Performance Audit

Managing Public Service Recruitment

Report by the Auditor General   May 2013

Performance Audit

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List of Abbreviations

AD	Assistant Director
CDRT	Centre for Development, Research and Training
HR	Human Resource
IPSL	Industrial Projects and Services Limited
IT	Information Technology
MEDE	Ministry of Education and Employment
MFEI	Ministry of Finance, the Economy and Investment
MHEC	Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care
MRRA	Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs
NAO	National Audit Office
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PAHRO	Public Administration HR Office
PSC	Public Service Commission

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

1.   Central to the delivery of Government's vast array of public services is a workforce suitably selected for the provision of a modern, efficient, effective and economical public administration. The Maltese public sector workforce stands well above the 40,000-employee mark, constituting a significant 26 per cent of Malta's total workforce (National Statistics Office, 2012). Recent trends seem to indicate a decline in terms of public sector employment, nonetheless, with a staff complement of such magnitude, refreshing and replenishing staff levels through recruitment is an inevitable ongoing process. This process is imbued with a plethora of challenges, driven forward by competing international and local market forces.

2.   In this context, the argument for greater efficiency and effectiveness in Public Service recruitment is straightforward, essentially emphasising on employing the right person, for the right job, in the right place and at the right cost. The various inefficiencies that may impact upon the recruitment process add to the length of time a post remains vacant, thereby influencing the overall delivery of services to clients and other end-users, possibly resulting in increased costs incurred in interim solutions.

3.   The PSC's 2011 Annual Report indicates a trend of general improvement in terms of time taken for completion of the average recruitment process. This now stands at 27 weeks, which might be a marked improvement on the average duration registered in preceding years. Nonetheless, the National Audit Office (NAO) is of the opinion that a six-month average duration merits attention and due consideration on possible avenues of improvement.

4.   At a national level, recruitment within the Public Service may be categorised under three broad headings, that is, nomination to headship positions, selection of General Service grades and recruitment of employees in non-General Service grades. A number of organisations are involved at some stage throughout the recruitment process, and all are expected to operate within the strictest boundaries of fairness, transparency, openness and ethical correctness. These include the Public Service Commission (PSC), the Public Administration HR Office (PAHRO), the Capacity Building Committee, the various line ministries, as well as the Management Support Directorate, within the Office of the Prime Minister.

5.   The main objective of this performance audit was the analysis of the management mechanisms and structures utilised in controlling Public Service recruitment. Sound management mechanisms and structures employed in the recruitment process essentially entail the:

a. Establishment and execution of strategic approaches to recruitment, central in addressing current and future workforce priorities and goals;
b. Support of recruitment activities through the provision of specialist advice, legislative and procedural guidance material, and training for staff involved in recruitment-related activities;

c. Effective conduct of recruitment activities in compliance with legislative and administrative requirements; and

d. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of implemented recruitment strategies and activities.

6.   The study sought to delineate the key limitations and challenges faced by all stakeholders involved throughout the recruitment process. Subsequently, the identification of such limitations and challenges was intended to serve as a springboard for the identification of opportunities key to the overall amelioration of recruitment practices across the Maltese Public Service. The emphasis on Public Service, rather than the wider public sector is intended, as the recruitment process and procedures employed differ substantially between the two. The scope of this performance audit narrowly focuses on the former, that is, recruitment within the Public Service.

7.   As a secondary objective, and of significant importance when contextualised against the aforementioned management considerations, this performance audit aimed to elicit good practices in place at ministerial level. This 'client' perspective served as an invaluable source of insight, balancing good practices employed with limitations encountered.

8.   This study focused on the recruitment of two categories of Public Service employees, that is, General Service grades and non-General Service grades. Data pertaining to recruitment carried out between 2008 and 2010 formed the basis of this audit's research focus. Correspondingly, the Ministries referred to throughout this report reflect the setup in place during the period under review. The selection process, more precisely referred to as a nomination process, utilised in the case of headship positions was scoped out of this performance audit.

9.   Besides the review of related literature as well as other local regulatory and policy documents, audit fieldwork was carried out in a two-staged approach. The first stage consisted of key informant interviews with stakeholders involved in the recruitment process, as well as the review of corresponding documentation. The aforementioned stakeholders comprised of PAHRO, the PSC, the then

Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care (MHEC), the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE), as well as the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs (MRRA).

10.   The second part of this staged approach involved the integration, analysis and review of recruitment-related data provided by PAHRO and each of the respective Ministries selected for this performance audit. In order to assess recruitment-related metrics, data provided by all of the aforementioned stakeholders was organised according to a number of established steps that essentially define the recruitment process. The following are the subsidiary steps of the recruitment process, utilised as an organising framework for the purposes of this audit:

a. Capacity building meeting;
b. Drafting of recruitment call;
c. Approval of draft call by PAHRO;
d. Approval of draft call by PSC;
e. Issue of call;
f. Deadline for submission of applications;
g. Interviews held by the selection board;
h. Report submitted by the selection board;
i. Submission of views by the head of department;
j. Verification of vacancies by PAHRO;
k. Petitions;
l. Submission of PSC recommendation to Prime Minister;
m. Prime Minister's approval; and
n. Notification of appointment to successful applicant/s.

Conclusions

11.   NAO's principal concern with regard to the management of Public Service recruitment relates to the pervasively poor, or at times, inadequate information management infrastructure, particularly apparent in the case of PAHRO, yet also prevalent in varying extents in the case of PSC and the reviewed Ministries.

12.   In the case of PAHRO, NAO considers the poor application of modern database technology and the lack of standardisation with respect to information management procedures as limiting overall efficiency and effectiveness. This latter

issue regarding standardisation, or the lack thereof, is rendered immediately apparent following the review of various databases forwarded by PAHRO to NAO, which appear to serve more of a log or register of file movement, rather than a detailed record of completed and pending action points.

13.   NAO is somewhat concerned at the extent of time taken for PAHRO to conduct the necessary verifications required. The average duration of 49 days and the significant number of calls with delays far greater than that indicate ample scope for improvement. Yet, NAO acknowledges that improvement in this regard should not exclusively focus on PAHRO, as this issue is in fact a multifaceted one. Better information management systems within PAHRO should contribute towards process improvement; however, quality control efforts remain a key area of concern, and it is in this context that the role of the line ministry/department becomes key. Higher quality submissions will notionally shorten the compliance process, as will the series of outreach meetings carried out by PAHRO; yet, for as long as the onus of verification remains embodied within PAHRO, it will be PAHRO's responsibility to shorten those instances of recruitment calls characterised by their considerable delay at this initial verificatory stage.

14.   NAO fully supports Government's initiative in establishing standing selection committees across all ministries. This revised system for selection board appointment should fine-tune an already highly efficient system, and de facto, address the small, yet nonetheless significant, cases of undue delay. Furthermore, NAO notes the soundness of approach in utilising a regular pool of former public officers in composing the above-referred standing committees, which should ultimately result in increased expertise (through the sheer increase in exposure to selection processes) of those conducting selection exercises.

15.   The selection stage represents a pivotal part of the overall recruitment process, and once again, NAO's attention converges on the highly contrasting statistical results yielded following ministry-level analysis. Consistent with its overall positive performance are the selection boards corresponding to MEDE calls, which in NAO's opinion, clearly reflect the employment of good practice. On the other hand, and less positive in this respect, were the results put

forward in relation to MHEC. Here, NAO's concern is limited to the small number of recruitment calls that extended well beyond the average duration, and therefore possibly warrant further management scrutiny and review.

16.   Of greater concern to NAO are the results corresponding to MRRA appointed selection boards, which notably account for a considerable delay, especially when juxtaposed against MEDE and MHEC data. NAO acknowledges that the revalidation process undertaken following the Ministry's restructuring has undoubtedly contributed towards the extensive time taken in completing this stage of the recruitment process. Nonetheless, NAO maintains that these excessive delays correspond to actual HR deficiencies and vacancies identified across the Ministry, and should not be written off on the basis of restructuring-related arguments.

17.   The reporting element of the aforementioned selection boards is also characterised by its marked disparity, with good practices exemplified by MEDE and MRRA, and a rather poor performance registered with respect to MHEC. In the case of the latter Ministry, a substantial number of calls extend well beyond the 50-day mark, causing NAO to raise concern with regard to the governance structure within which such selection boards operate.

18.   In addition to the above, extensive delays in the submission of views by heads of department with respect to particular cases, once again confirms the need for greater management control and scrutiny. NAO considers the submission of views by the respectively recruiting heads of department to represent a straightforward step in the overall process, and should never come anywhere near to the 50-day mark, let alone exceed it. This argument is further strengthened when one bears in mind the fact that the vast majority of submissions support the recommendations put forward by the corresponding selection board.

19.   Coalescing the analysed stage-based data yields a holistic overview of notable concern to NAO, particularly with respect to the overall duration of the recruitment process. An average of approximately 38 weeks represents a considerably lengthy period of time taken to complete a standard call for recruitment, and one that certainly leaves

ample scope for improvement. Of significance is the fact that NAO's findings with respect to the excessive duration of particular stages (verification undertaken by PAHRO prior to issuing the call and the holding of interviews) corroborate similar patterns already established by PSC, albeit, with the former presenting a somewhat harsher record of measurement.

20.   The cross-comparison of ministry-specific data from this holistic perspective draws upon two major concerns. The first relates to the submission of selection board reports in the case of MHEC calls, while the second focuses on the excessive duration of the interview stage in the case of MRRA calls, particularly when viewed in relative terms vis-à-vis the other Ministries reviewed for the purposes of this audit.

21.   NAO's concern regarding the excessive time taken to complete calls for recruitment further intensifies with respect to the resourcing of staff in General Service grades. The reported average of 500 days is, in NAO's opinion, a highly unacceptable duration for completion of what in effect are straightforward standardised calls. Various factors bear influence on this situation, foremost among which is the voluminous number of applications that must be processed for each call. This certainly impacts upon the time taken for executing the selection process proper, be it by means of written examination, individual interview, or group interview. Another factor, indicative of significant inefficiency within PAHRO, corresponds to the undue delay between the publication of final results and the earliest date upon which the selected candidate assumes appointment. A further indication of inefficiency emerges with respect to the considerable time taken for PSC's appointment of selection boards in the case of internally circulated calls.

22.   In principle, NAO fully supports the transition towards a delegated recruitment environment, and shares PAHRO's views in that the transferring of further responsibility to line ministries and departments would notionally circumvent the present situation of over-reliance on PAHRO's checks. The comfort of relying on PAHRO to rectify poorly prepared draft calls may have significantly contributed to the prolonged duration of the verificatory process indicated earlier.

23.   However, eliminating the safety net provided by PAHRO presents numerous risks that must be anticipated, planned for, and subsequently addressed. NAO opines that transferring PAHRO's vast institutional knowledge will prove to be a fundamentally determining factor in the success, or otherwise, of catering for this risk. A transitory period, mirroring the stage-based system already adopted by PAHRO and PSC, reflects a positive approach in planning for the eventual full-scale rollout of the delegated recruitment function. Furthermore, the training of HR specialists at line ministry level serves to address identified gaps in terms of resourcing-related service provision, while the possible implementation of ministry-wide standard operating procedures will contribute towards streamlining this complex process.

24.   Implementation of the delegated recruitment framework will inevitably result in a fundamental transformation of the role and function of PAHRO. A central component, certainly subject to significant change in this regard, is PAHRO's compliance function, which is due to increase in terms of importance once the respective line ministries absorb the verificatory stage. In NAO's opinion, an integrated information management system duly accessed by PAHRO and all government ministries will aid such compliance checks, thereby allowing the newly empowered regulator to maintain conformity and uniformity amid all involved stakeholders.

25.   Another aspect relating to this transformation revolves around PAHRO's shift from an organisation involved in the day-to-day operational activities associated with recruitment to one more oriented towards the strategic management thereof. In this context, the importance of tasks scheduled at post-recruitment stage, and associated with the measurement of efficiency and effectiveness metrics, assume greater importance.

26.   NAO considers the delegation of recruitment as the beginning of a transformation process rather than its end. This radical departure from traditional means of resourcing serves as the ideal catalyst for encouraging further review, adaptation and modification of current HR policies and practices. PAHRO makes a number of sensible proposals in this regard, driving forward the principle of meritocracy, while simultaneously eroding the vestigial structures

of seniority. The criterion of accelerated channels of progression, accessed by those who exhibit initiative, in the form of training undertaken and sustained professional development, is but one example of this strategic redirection in HR focus.

27.   One major shortcoming of the overall government recruitment process is the lack of recorded information with respect to costs incurred. Calculating the cost of such a process is of central importance for the subsequent analysis of efficiency and effectiveness metrics. NAO considers its estimated cost calculation of €2,288 per recruitment call and €37 per eligible application as indicative of the significant cost incurred in this regard, which would therefore justify the necessity of implementing systems purposely designed for the registration of such costs.

28.   NAO is concerned by the absence of a suitably designed infrastructure and communication framework supporting MHEC's HR management function. This latter referred framework, or rather, its lack thereof, underlies potential organisational inefficiency and ineffectiveness, overtly manifested in instances when subsidiary level organisations bypass the ministry and deal directly with PAHRO. Furthermore, NAO noted a stark incongruence in terms of the decentralised strategic approach adopted with respect to recruitment. This is amply characterised by the notable technical limitations experienced at subsidiary level, which in turn constrain the MHEC central HR office to adopt a more active and direct role, thereby centralising a conceptually decentralised system.

29.   With regard to MRRA and MEDE, NAO noted a number of good practices that emerged in relation to the HR management practices employed within these Ministries. In the case of the latter referred Ministry, diligence in the planning of anticipated HR requirements impacts upon overall efficiency and effectiveness. This bears particular relevance when contextualised against the somewhat unpredictable circumstances arising due to staff resignations with immediate effect, given that no notice period may be enforced. With respect to MRRA, NAO recognises as good practice the procedure employed by this Ministry in pre-empting staff recruitment requirements. This pre-emptive sourcing of feedback from line departments facilitates the submission

of MRRA's response to the PAHRO driven capacity building exercise, enabling the Ministry to respond in a timely manner, thereby resulting in notable efficiency gains.

30.   In view of the above, NAO is somewhat concerned at MHEC's stated difficulty in adhering to reporting parameters established by the Capacity Building Committee, particularly with respect to the timeliness of reporting obligations. Bearing indirect relevance to this issue is the need to manage and balance the load of incoming recruitment requests at Ministry level, with the corresponding HR staff capacity available for due processing. Shortcomings in this regard will undoubtedly strain the Ministry's limited resources, resulting in a series of efficiency and effectiveness losses across its multiple facets of operation.

31.   NAO acknowledges the concern expressed by MEDE and MRRA with regard to the Government-wide policy of replacing every two outgoing staff with one replacement. The Office's focus in this respect does not centre on the policy per se, but on the manner of its application. One workaround solution, addressing and circumventing the shortfall in staffing levels brought about by this conservative approach to Public Service recruitment, is represented by the outsourcing of services instead of outright recruitment. Such an option bears consonance with Government's HR strategy, providing the necessary flexibility to scale-up and scale-down operations as and when necessary, while simultaneously mitigating the risks and challenges posed by recruitment-related limitations.

32.   As stated on a number of occasions throughout this audit report, the role played by robust information management systems is key in ensuring effective and efficient HR management practices. It is in this context that NAO contends that difficulties experienced by MEDE in maintaining the accuracy of such data further strengthens the need for investment in adequate information management systems.

33.   NAO is concerned by the absence of basic contractual safeguards, such as a notice period, in the case of particular categories of Public Service employees. Although by no means sufficient to initiate and complete recruitment within such

provisions, the notice period serves to provide employing ministries and departments with limited staff coverage, easing the handing over period and eventual replacement. In NAO's opinion, the absence of such provisions results in unwarranted pressure on the speeding up of the recruitment process.

34.   NAO fully supports the need for further technical and specialised training directed at HR functionaries posted across all line ministries. This need will certainly assume pivotal importance once the planned delegation of authority comes into full effect. Given that the envisaged delegated recruitment scenario implies a strong element of quality control being assumed at line ministry level, the added technical competence of HR sections should, on a conceptual basis, provide added safeguards in ensuring uniformity of application of recruitment provisions, while simultaneously ensuring adherence to established frameworks.

Recommendations

35.   NAO strongly recommends that PAHRO institutes a robust information management infrastructure to establish better management control of its recruitment function. Such an information management system would primarily serve to standardise data recording protocols, ensuring that progress registered on all calls at hand is maintained in a uniform manner, thereby facilitating data retrieval and management reporting requirements. Secondly, NAO considers the closer management control enabled through the envisaged information management system as conducive towards overall efficiency gains, ensuring that PAHRO remains acutely aware of which stage each of its calls is at, allowing for corrective action should inordinate delays be noted.

36.   In line with the above, NAO recommends that human resource-related information management protocols are introduced in an analogous and standardised manner across all ministries. NAO considers the introduction of such procedures to bear a twofold benefit, impacting upon the overall efficiency and effectiveness at ministry and PAHRO level vis-à-vis recruitment. Rolling out such protocols across ministries would bear similar benefits as stated in the preceding point, namely, allowing for better internal management and control of the

recruitment function, as well as refining reporting arrangements. Simultaneously, ministry-level standardisation would facilitate the integration of data sharing capabilities, allowing PAHRO to more accurately identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies in a uniformly measured recruitment function across all ministries.

37.   NAO encourages PAHRO to adopt the aforementioned information management system, as this will undoubtedly serve as a vital source of business intelligence, aptly identifying calls requiring action and further verificatory prompting. While fully supporting PAHRO's series of outreach meetings, NAO urges further 'investment' geared at improving the technical expertise of staff tasked with recruitment at line ministry or key department level. In this context, PAHRO's greatest asset is undoubtedly the recruitment-related expertise prevalent among its staff complement, and to this end, PAHRO should endeavour at organising or establishing mechanisms and systems by which such institutional memory can be transferred to line ministry level, where it can tangibly translate in the overall improved quality of submitted calls.

38.   One final recommendation in this regard relates to the substantial number of cases with considerable delays in the verification process. Here, NAO recommends that PAHRO, and corresponding OPM management, scrutinise the factors that have contributed to such prolongation on a case-by-case basis, and in so doing, identify avenues warranting potential improvement.

39.   With respect to the selection stage of the recruitment process, NAO's recommendations essentially converge and link with previously discussed issues, such as the utilisation of information management systems to address delays on a case-by-case basis, and the strategic level review when circumstances such as those characterising MRRA arise. Furthermore, NAO encourages PAHRO to act as an interlocutor, facilitating the exchange of good practices (as exemplified by MEDE) among the various ministries.

40.   In addition to the above, NAO fully supports the views put forward by PSC, calling for greater flexibility in the utilisation of selection tools deemed more appropriate for simultaneously handling

large numbers of applicants in a more efficient timeframe. NAO recommends the introduction of modern and innovative selection methods, in line with current HR practices. Should the deployment of such methodologies warrant corresponding review of established procedures and regulations, NAO considers PSC and PAHRO to be suitably equipped with balancing the need to be fair, transparent and accountable with the exigencies of modern HR management.

41.   In view of the occasional, yet notable delays in submission of selection board reports, NAO recommends that PSC establish reporting timeframes that should, as a general rule, and barring exceptional circumstances, be adhered to. This recommendation assumes particular relevance in light of the establishment of the standing selection panels. Proposed reporting timeframes should, by default, be incorporated into their terms of reference.

42.   NAO strongly recommends the review of delays associated with the submission of views by heads of department. The Office considers this stage of the recruitment process as bearing the greatest scope for improvement and a clear opportunity for registering efficiency gains. One alternative solution intended at addressing such delay could be the establishment of a fixed reporting timeframe for the submission of head of department views. Under this scenario, heads of department would be bound to submit views within, for example, a ten working day time-window, and failure to do so would, by default, imply agreement with the selection board's recommendation.

43.   NAO's recommendation with respect to the recruitment of General Service grade employees centres on the excessive and unacceptably long duration characterising this process. Each of the factors deemed critical and directly contributing to this delay necessitates the implementation of corresponding countermeasures, thereby improving upon process efficiency and effectiveness.

44.   The first factor, relating to the substantial number of applicants and the subsequent delays caused by their sheer volume, accentuates the importance of reviewing current selection tools. Without foregoing the values of accountability,

transparency and fairness, PAHRO and PSC should explore other methods of screening and filtering the hundreds of applications it receives with respect to General Service calls.

45.   The second factor, corresponding to indicative inefficiencies within PAHRO when transitioning between candidate selection to subsequent appointment, may be somewhat mitigated by means of process reengineering. One practical solution in this regard could involve increasing the regularity by which such calls are issued, moving away from a call issued once every three or four years to a scenario where such calls are issued on a quasi annual basis. Such a system would essentially imply a rolling succession of standardised General Service recruitment calls, with the expiry of one call closely replaced by a freshly issued selection. PAHRO indicated its agreement with the recommendation put forward by NAO, and stated that it had in fact attempted to devise such a schedule for the period 2010 to 2013, which was largely unsuccessful due to budgetary constraints.

46.   As a third and final factor in this regard, NAO considers the considerable duration corresponding to the PSC approval of selection boards sub-process to be an issue that will be eventually addressed by means of the now established standing selection panels. Therefore, their involvement in this respect is considered essential and critically influential in curtailing this stage's delays.

47.   The stage-based approach adopted in the implementation of the delegated recruitment environment is fully endorsed by NAO and augurs well for what should prove to be a revolutionary change in terms of Public Service recruitment. Nonetheless, NAO recommends that PAHRO's involvement in this process takes into account a number of critical considerations.

48.   First and foremost, PAHRO should explore means by which to transfer its HR-related expertise to line ministry level. One possible alternative would involve the temporary secondment of PAHRO staff, posted at ministry level to oversee the smooth transition of verificatory duties. Another option that merits due consideration involves the establishment of an IT-enabled support desk within PAHRO, which would notionally be specifically dedicated to

troubleshooting arising out of recruitment-related difficulties. Finally, the preparation of manuals and guidelines, such as frequently asked questions booklets, or standard operating procedures guides, may prove to be useful reference documents facilitating the transitory process.

49.   Secondly, NAO recommends that PAHRO, possibly in conjunction with the Centre for Development Research and Training (CDRT), develops a suitably comprehensive training programme intended for delivery at line ministry level. An in-depth and structured programme specifically designed for HR employees operating across the various ministries will undoubtedly aid and accelerate the uptake of intended work practices and procedures in relation to Public Service recruitment. Moreover, NAO also recommends that such a tailor-made training course would be far more effective were it to be designed as an e-learning programme, thereby circumventing logistical difficulties inherent in coordinating among a limited pool of staff spread across the various ministries.

50.   Thirdly, NAO reiterates and strongly recommends the establishment of an appropriately planned information management system, which will aid and assist PAHRO in the better exercise of its regulatory and compliance functions. Management from a distance is an undoubtedly challenging endeavour, yet one that may be rendered somewhat more manageable through the establishment of appropriate controls, aptly embodied in the proposed IT framework. Furthermore, the logging of specific work activities and tasks performed by the various HR functionaries throughout the recruitment process should be planned for and duly electronically registered, thereby ensuring accountability of work undertaken within the delegated environment.

51.   In addition to the above, NAO recommends the further development of PAHRO's strategic role in recruitment by directing increased attention at post-recruitment related activities. Measures of efficiency and effectiveness may be introduced as standard practices, which could notionally include duration metrics in completing particular sub-stages, as well as the process in its entirety, and other useful indicators such as staff retention rates.

52.   One measure of efficiency and economy that undoubtedly bears central importance relates to the measurement of costs incurred. In this respect, NAO recommends that a formal and standardised system for the recording of costs incurred is introduced and implemented across all involved stakeholders. This system could notionally be linked to the recording of hours worked on particular recruitment calls by individual employees, in what could effectively be conceptualised as a project-based timesheet of sorts. Once again, NAO considers PAHRO's role in establishing such a system as integrally important in its anticipated success.

53.   Furthermore, PAHRO is ideally and strategically well placed to introduce standard assessment reports relating to the quality and aptness of fit of newly recruited employees. Such reports may be best regulated by means of an officially documented probation policy framework, with submitted reports serving as confirmation of appointment, or otherwise. In NAO's view, PAHRO's role in this regard centres on the drafting, implementation, management and eventual review of such a policy. Actual compilation of assessment reports would be a task assigned to the newly engaged employee's respective manager.

54.   Finally, NAO urges PAHRO to consider developing an appropriately regulated and detailed system for the tapping of feedback at employee exit stage. Irrespective of the methodology employed, be it through an exit interview, or a structured questionnaire, collecting employee feedback at this critical stage may indeed serve as a vital source of insight into potential process improvement.

55.   NAO fully supports and strongly recommends the uptake of revisions proposed by PAHRO with regard to staff progression. Strengthening the principle of meritocracy will serve to further align the Public Service's recruitment function with modern management codes. Empowering employees by allowing them to determine the rate at which their career may progress, rather than relying on the accrual of years of service as a means of determining eligibility, is certainly a step in the right direction. To this end, NAO recommends that PAHRO embraces its catalytic role in driving forward necessary changes to HR policies, procedures and practices, more in line

with its revised role of championing Public Service HR reform.

56. NAO considers the establishment of formal governance structures delineating the roles, responsibilities, reporting arrangements and communication systems key to the effective functioning of the desired decentralised set-up at MHEC. The importance of close scrutiny and monitoring of MHEC's relevant HR subsidiary sections is critical, as has in fact been clearly highlighted in NAO's Annual Audit Report (2012). To this end, NAO recommends that due attention is afforded to the formulation of robust governance structures, thereby imbuing MHEC's HR function with added safeguards ensuring accountability.

57. Good practices such as those exhibited by MEDE and MRRA are to be commended and, where possible, implemented across other Ministries. In this regard, NAO recommends that a forum for the exchange of good HR practices be identified or designated, conceptually spearheaded by PAHRO, which is strategically well-placed to identify and promote instances of good governance HR practices.

58. In view of the stated HR staffing level concerns expressed by MHEC, NAO is of the opinion that benchmarking exercises directed at establishing such requirements may prove useful. The onus of driving forward such measurements would axiomatically form part of PAHRO's remit of responsibility. Common measures identifiable in this regard include the number of recruitment calls that are to be processed by an HR officer within a given timeframe, the expected duration of particular stages in the recruitment process, as well as various other performance indicators already amply elaborated upon in the preceding text.

59. NAO is of the opinion that the government-wide policy of replacing every two outgoing staff with one replacement may be best actuated if applied in a strategic and selective manner, customised to the particular sector being addressed. Targeted reductions in staff complements should be well-planned and in line with ministry and department operational objectives. The better overall redeployment of staff, coupled with the two

is to one policy, may ultimately yield the desired benefit; yet in the latter case, this measure may prove to be more effective if utilised selectively in cases of surplus workforce capacity, and discarded in cases where logistical and operational circumstances dictate otherwise.

60. The need for robust information management systems is, in NAO's opinion, at the core of sustained efforts at improving HR management practices at ministry level. This issue has already been addressed from a central management perspective, that is, in relation to PAHRO's involvement in the recruitment process. However, the possibility of introducing appropriately designed systems that serve to facilitate recruitment at ministry level, while simultaneously interfacing with PAHRO will undoubtedly lead to better coordination and greater efficiency. NAO opines that the challenges created by the diverse employment considerations characteristic of today's workforce, including, but not limited to the various family-friendly measures, must be addressed by means of correspondingly flexible information management systems.

61. NAO urges PAHRO to instigate the measures necessary in introducing an enforceable notice period across all Public Service employment contracts, thereby easing unwarranted pressure on the recruitment process, and providing ministries and departments with adequate coverage with respect to the handing over of tasks and duties. To this end, PAHRO indicated that the Public Service Collective Agreement dated 15 October 2012 contemplates the enforcement of a notice period.

62. In view of the identified need for greater technical proficiency across ministry-level HR sections, NAO recommends that a concerted effort be undertaken so as to redress this weakness. To this end, NAO recommends that CDRT organise a specialised programme of training targeting the various ministries' HR departments. In light of possible logistical constraints, NAO is of the opinion that such training would be most efficient and effective if delivered through an e-learning model, thereby bypassing efforts at coordination of suitably sized groups, and allowing for training to be conducted on an individual basis.

Chapter 1

An Overview of Recruitment within the Public Service

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This introductory chapter establishes the relevance of a changing Public Service recruitment environment, particularly when contextualised against an economic backdrop in a state of flux. The Maltese Public Service, mirroring wider human resource dynamics, is also in a state of transition, and this bears direct impact on the numerous stakeholders involved in addressing recruitment-related requirements. Foremost among these are the Public Service Commission (PSC), as well as the Public Administration HR Office (PAHRO), which together with the various line ministries fulfil this vital resourcing function. Finally, this chapter outlines the scope and objectives of this audit report, together with the employed methodology.

1.1   Setting the Context

1.1.1   Central to the delivery of Government's vast array of public services is a workforce suitably selected for the provision of a modern, efficient, effective and economical public administration. The Maltese public sector workforce stands well above the 40,000-employee mark, constituting a significant 26 per cent of Malta's total workforce (National Statistics Office, 2012). Recent trends seem to indicate a decline in terms of public sector employment, illustrated in Figure 1 (with corresponding data presented in Table 1).

Figure 1: Annualised Average Number of Employees According to Employment Type
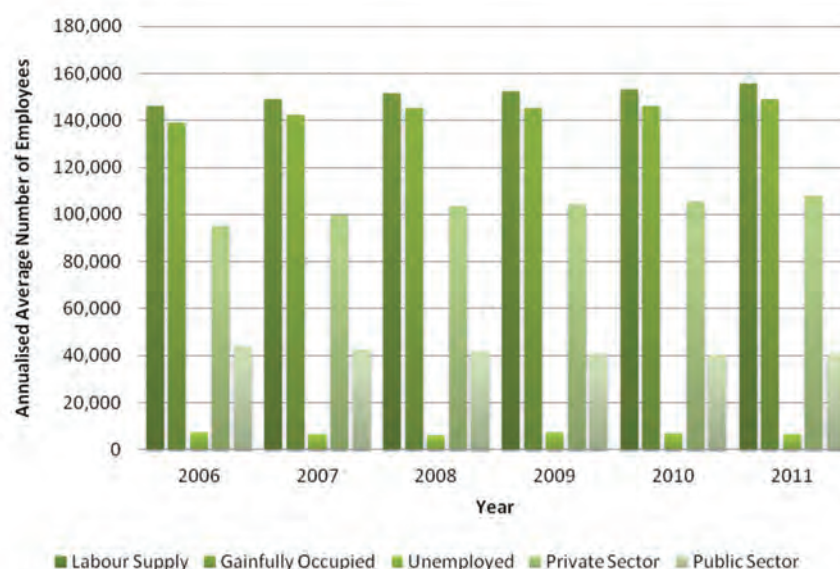
Source: National Statistics Office (2006 – 2011), Gainfully Occupied Population (adapted)

Table 1: Annualised Average Number of Employees According to Employment Type

Year	Labour Supply	Gainfully Occupied	Unemployed	Private Sector	Public Sector
2006	146,281	138,955	7,326	95,252	43,703
2007	148,845	142,162	6,683	99,623	42,539
2008	151,646	145,443	6,203	103,649	41,794
2009	152,443	145,109	7,334	104,344	40,765
2010	153,196	146,143	7,053	105,584	40,559
2011	155,654	149,085	6,569	108,076	41,009

Source: National Statistics Office (2006 – 2011), Gainfully Occupied Population (adapted)

1.1.2   With a staff complement of such magnitude, refreshing and replenishing staff levels through recruitment is an inevitable ongoing process. This process is imbued with a plethora of challenges, driven forward by competing international and local market forces.

1.1.3   In this context, the argument for greater efficiency and effectiveness in Public Service recruitment is straightforward, essentially emphasising on employing the right person, for the right job, in the right place and at the right cost. The various inefficiencies that may impact upon the recruitment process add to the length of time a post remains vacant, thereby influencing the overall delivery of services to clients and other end-users, possibly resulting in increased costs incurred in interim solutions.

1.1.4   Identifying the issues faced in government recruitment is a challenging endeavour. Nelson (2004) comments on the generally passive and time-consuming processes that increasingly characterise such recruitment.

1.1.5   The PSC's 2011 Annual Report indicates a trend of general improvement in terms of time taken for completion of the average recruitment process. As illustrated in Table 2, this now stands at 27 weeks, which might be a marked improvement on the average duration registered in preceding years. Nonetheless, the National Audit Office (NAO) is of the opinion that a six-month average duration merits attention and due consideration on possible avenues of improvement.

1.1.6   In compiling the statistics presented in Table 2, PSC indicated that a sample of the first 75 calls that are issued and completed with that same year is taken. A more detailed reproduction of the above-referred data is comprehensively presented in Appendix A.

1.1.7   This situation is further compounded by a Public Service that was popularly stereotyped as an employer of second-rate, sluggish and generally inept staff. In fact, the Public Service Reform Commission report (1989, p.46) entitled 'A New Public Service for Malta' captures this long-standing perception

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Selection Process in the Public Service

Year	1993 / 1994	2001 / 2002	2003 / 2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Duration (days)	379	265	205	221	232	182	236	203	166	190
Duration (weeks)	54	38	29	32	33	26	34	29	24	27

Source: PSC (2011) (adapted)

as follows, *"The Public Service has been cast in the role of employer of last resort, a convenient source of jobs dispensed in anticipation of electoral support…Nobody acknowledges the implications of saddling the public service with mediocre, or worse, incompetent individuals."*

1.2 The Maltese Public Service: A Statistical Overview of a Changing Workforce

1.2.1 Recruitment, similar to any other organisational process, is largely dependent on the prevalent organisational strategy, structure, culture and dynamics. The ensuing section presents an overview of the organisational composition of the Maltese Public Service, which is the main subject of this study as distinct from the wider public sector. The Public Service incorporates all government ministries and departments, whereas the public sector extends in its composition and includes other government entities, agencies, authorities and organisations not strictly part of the Public Service.

1.2.2 Over the last years, the Public Service has been steadily decreasing in terms of its workforce population. Figure 2, which captures Public Service workforce statistics from 1999 up to 2011 clearly depicts this trend. This reduction in the number of employees is in line with the overall government strategy of curtailing public expenditure through the better rationalisation of available human resources (Ministry of Finance, the Economy and Investment, 2010).

Figure 2: Public Service Workforce Publication
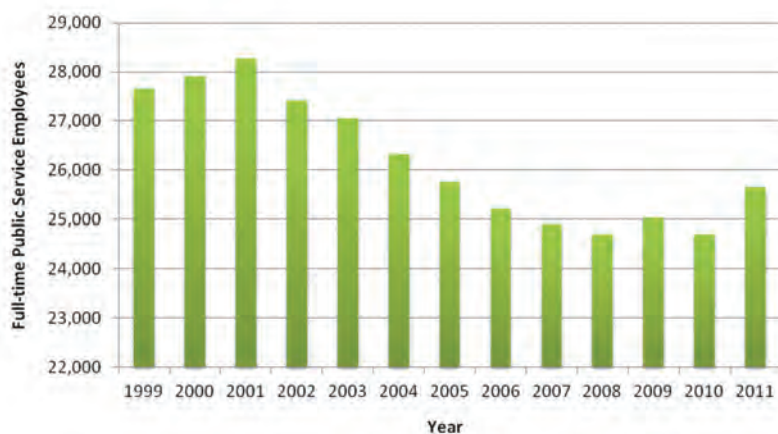
Source: PAHRO Annual Departmental Reports (2000 – 2012)

1.2.3 From an operational perspective, Public Service recruitment can be generally classified under two major categories, that is, General Service grades and non-General Service grades. In the former case, this category is composed of a classification of essentially administrative positions, which are more or less assigned standardised responsibilities across departments and ministries. On the other hand, non-General Service grades incorporate more specialised professions, including for example, medical staff, teachers, and accountants among a diversity of others.

1.2.4 The following figures illustrate the finer distribution of staff among General Service grades and non-General Service grades. In fact, Figure 3 depicts the changing staff levels of General Service employees over a ten-year period, more or less, steadily hovering around the 3,800 mark.

1.2.5 Despite the relative stability in terms of magnitude, the General Service profile has in fact undergone considerable change, with a shift in balance from clerical to managerial positions. This shift is aptly captured in Figure 4, which illustrates the approximate increase of senior management at 25 per cent. The middle management and clerical staff categories referred to in Figure 4 maintain a consistent size, with upward and downward fluctuations generally offsetting one another.

Figure 3: General Service Grade Workforce Complement
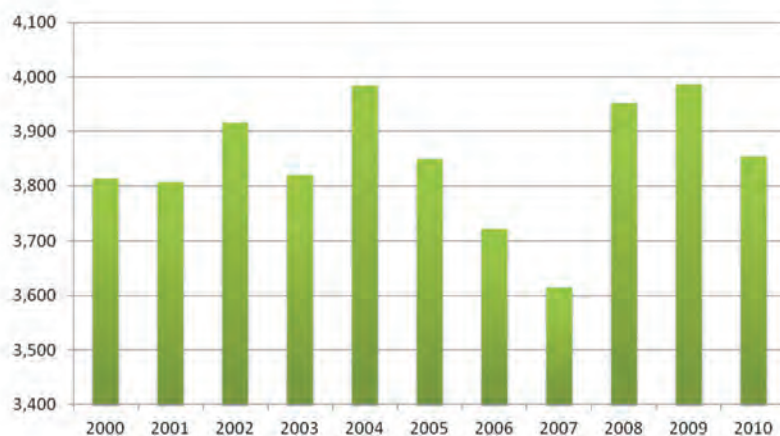
Figure 4: General Service Grade Workforce Complement – Staff Profile Analysis
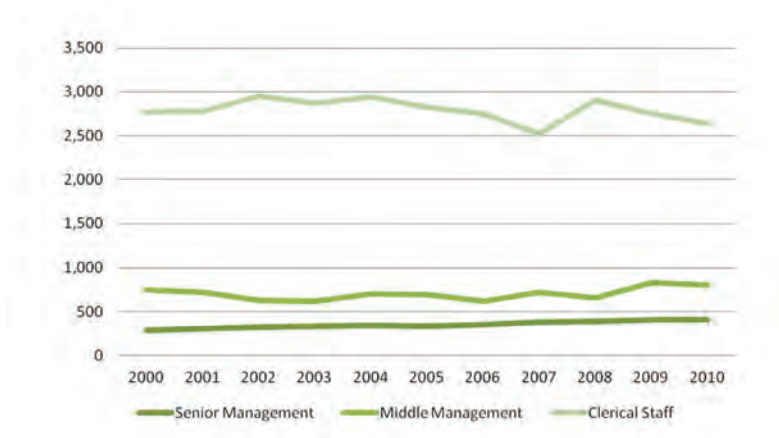
Notes:

1.   Senior Management classification encompasses all officers in scale 5 and upwards;

2.   Middle Management classification encompasses Senior Principals and Principals; and

3.   Clerical Staff classification encompasses Assistant Principals, Executive Officers, Senior Clerks and Clerks.

1.2.6   Furthermore, Figure 5 provides an overview of the number of government employees in non-General Service grades employed across the various ministries. A quick glance at this Figure immediately indicates a declining non-General Service staff workforce, which when contextualised against the overall stability of General Service grade employment statistics, indicates the focus of government efforts at better rationalisation of its human resource complement. A finer categorisation of this analysis is rendered in Appendix B, indicating in a more precise manner, the particular grades of employees and their changing totals throughout the years.

1.3   Addressing Recruitment Requirements: Processes and Players

1.3.1   At a national level, recruitment within the Public Service may be categorised under three broad headings, that is, nomination to headship positions, selection of General Service grades and recruitment of employees in non-General Service grades.

1.3.2   A number of organisations are involved at some stage throughout the recruitment process, and all are expected to operate within the strictest boundaries of fairness, transparency, openness and

Figure 5: Non-General Service Grade Workforce Complement
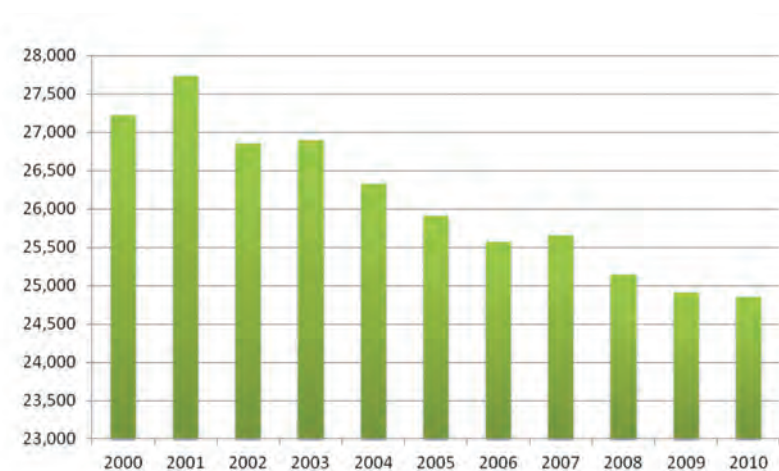
ethical correctness. These include the PSC, PAHRO, the Capacity Building Committee, the various line ministries, as well as the Management Support Directorate, within the Office of the Prime Minister.

Public Service Commission

1.3.3   Foremost in ensuring the good governance of the recruitment process is the PSC, established through Article 109 of the Constitution of Malta. In essence, the PSC is tasked with the responsibility of submitting recommendations and advice to the Prime Minister on appointments to public office, removal from public office and the exercise of discipline over public officers.

1.3.4   The PSC (2010, p. 1) aptly states that, *"In fulfilling its role, the Commission is guided by the principles of merit, equality of opportunity, impartiality, non-discrimination, transparency, the exclusion of patronage (political or otherwise), and fair and open competition; the latter within the parameters of agreements that exist between the government and the trade unions."*

1.3.5   Of critical importance in the successful fulfilment of the above role is the composition of the Commission itself, addressed by virtue of Article 109 of the Constitution of Malta and consisting of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman, and from one to three other members. Appointments to the Commission are effected by the President, acting upon advice of the Prime Minister, following due consultation with the Leader of the Opposition.

Public Administration HR Office

1.3.6   Working in close collaboration with the PSC is PAHRO, which forms part of the Office of the Prime Minister. PAHRO particularly focuses on proposing, designing, implementing and regulating new policies as well as policy revisions required from time to time. Attention is also directed at improving workforce planning, change management initiatives, leadership development together with the overall monitoring and streamlining of human resource-related policies and practices across the Public Service.

1.3.7   The section specifically tasked with recruitment-related responsibilities within PAHRO is the Resourcing Directorate. Besides recruitment, the

Resourcing Directorate's main responsibilities include internal transfers, the promotion of employees within the Public Service and the redeployment of employees across the wider public sector.

1.3.8   The transient nature and significant changes experienced within the Public Service employment environment pose an array of challenges to Government, particularly with respect to attracting and retaining a skilled and professional workforce. The approach adopted in the recruitment and selection of staff is of utmost importance, and bears a considerable influence on the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process in its entirety. The role of the Resourcing Directorate (and of PAHRO) is central to the achievement of such success, essentially attained by means of implementing a strategic approach towards recruitment, ensuring and continuously improving the quality of undertaken recruitment exercises and adopting tailor-made approaches that target specific occupations.

1.3.9   Changes brought about by virtue of the Public Administration Act (2010, Cap. 497), particularly as put forward in the Public Service Management Code (PAHRO, 2011 March, p.21) reorient the Resourcing Directorate towards a more *"...active regulatory role aimed towards strategic HR planning, better resourcing, structured job mobility and alignment with the wider financial planning scenario through the Capacity Building exercise."*

Capacity Building Committee

1.3.10   The latter mentioned Capacity Building exercise is administered by the Capacity Building Committee, essentially composed of representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Economy and Investment (MFEI), PAHRO and the respective line ministry originating the recruitment request.

1.3.11   In essence, the line ministry submitting its forecasted recruitment requirement must present its case and relevant justifications to the Capacity Building Committee. Here, PAHRO verifies conformity to the standards, regulations and guidelines governing recruitment to the public service. On the other hand, the representatives hailing from MFEI evaluate the budgetary implications of such recruitment requests.

1.3.12 Such capacity building exercises take place against an economic backdrop characterised by tightening public expenditure. In fact, this is precisely captured in the 2011 Budget Speech (MFEI, 2010, p. 11), *"…where practicable, employ one person for every two persons whose employment terminates. The departments and entities are expected to use their human resources in the best possible manner."*

Line Ministries

1.3.13 Integral to the process is the input of the line ministries and departments in driving forward their respective recruitment needs. Featuring most prominently at the initial and final stages of the process, the line ministries/departments are essentially responsible for substantiating requests for recruitment, providing technical details on necessary requirements and eligibility criteria, providing administrative support, and, finally, reporting to other stakeholders, as well as to successful candidates. Representatives from the recruiting ministry or department, whose technical expertise corresponds and relates to that of the particular recruitment exercise being carried out, may be appointed to form part of the selection board, thereby entrusted with identifying suitable candidates for the filling of vacancies.

1.3.14 After due consideration of the distribution of non-General Service grades as presented in Figure 4, NAO has decided to focus its study on the three Ministries with the highest number of such personnel. Hence, for the purposes of this study, further in-depth analysis was targeted at the Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care (MHEC), the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs (MRRA) and the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE).

1.3.15 In the case of the latter referred Ministry, NAO exclusively restricted its focus on the Directorate for Educational Services, therefore omitting the review of recruitment undertaken by the Support Services Division.

1.3.16 The relationship between the various line ministries/departments and PAHRO is of paramount importance. In fact, PAHRO has recently introduced a system of outreach meetings, whereby officials from PAHRO meet with Directors Corporate Services from each ministry on a regular basis, so as to discuss and plan forthcoming tasks and activities. Although these outreach meetings bear some similarity to the capacity building arrangement in place, the former are intended as preparation for the latter, enabling ministries, aided by PAHRO, to address difficulties and anticipate problems before they arise at the capacity building stage.

Management Support Directorate

1.3.17 The process and procedures invoked in the case of recruitment to headship positions deviates from that outlined above, and is essentially driven forward by the Management Support Directorate. This Unit forms part of the Office of the Principal Permanent Secretary within the Office of the Prime Minister.

1.3.18 The Management Support Directorate coordinates the process of selection of candidates for headship positions and also extends its full support to the Senior Appointments Advisory Committee, which is chaired by the Principal Permanent Secretary. The Management Support Directorate carries out research and collates data on specific topics and, among other assignments, also assists the Principal Permanent Secretary in the finalisation of the annual performance appraisals of heads of departments.

1.3.19 As part of its pre-selection process, the Management Support Directorate works in close collaboration with the Centre for Development, Research and Training (CDRT). The pre-selection filtering of applicants was a task assigned to CDRT in 2008, and was intended as a means of introducing innovative methods in the process of identifying candidates suitably prepared for headship positions. As from 2009, this has now become a standard part of the recruitment process for headship positions and now incorporates psychometric profiling together with extended interviews for Directors and Directors General.

1.4   Objectives and Scope of the Study

1.4.1   The main objective of this performance audit was the analysis of the management mechanisms and structures utilised in controlling Public Service recruitment. Sound management mechanisms and

structures employed in the recruitment process essentially entail the:

a. Establishment and execution of strategic approaches to recruitment, central in addressing current and future workforce priorities and goals;
b. Support of recruitment activities through the provision of specialist advice, legislative and procedural guidance material, and training for staff involved in recruitment-related activities;
c. Effective conduct of recruitment activities in compliance with legislative and administrative requirements; and
d. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of implemented recruitment strategies and activities.

1.4.2   The study sought to delineate the key limitations and challenges faced by all stakeholders involved throughout the recruitment process. Subsequently, the identification of such limitations and challenges was intended to serve as a springboard for the identification of opportunities key to the overall amelioration of recruitment practices across the Maltese Public Service. The emphasis on Public Service, rather than the wider public sector is intended, as the recruitment process and procedures employed differ substantially between the two. The scope of this performance audit narrowly focuses on the former, that is, recruitment within the Public Service.

1.4.3   As a secondary objective, and of significant importance when contextualised against the aforementioned management considerations, this performance audit aimed to elicit good practices in place at ministerial level. This 'client' perspective served as an invaluable source of insight, balancing good practices employed with limitations encountered.

1.4.4   The overall approach and perspective adopted in addressing the management of the Public Service recruitment function was one grounded in the principles of performance auditing. To this effect, the audit team intentionally steered away from issues solely in the domain of compliance to regulations and procedures, which would have been more in line with a micro level analysis of individual case

files pertaining to a specific department or ministry. Instead, focus was channelled towards the macro level strategic concerns relating to management of the recruitment process. NAO considered this latter approach to be more conducive toward its principal objective of identifying good practices in recruitment across the Public Service.

1.4.5   This audit adopted a comprehensive view of the entire recruitment process, commencing at the initial identification of human resource requirements, moving on to the administrative preparatory work relating to the issue of calls for recruitment, the actual selection process and culminating at the stage where the successful applicant is notified. NAO considers these tasks to be best understood when conceptualised as a continuum rather than distinct phases, with the overall recruitment exercise planned for from the start of the process.

1.4.6   Following the above referred notification stage, the successfully identified recruit may exercise the option to postpone acceptance of appointment by up to two months. This is, in fact, regulated by article 1.1.15.2 of the Public Service Management Code. Cases of requests for postponement of appointment exceeding the stipulated two-month period (yet within the overall validity period of the selection board result) may also be considered, yet are subject to approval following PSC recommendations. For the purposes of this audit, this postponement of acceptance of appointment was not considered as forming part of the recruitment process. The onus of delaying one's acceptance following successful recruitment is exclusively within the control of the selected candidate, and therefore, delays brought about in this respect should not be attributed to Government's recruiting agents.

1.4.7   This study focused on the recruitment of two categories of Public Service employees, that is, General Service grades and non-General Service grades. Data pertaining to recruitment carried out between 2008 and 2010 formed the basis of this audit's research focus. Correspondingly, the Ministries referred to throughout this report reflect the setup in place during the period under review. The selection process, more precisely referred to as a nomination process, utilised in the case of headship positions was scoped out of this performance audit.

1.4.8   The audit report presents a factual account of recruitment-related processes, procedures and regulations as at September 2012. Changes with respect to the manner by which Public Service recruitment is undertaken and managed that took place after this cut-off period are presented in greater detail in Chapter 3, under the sub-heading 'Recent Developments'. The audit team did not verify these recent changes, and data provided in this respect is exclusively based on auditee feedback.

1.5   Methodology

1.5.1   An extensive review of literature on recruitment within the context of the public sector was carried out. Particular attention was directed at similarly oriented performance audits, such as the 'Recruiting civil servant efficiently' report (National Audit Office, United Kingdom, 2009) and the 'Management of Recruitment in the Australian Public Service' report (Australian National Audit Office, 2008), among others.

1.5.2   Other local regulatory and policy documents of relevance to the recruitment process within the Maltese Public Service were also reviewed. Centrally important in this regard, was the review of the Public Service Management Code (PAHRO, 2011), which clearly establishes the procedures that govern Public Service resourcing. Equally important in this review were the series of annual reports compiled by the PSC and PAHRO. Furthermore, the Public Service Reform Commission's report (1989), entitled 'A New Public Service for Malta', was highly insightful and bore direct relevance to the subject matter addressed by virtue of this performance audit.

1.5.3   Fieldwork was carried out between October 2011 and March 2011, and essentially consisted of a two-staged approach. The first stage consisted of key informant interviews with stakeholders involved in the recruitment process, as well as the review of corresponding documentation. The aforementioned stakeholders comprised of PAHRO, PSC, MHEC, MEDE, as well as MRRA.

1.5.4   As already indicated, the selection of these three ministries was based on the criterion of frequency of recruitment. These three ministries were involved in the highest number of recruitment calls throughout the identified audit period, that is 2008 up till 2010. The findings and conclusions drawn from the review of this sample of ministries are easily extendable to other ministries, particularly in view of the uniformity of procedures and policies employed.

1.5.5   The second part of this staged approach involved the integration, analysis and review of recruitment-related data provided by PAHRO and each of the respective line ministries selected for this performance audit. In order to assess recruitment-related metrics, data provided by all of the aforementioned stakeholders was organised according to a number of established steps that essentially define the recruitment process. The following are the subsidiary steps of the recruitment process, utilised as an organising framework for the purposes of this audit:

a. Capacity building meeting;
b. Drafting of recruitment call;
c. Approval of draft call by PAHRO;
d. Approval of draft call by PSC;
e. Issue of call;
f. Deadline for submission of applications;
g. Interviews held by the selection board;
h. Report submitted by the selection board;
i. Submission of views by the head of department;
j. Verification of vacancies by PAHRO;
k. Petitions;
l. Submission of PSC recommendation to Prime Minister;
m. Prime Minister's approval; and
n. Notification of appointment to successful applicant/s.

1.5.6   NAO is aware that there are additional steps in the recruitment process other than those represented above. However, for data analysis purposes, some steps have been condensed into one major sub-step. Therefore, for example, the approval of the vacancy by PAHRO and the MFEI budgetary clearance were for all intents and purposes condensed into the capacity building meeting sub-step.

1.5.7   The purpose of the indicated categorisation was to elicit the time taken in completing each of the

Figure 6: Reading Box-and-Whisker Plots
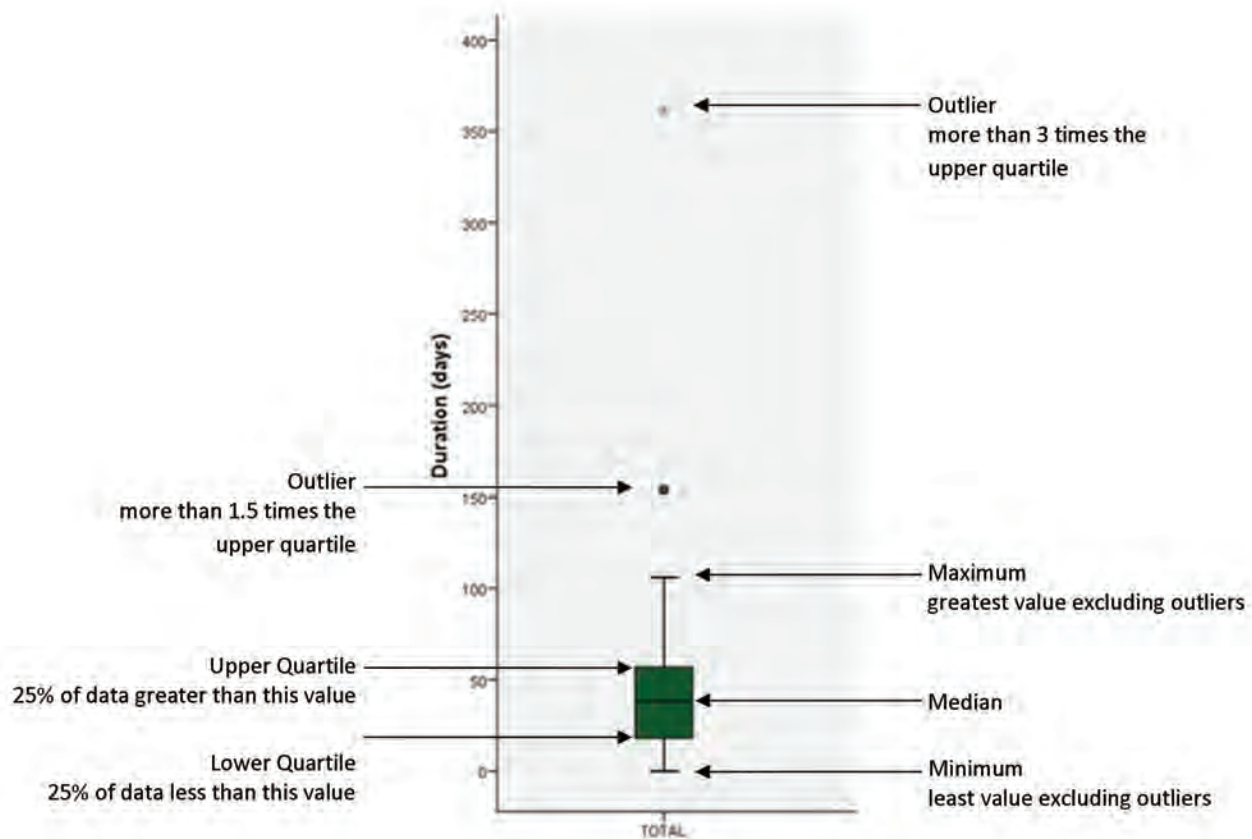
above steps, and eventually, the process as a whole. Statistical data corresponding to each of the steps, namely the range, average duration and interquartile range, was compiled for the three ministries involved in this audit on a collective basis, as well as on an individual basis.

1.5.8   Data corresponding to each of the analysed stages of the recruitment process was presented in a box-and-whisker plot. These data plots corresponded to each of the audited Ministries, while also including the aggregate total. Figure 6, guides the reader on how to interpret the various aspects of this type of data representation.

1.5.9   As a general rule, NAO adopted the earliest possible date recorded for each particular sub-step. Therefore, by means of example, if successful candidates were notified sequentially over a given period of time, NAO only considered the date when the first notified successful candidate as the date of effect, and utilised this principle throughout its

analysis. The rationale behind such an approach essentially relates to the fact that delays beyond the first candidate are in principle not attributable to the recruiting body, but in all probability, due to candidate availability.

1.5.10   All data presented in this report indicating duration in days refers to actual calendar days and not to working days.

1.5.11   Whereas the line ministries were requested by NAO to provide and structure their data according to the above-defined framework, PAHRO on the other hand were asked to forward the databases utilised on an operational basis. A similar request was also made to PSC; however, NAO was informed that such data was not maintained electronically and had to be retrieved on a case-by-case basis through review of each recruitment file. NAO considered such an endeavour to be highly time-consuming and not feasible within the context of the overall audit.

1.6   Limitations

1.6.1   NAO acknowledges that a number of limitations, particularly relating to the data utilised in this audit, may impinge on the overall validity of the findings. These are summarily discussed hereunder.

1.6.2   At a general level, information collected through the series of key informant interviews held with all stakeholders involved in the recruitment process tapped into perception data. Such interviews assumed importance in terms of being indicative of the most salient themes and issues at play in this process; however, the subjective nature of collected data remains. The audit team sought to compensate for this limitation through appropriate triangulation; yet this was not always possible, largely due to the type and nature of data. Perceived excessive delays in particular sub-steps were triangulated against the in-depth analysis of cases. Axiomatically, this exercise could not be similarly applied to proposed policy and procedural measures. Notwithstanding the above, efforts at improving data reliability were nonetheless carried out, specifically through consistent requests for confirmation of meeting minutes.

1.6.3   With regard to the collation and analysis of recruitment-related data, all calls initiated in 2011 and 2012 were intentionally scoped out of this audit. Such scoping was purposely planned for, as calls initiated in 2010 would have been ongoing at the time of data analysis, rendering the timely completion of the exercise impossible.

1.6.4   Data corresponding to the recruitment calls reviewed in this audit was not verified on an individual, case-by-case basis. Given the large number of calls reviewed and analysed on a macro level, such depth of analysis was not considered necessary and feasible by the audit team. Instead, efforts at improving upon the reliability and validity of such data were addressed through the reconciliation of corresponding databases independently administered by different stakeholders, namely PAHRO and the respective line ministries.

1.6.5   This latter-referred process of organising and integrating data from various stakeholders proved to be highly challenging. In the case of PAHRO-maintained databases, NAO noted significant inconsistency in its information management practices. The data provided was segmented according to the particular ministry each PAHRO employee was assigned to, subsequently resulting in no standard format of record keeping. This created major difficulties when attempting to integrate and merge essentially similar procedure-related data.

1.6.6   Furthermore, there were instances when data corresponding to one ministry was not maintained within the same database, and in different formats, rendering it virtually impossible to comprehensively view ministry-related recruitment information in an ordered and logical manner. At times, data was recorded in terms of a registry function, simply recording file movements rather than actual recruitment-related tasks pending action or at hand.

1.6.7   NAO noted that provided data was at times characterised by its incompleteness, particularly in cases where important fields were left blank, such as the actual vacant post or position, and government gazette reference. Additionally, date formatting was at times maintained in dd/mm/yyyy format, while sometimes maintained in mm/dd/yyyy, therefore creating significant difficulty in rectifying and correctly formatting such data for eventual analysis.

1.6.8   Overall, in the case of PAHRO, the logical organisation of data was evidently weak in the case of a number of databases. This lack of organisation rendered data analysis impossible and raised concerns with respect to work management practices in place.

1.6.9   The process of integrating PAHRO data with that provided by the respective line ministries also posed a number of difficulties. The most considerable challenge in this regard emerged when PAHRO-maintained databases did not incorporate some form of unique identifier, key in distinguishing among the various calls. The absence of the appropriate means necessary in accurately identifying recruitment calls (for example, a PAHRO specific reference or government gazette details) further compounded the complexity of reconciling data between PAHRO and the line ministries.

1.6.10   Finally, NAO also identified a number of limitations relating to the completeness and validity of audited data. In this regard, NAO noted numerous

instances of inputting errors committed by the respective line ministries and by PAHRO, which it therefore strived to rectify or eliminate from the audit sample. This was largely carried out on a case-by-case basis, depending on the nature of the inconsistency. Such errors were identified when integrating the data and also during the subsequent analysis stage. In the latter case, such inconsistencies came to the fore due to their incongruent and extreme results, with calls either being completed in negative time or lasting a number of years to complete one single sub-step of the process. On a related note, at times, data provided by the line ministries had a number of missing data fields. This limited NAO's analysis in determining the duration of particular sub-steps of the overall recruitment process.

1.7 Structure of the Report

1.7.1 The remainder of the report is structured around the following key areas, while each of the ensuing chapters is subsequently followed by a series of corresponding conclusions and recommendations relating to the content addressed:

a. **Chapter 2 – Managing the Recruitment Process**
This chapter provides a holistic overview of the recruitment process, commencing with the identification of needs, the drafting of calls process, as well as the verification and approvals required prior to the publication of vacancies. Pursuant to this initial preparatory work, due analysis is directed at the actual mechanics of the selection process, the reporting structures in place, together with final approval, and petitions, when circumstances so warrant. Finally, following the analysis of metrics relating to non-General Service grade recruitment, attention is directed towards the recruitment of General Service grade employees.

b. **Chapter 3 – Key Issues in the Management of Public Service Recruitment**
Various management issues central to Public Service recruitment are addressed in this chapter. Foremost among these is the delegation of authority, which represents a fundamental shift in how recruitment is actuated, effectively based on a crucial evolution of stakeholder roles, and certainly associated with a

number of significant challenges. In addition, focus is subsequently channelled towards recruitment follow-up, undertaken as a means of determining process efficiency and effectiveness. Finally, a number of other management considerations deemed directly relevant to the Public Service recruitment process are also analysed. Here attention gravitates around the ancillary changes to recruitment practices, the cost of the resourcing process, as well as systems employed with respect to prioritisation and training.

c. **Chapter 4 – Ministry-Level Perspectives on Recruitment**
This final chapter adopts a ministry-level perspective on the various management issues deemed centrally relevant to Public Service recruitment. Foremost among which is the analysis of the corresponding HR management structures and functions instituted by each of the Ministries reviewed as part of this performance audit. Following this analysis, a thorough examination of the recruitment-related challenges faced by the audit Ministries is expounded upon, highlighting among others, issues of HR staff technical expertise, capacity building considerations, as well as centre and subsidiary coordination. Finally, attention is also directed at information management concerns, ministry-level HR training requirements and the envisaged delegation of authority.

d. **Appendix A – Public Service Commission: Comparative Analysis of Selection Processes in the Public Service**
This appendix reproduces data sourced from the PSC Annual Report (2011), which provides a detailed, step-by-step account of the duration of selection processes in the Public Service. Once again, this appendix adopts a longitudinal view of the recruitment process, commencing with data from the period 1993/1994, and ranging up to 2011.

e. **Appendix B – Analysis of Non-General Service Grade Staff Complement According to Grade**
Appendix B presents a ten-year overview of the varying staff complements with respect to non-General Service grade employees. This data is segmented according to the various non-General Service grades employed across the Public Service, thereby providing an indication of trends per grade.

f.   **Appendix C – Resourcing Directorate: Public Service Recruitment Salary Apportionment**

As part of this performance audit's costing exercise, Appendix C presents workings relating to the cost of PAHRO's resourcing function.

g.   **Appendix D – Line Ministry Recruitment Cost Estimations**

Forming part of the same costing exercise as referred to above, Appendix D presents cost estimations based on information submitted by MEDE.

h.   **References**

Finally, a selection of the documents utilised and consulted with along the various stages of this audit are presented for ease of reference.
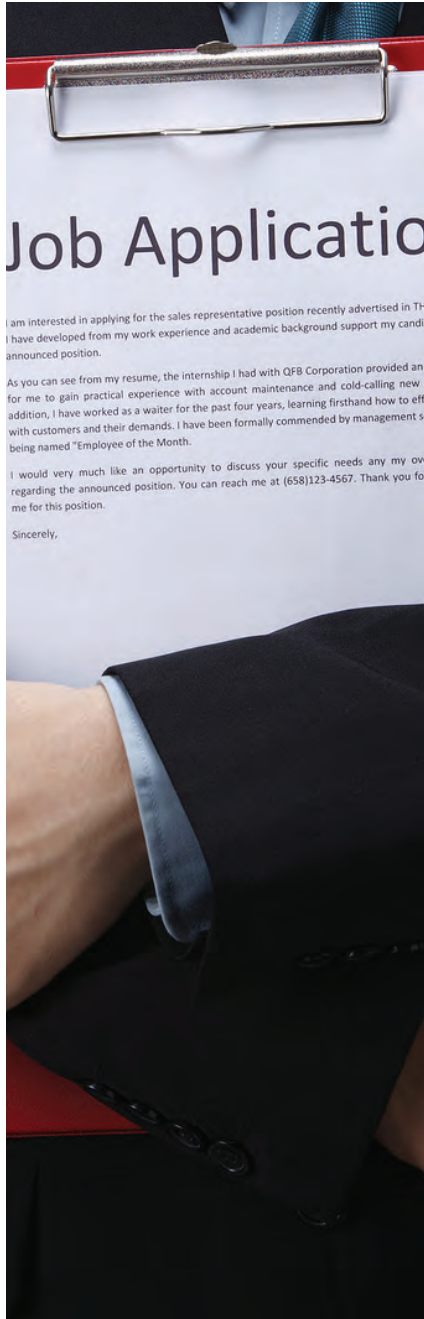
Chapter 2

Managing the Recruitment Process

Chapter 2 – Managing the Recruitment Process

This chapter provides a holistic overview of the recruitment process, commencing with the identification of needs, the drafting of calls process, as well as the verification and approvals required prior to the publication of vacancies. Pursuant to this initial preparatory work, due analysis is directed at the actual mechanics of the selection process, the reporting structures in place, together with final approval and petitions, when circumstances so warrant. Finally, following the analysis of metrics relating to non-General Service grade recruitment, attention is directed towards the recruitment of General Service grade employees.

2.1   Identification of Recruitment Needs

2.1.1   Recruitment within the context of the Public Service is a highly structured process. The first stage of this process centres on the notional identification of recruitment needs. The organisation triggering the identification of particular human resource capacity deficiencies is ordinarily the line department or ministry wherein lies this same deficiency, in effect, the recruiting department or ministry.

2.1.2   Requests for recruitment are assessed in terms of actual validity of the identified need and priority, thereby enabling government to strategically allocate resources where most required. The onus of seeking approval and relevant authorisation for proceeding with recruitment proper is the responsibility of the line department, which in liaison with its respective ministry, presents a business case supporting the validity of requested recruitment cases. In submitting such requests, ministries/

departments must provide adequate justification and explanations regarding why additional staff is required, particularly indicating whether anticipated recruitment addresses the replacement of retiring or resigning staff, or constitutes a newly added position.

2.1.3   In view of government efforts at curtailing and reducing the size of the public sector through the better rationalisation of available resources, identified recruitment needs are initially evaluated in terms of such internal redeployment. Efforts intended to ensure the effective and productive utilisation of existent human resources are coordinated by the Redeployment Advisory Group, which forms part of the Office of the Prime Minister. As stated in OPM Circular 14/2005, the Redeployment Advisory Group, has in essence, assumed responsibility for the redeployment operations previously managed by MIMCOL, the Industrial Projects Services Limited, and other public sector organisations, agencies and authorities.

2.1.4   The forum within which requests for recruitment are evaluated and eventually adjudicated is the Capacity Building Committee. Implemented in 2006, the capacity building exercise was intended to further streamline and refine the process through which proposed recruitment requirements were approved within the wider strategic context. The Capacity Building Committee brings together representatives from the various entities involved in the recruitment process, namely, PAHRO, MFEI, as well as the respective ministries and line departments whose recruitment requests are being reviewed and evaluated. At Capacity Building Committee level, the ministry is ordinarily represented by its Permanent

Secretary, and the Director responsible for heading its recruitment function, who are in turn, at times, accompanied by the corresponding department heads.

2.1.5   During meetings held with NAO officials, PAHRO indicated that the remit of the capacity building exercise was wide ranging, encompassing recruitment of General and non-General Service Grades. Throughout the analysis presented in the ensuing sections of this chapter, reference is exclusively made to the latter category, that is non-General Service Grades. Specific reference to recruitment to General Service Grades is presented in section 2.11.

2.1.6   Although, as a rule, all recruitment requests are channelled through the Capacity Building Committee, there are particular circumstances where the Committee's involvement is bypassed. Here, specific reference may be drawn to Article 110(5) of the Constitution of Malta, which exempts the provisions of this same article in the case of recruitment to:

a. The Office of the Attorney General, Permanent Secretaries and heads of government departments (barring exceptions made by virtue of sub-article 92(4), Secretary to the Cabinet, judges and magistrates, the Office of the Auditor General, and principal representatives of Malta abroad;
b. Any public office for two months or less, insofar as the recommendation of the PSC is required for any such appointment (in which case budgetary clearance is nevertheless sought);
c. Heads of departments of government other than those whose manner of appointment is specifically provided for in the Constitution, who are appointed from among senior public officers by the Prime Minister acting after consultation with the PSC; and
d. Offices, the holders of which are required to reside outside of Malta for the proper discharge of their functions, as well as in the case of offices in the Ministry responsible for the external affairs of Malta as may, from time to time, be designated by the Prime Minister.

2.1.7   As already stated, the main aim of the Capacity Building Committee is that of vetting applications put forward by the requesting ministries and departments for additional human resources. To this end, the Committee holds meetings that ultimately result in the approval or otherwise of requests put forward by the various ministries. The procedure ordinarily employed in assessing capacity requirements commences when ministries (following feedback collected and collated from their respective line departments) are prompted to submit a formal report of the vacancies expected to materialise or arise in the following year. The submissions put forward are regulated by virtue of circulars issued by PAHRO, indicating among others, the established deadlines for submission. After the submitted reports are received by PAHRO, the Capacity Building Committee calls for meetings with the various respective ministries or departments whereby these same entities are directed to justify their submitted recruitment requests. Consideration regarding financial allocation for the recruitment in concern runs in parallel to this process and is managed by MFEI.

2.1.8   During meetings held with NAO, PAHRO indicated that in order to ascertain the smooth running of this process, and in so doing better fulfil its role within the Capacity Building Committee, it endeavoured in maintaining constant channels of communication with the various line ministries, through formal and informal means. It was also indicated that the Resourcing Directorate within PAHRO recently introduced a system of outreach meetings intended to bring together PAHRO representatives and the respective directors responsible for the management of each ministry's recruitment needs. PAHRO stated that these outreach meetings provide the ideal opportunity to discuss forthcoming work and activities, and consequently identify recruitment-related issues and difficulties well in anticipation.

2.1.9   Once the capacity building exercise is successfully concluded, PAHRO, acting on behalf of the Capacity Building Committee, compiles its outcomes into reports, which it subsequently forwards to the Principal Permanent Secretary for endorsement.

2.1.10 It is also important to note that requests for the filling of vacancies are at times put forward outside of the capacity building schedule. Such requests are usually limited to calls whose urgency warrants rapid attention, and are therefore processed independently of the regularly established schedule. Calls processed in such a manner, that is, in anticipation of when the next scheduled capacity building meeting is convened, are generally the direct consequence of resignations and other unforeseen situations, nonetheless characterised by urgency. Such requests are usually submitted to PAHRO by the respective ministry's Permanent Secretary and include cogent reasons justifying the particular nature of the urgency of the calls and why such calls were not included in the previous capacity building exercise.

2.2   Drafting of Calls

2.2.1   Once calls for recruitment are approved at Capacity Building Committee level, and duly endorsed by the Principal Permanent Secretary, an official report detailing approved posts and positions is referred to the requesting ministry's Permanent Secretary. It is at this stage of the process that the ministry assumes control of the recruitment process, as the particular director responsible for management of its human resource function instigates commencement of the drafting of calls stage.

2.2.2   At this stage of the process, English and Maltese language versions of all the calls that are to be processed are prepared by the requesting ministry/department. These drafts, accompanied by further correspondence indicating the number of new recruits required for each respective vacancy, are submitted to PAHRO for review and eventual approval prior to publication.

2.2.3   From data forwarded to NAO, the audit team calculated the average time taken for the process to progress from the initial capacity building approval through the drafting of calls stage. From the 153 calls reviewed, corresponding to the three selected Ministries, NAO concluded that the average duration between these two milestones was that of 190 days, with an interquartile range of between 79 and 274 days (Figure 7 refers).

Figure 7: Duration of Transition from Capacity Building Approval to Finalisation of Draft Call
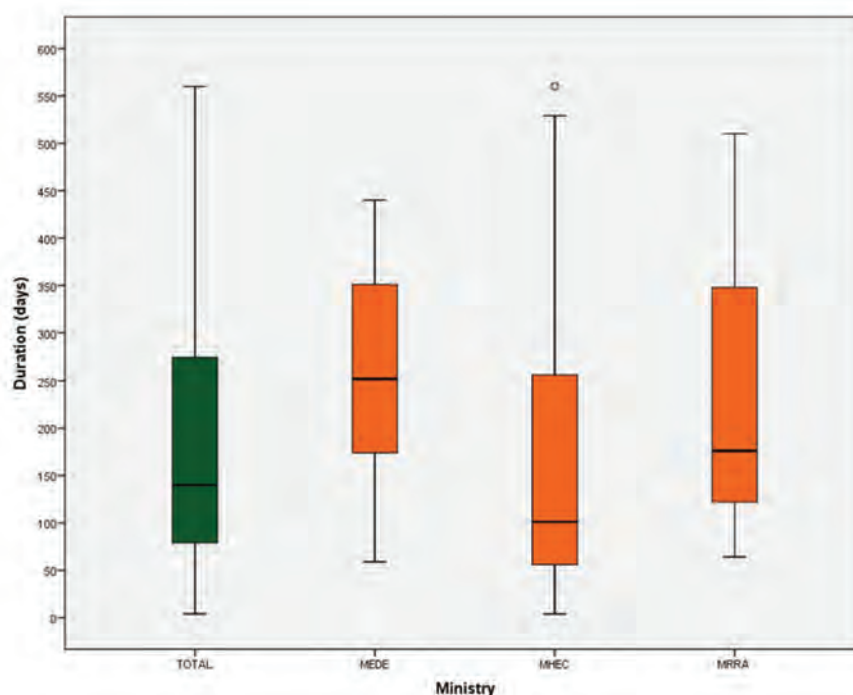
2.2.4   The notably large interquartile range is understandable, particularly in view of ministry recruitment requirements approved en bloc at capacity building stage, and subsequently processed according to the individual priorities assigned to each call. Ministries operating through their respective HR sections eventually become the limiting factor with respect to the submission of draft calls.

2.2.5   Nonetheless, despite acknowledging such limitations, analysis of the above-referred data provides insight on a number of matters. NAO commends MHEC on its relatively rapid processing of 46 per cent of its approved calls, drafting all of these calls within 100 days from the capacity building stage. Yet equally significant are the considerable number of calls that extended well beyond the one-year mark prior to submission of the draft call documents. In fact, the submission of draft calls stage for the final 25 per cent (75th percentile up to the 100th percentile) of MHEC calls ranged from 256 days up to 560 days, which is highly incongruent with the expedient manner exhibited in other circumstances.

2.2.6   Noteworthy points may also be drawn in the case of MEDE. The processing of approved calls, from capacity building endorsement up to draft call level, is delayed in terms of duration, particularly when one draws comparisons against the aggregate data plot. However, despite the overall delay (interquartile range in the case of MEDE stands at 174 – 351 days, while that of the aggregate data was of 79 – 274 days), MEDE completed the preparation of draft calls for all of its approved vacancies in the most expedient manner, thereby indicating a strong consistency in terms of output.

2.2.7   Data corresponding to MRRA is less consistent, indicated by means of its larger interquartile range (when compared to MEDE data) and the significant incongruence between the first and fourth quartile. Such findings are largely attributable to the fact that the majority of MRRA calls submitted in 2007 were delayed due to the reorganisation and restructuring of the Ministry, and subsequently revalidated in December 2008.

2.3   Verification of Calls by PAHRO

2.3.1   Draft versions of calls for recruitment submitted by ministries are, as a matter of procedure, channelled through PAHRO, in order for the relevant verification to commence. Such verification is an integral part of the recruitment process, effectively ensuring that proposed calls are in line with established standards and agreements.

2.3.2   In the case of new fixed-term positions, or in the redesignation of an existing fixed-term position, the director responsible for the recruiting ministry's HR function, through the respective Permanent Secretary, submits the Senior Executive Service Form (for the creation or redesignation of existing fixed-term position) to PAHRO. Subsequently, PAHRO evaluates the submitted requests and, once such evaluation is complete, seeks the Principal Permanent Secretary's authorisation.

2.3.3   On the other hand, when the recruitment being undertaken relates to posts, existing positions or already approved new positions and redesignations, the process varies. Under such circumstances, the director responsible for the ministry's HR function submits a recommendation to the PSC, with PAHRO in copy. This recommendation formalises the ministry's request for the issue of a call for applications, the appointment of the selection board, as well as the proposed selection criteria and weightings. PAHRO's role, once again, is that of verifying the accuracy and validity of submitted calls, and to this end, communicates directly with PSC with regard to actual verification.

2.3.4   In essence, PAHRO's role at this stage of the recruitment process is best conceptualised as one geared towards quality control. NAO noted, through its series of in-depth discussions with PAHRO, that this sub-stage of the process poses numerous challenges. From an operational perspective, PAHRO stated that the verification process associated with posts is relatively straightforward, as these emerge from established classification streams, and therefore require less input in terms of verification, necessitating simple compliance and conformity checks.

2.3.5   On the other hand, the verification stage in the case of new fixed-term positions warrants greater attention, as in this case, PAHRO is entrusted with ensuring correctness of fit of the position to be created within the context of the wider Public Service. When verifying such positions, PAHRO assigns particular attention to the proposed job descriptions and specific eligibility benchmarks pegged to these newly created positions. Such safeguards effectively ensure that no vacancies, which could notionally be addressed through already existent posts, are in fact addressed by erroneously created positions. Furthermore, PAHRO's intervention in this regard is instrumental in ensuring uniformity with respect to remuneration for newly created positions when compared to established salary structures.

2.3.6   Further to the above, PAHRO commented on the importance of carrying out such verifications with the utmost diligence. According to PAHRO, this highly detailed level of analysis is essential, as in its correspondence with PSC, PAHRO must unequivocally state that 'there is no reason why such recruitment should not take place.' Once PAHRO establishes that the forwarded calls meet the required standards and no significant deviations are noted, it forwards these same calls to the PSC for their subsequent approval or otherwise.

2.3.7   From a PAHRO-ministry interface perspective, PAHRO stated that difficulties with respect to the verification process were often the direct result of communication-related issues prevalent among stakeholders. Such communication problems,

coupled with what NAO considers limitations in terms of expertise at ministry level, necessitate the intensely thorough review of submitted draft calls by PAHRO, enabling the rectification of such deviations prior to onward submission to PSC.

2.3.8   Data corresponding to the duration of the transition from submission of draft calls by the respective ministries, up to finalisation of the verification process carried out by PAHRO, was analysed and reviewed by the audit team. The analysed data, pertaining to 301 calls issued by the three Ministries reviewed, resulted in an average duration of 49 days for PAHRO to carry out the required verification of forwarded calls. The interquartile range of this sub-stage of the recruitment process varied from 18 to 57 days (Figure 8 refers).

2.3.9   Analysis of the above-illustrated data is indicative of certain issues relating to this particular sub-stage of the recruitment process. On a relatively positive note, the vast majority (75 per cent) of submitted draft calls are verified within a timeframe of 57 days. More detailed analysis indicates notably similar results in the case of each of the three Ministries. However, of concern to NAO, are the numerous cases that extend well beyond this timeframe, with 45 calls ranging from 58 up to 100 days, and another 30 ranging from 101 up to 361 days. Such delays assume particular significance when one considers the fact that these calls, when totalled, represent 25 per cent of PAHRO's caseload with respect to the three Ministries under review.

Figure 8: Duration of Transition from Submission of Draft Call to Verification by PAHRO
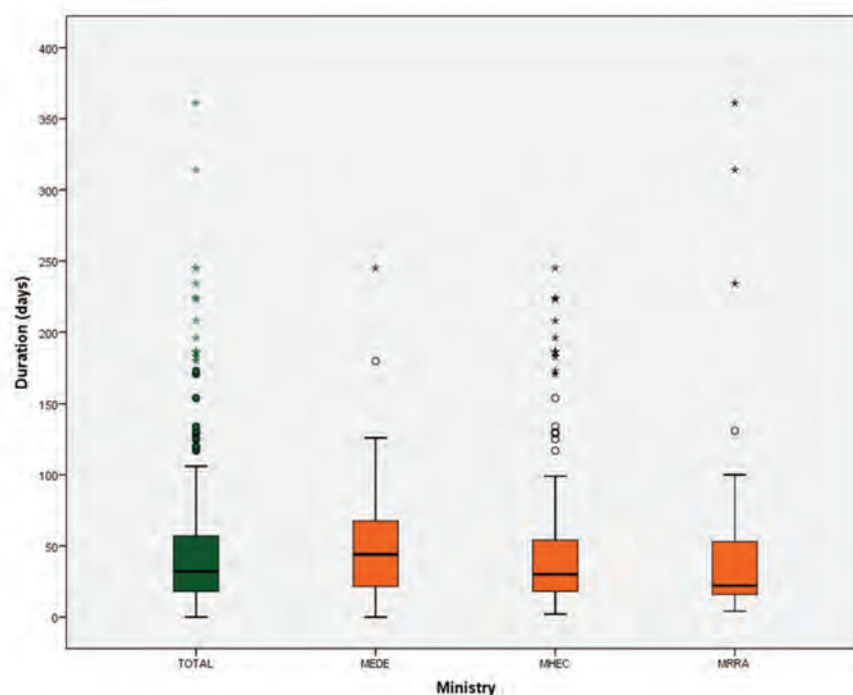
2.4   PSC's Role at Approval Stage

2.4.1 Following the verification process undertaken by PAHRO in liaison with the respective ministry/department, duly verified calls are submitted to PSC. Once at PSC, the necessary action is instigated for the publication of the call on the Government Gazette and/or as a PAHRO or departmental circular.

2.4.2   At this stage of the process, PSC oversees two other aspects of the call's overall approval, that is, the endorsement of the selection board members nominated by the ministry/department involved, as well as the selection criteria. Approval of this latter aspect also includes establishment of the maximum mark and pass-mark, together with the breakdown of marks according to relevant criteria. It is against these criteria that aspiring candidates are vetted to determine their suitability with respect to the vacant positions in concern.

2.4.3 Officers nominated by the recruiting ministry/department to form part of the relevant selection board are evaluated in terms of suitability by PSC and approved of, or otherwise. An important, yet subtle point, is that relating to the selection board's accountability. Once constituted and approved by the PSC, the selection board reports directly to the PSC and not to the recruiting ministry/department.

2.4.4 Once the selection board is properly established, it is directed to conduct an internal exercise in order to finalise the sub-selection criteria (which must invariably fit within the parameters of the selection criteria as approved by PSC) that are employed during the selection process. Marks are also further sub-divided to reflect the weight allotted to the different identified sub-criteria with respect to each particular post or position. PSC is informed of these decisions by the appointed selection board but is not requested to formally approve of them, or otherwise, and merely refers back should it feel that clarifications are necessary.

2.4.5 PSC, through its series of interviews with NAO, expressed its concern on the challenges faced in its role establishing selection boards. Selection board members, particularly in the case of senior level recruitment, are often officials occupying senior positions. Scheduling and coordinating the availability of all selection board members is a challenging endeavour, given the need to reconcile this specific duty with the other multiple demands on their time. In fact, PSC makes such an assertion in the context of how such unavoidable delays ultimately impact on the extended duration of a number of recruitment calls.

2.4.6 Against this contextual backdrop, one possible solution put forward by Government, and duly supported by PSC, is the establishment of a standing selection panel within each Ministry. These standing committees would ideally be formed through the reengagement of retired former public officers and others serving public officers deemed fit for such a purpose. It is envisaged that such a selection panel could contribute towards the completion of this aspect of the recruitment process in a more timely manner, while simultaneously ensuring that recruitment exercises are carried

out by experienced board members. At the time of publication of this audit report, this initiative was still under discussion between the PSC and the Principal Permanent Secretary.

2.4.7 Analysis of duration metrics relating to this particular stage of the process yields a number of interesting results (Figure 9 refers). The vast majority of calls are expediently attended to by PSC. In fact, the interquartile range of 3 to 11 days supports this assertion by NAO, essentially implying that 75 per cent of cases are processed well under a two-week period.

2.4.8 On the other hand, analysis of this same data set yields an average duration of 16 days, which starkly contrasts with the above reported figures. The data corresponding to this stage of the recruitment process is clearly positively skewed, with 84 per cent of cases falling under the above quoted average. The considerable time taken to complete this approval process, in the case of a number of outliers, is cause for concern to NAO.

2.5 Issuing of Approved Recruitment Calls

2.5.1 Calls intended to fill vacancies across the Public Service are issued in three ways, contingent on the type of call being issued. The Public Service Management Code (2012) presents these three means of issuing calls:

a. A public call for applications published in the Government Gazette, where the PSC would instruct the Department of Information to publish the relevant call in the ensuing edition;
b. A service-wide call for applications issued by means of a PAHRO Circular, initiated by PSC; or
c. A departmental call for applications issued through a departmental circular, once again initiated by PSC.

2.5.2 Moreover, it must be emphasised that the use of any of these three methods of advertising is not optional. The applicable method depends on the nature of the capacity building approval and/or the applicable Classification Agreement. In the

Figure 9: Duration of Transition from Verification by PAHRO to Approval by PSC
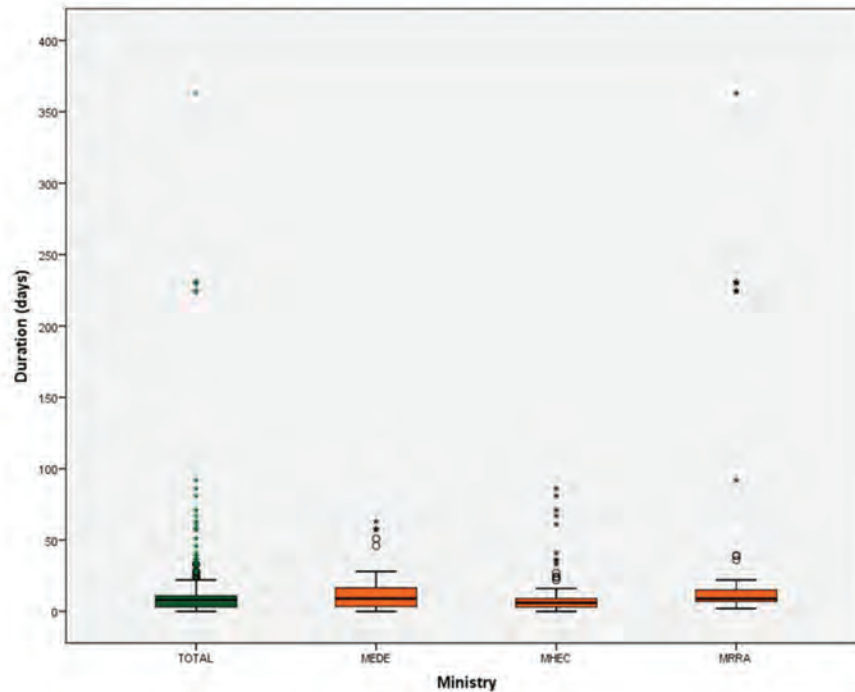
case of the latter, calls for the filling of grades, which by virtue of the particular agreement limit the catchment area to Public Officers, can only be issued internally (service-wide or departmental, as applicable). As regards the filling of a position or a grade, where a certain degree of flexibility is afforded by the relative classification agreement, the method of advertisement is determined by the capacity building approval.

2.5.3   Once all the necessary PAHRO verification and PSC approvals (relating to the call, selection board composition and selection criteria) are in place, the preparatory work with respect to the recruitment process is complete. Therefore, it is then the responsibility of the recruiting ministry/department to drive forward the next step of the process, that is, the issuing of the call, which is essentially intended to attract applicants to fill the identified vacancies.

2.5.4   With regard to the recruitment of non-General Service Grades, ministries/departments may opt to advertise published calls through a number of channels, most notably through the aforementioned circulars and government gazette, the Department of Information website and mailshots, ministry/

department-specific websites, local and foreign newspapers, and specialised journals. As a point of clarification, it is only in the case of external calls for applications (those open to members of the public) that notification of such recruitment is published in the Government Gazette, and subsequently advertised in the local media. On the other hand, in the case of internal calls, these are published as official circulars.

2.5.5   In this respect, MEDE indicated its concern relating to the relatively high costs associated with the advertisement of such calls in locally published media. To this end, MEDE insightfully proposed that central government should endeavour in seeking more favourable rates, based on the assumed economies of scale in negotiating on behalf of the wider Public Service. Such rates could notionally be attained through the involvement of the Department of Contracts.

2.5.6   On the other hand, in the case of General Service Grades, PAHRO assumes the role ordinarily adopted by the line ministry/department, and therefore, similarly has the option to advertise its published calls through the multitude of aforementioned channels.

Figure 10: Duration of Transition from Approval by PSC to Issuing of Call
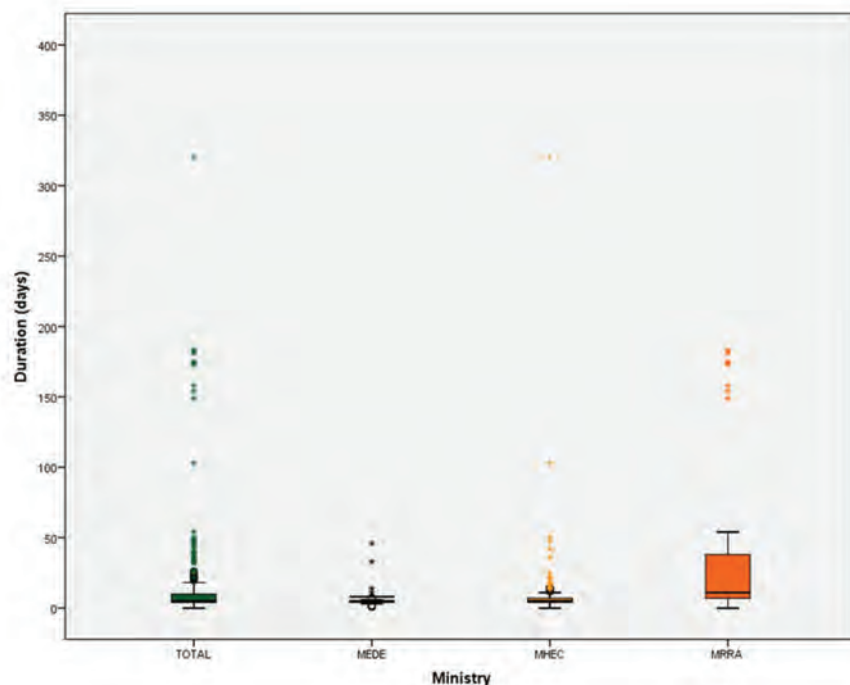
2.5.7 From the forwarded data, NAO concluded that the average time taken for the reviewed 298 calls to be issued, following the attainment of relevant approval from PSC, was that of 15 days (Figure 10 refers). This average assumes particular relevance when contextualised against the interquartile range for this stage of 4 to 10 days. Once again, these figures are indicative of data that is positively skewed, therefore subject to the significant influence of a number of outliers. In fact, the number of calls that took longer than 30 days to transition from the approval by PSC stage to issue of call stage amounted to 34, representing 11 per cent of all recruitment calls.

2.5.8 Further analysis of data presented in Figure 10 illustrates considerable differences in the distribution of duration-related data. MEDE and MHEC present highly homogenous data, with interquartile ranges of four to five and four to seven, respectively. On the other hand, the variance registered in the case of MRRA presents a starkly contrasting scenario, with an interquartile range of 7 to 37 days. The considerable delay in completion of this stage of the recruitment process by MRRA also manifests itself in the case of the already mentioned outliers, with seven out of the nine cases exceeding

100 days to complete this stage pertaining to this Ministry.

2.6 Application and Commencement of the Selection Process

2.6.1 Once the recruitment call has been duly issued, the next step in the process naturally involves the submission of applications by prospective candidates, receipt by the requesting department/ ministry, and execution of the selection process proper. Figure 11 represents the time taken, in aggregate, and as per each of the Ministries reviewed, from the date of issue of the call for recruitment, up until the deadline of submission of application forms.

2.6.2 From analyses of the forwarded data, NAO concluded that the average duration for completion of this particular stage of the process, in the case of the 331 calls analysed, was that of 22 days. The interquartile range corresponding to this stage, that is, 18 to 24 days, indicates congruence with the general practice of allowing a number of weeks for submission of application forms. However, the range (between 3 days and 54 days), more specifically referring to the upper limits of this process,

Figure 11: Duration of Transition for Issue of Call to Application Deadline
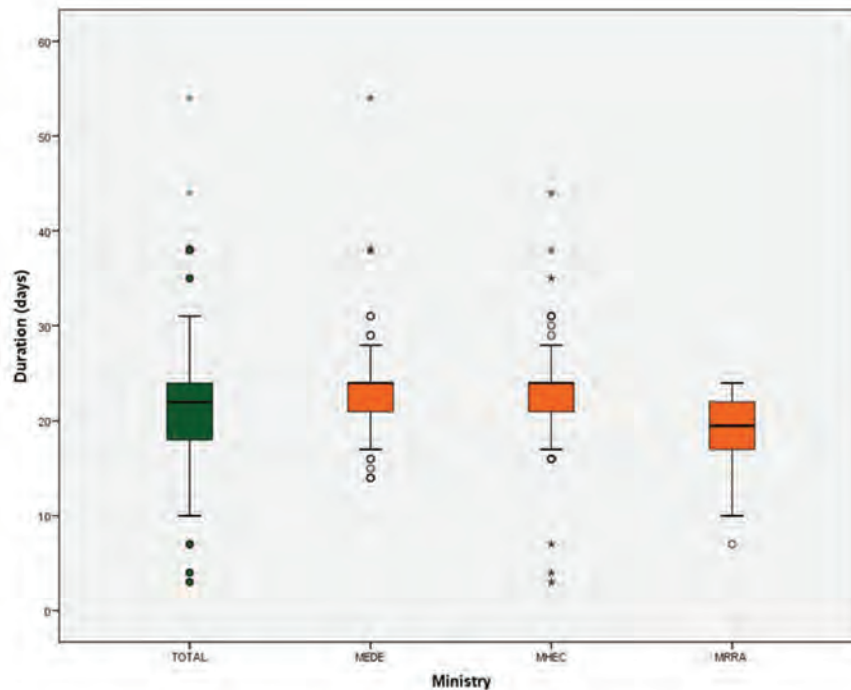
represents data that warrants attention. Outliers relating to MEDE and MHEC data may accentuate the need for further management scrutiny and review.

2.6.3   All applications received prior to the published and established deadline for receipt are forwarded to the appointed selection board, while a list detailing the above-referred corresponding applications is simultaneously submitted to PSC. This latter mentioned involvement of PSC is intended to serve as an integrity check, enabling reconciliation with the eventual submission of final selection results by the appointed selection board.

2.6.4   Upon receipt of these submissions, the selection board reviews the submitted applications and determines who of the candidates is eligible for further consideration, and who is not. This preliminary screening process is carried out in accordance with the eligibility requirements established in the call for applications. The selection board duly informs candidates who are not successful in this first round of consideration, while eligible candidates are informed of accordingly scheduled interviews or other selection methods to be employed in the recruitment process.

2.6.5   NAO also analysed the duration of transitioning from the established call for application deadline to the first interview held for the respective call (Figure 12 refers). From 308 analysed calls relating to the three selected Ministries, NAO concluded that the average duration of this particular process was that of 69 days and ranged from 0 to 486 days. The interquartile range corresponding to this same stage of the recruitment process was between 18 and 78 days.

2.6.6   Analysis of the above results from a ministry perspective yields highly contrasting views. Reference here is specifically addressed to the selection boards appointed for each particular recruitment call. For ease of understanding, the ensuing text refers to the ministry wherein the vacancy lies; however, this is not entirely precise as this stage of the process is effectively controlled by the selection board and not the ministry, and therefore comments presented hereunder are addressed to the respective selection boards.

2.6.7   As presented in Figure 12, MEDE presents a near perfect result, with the absolute vast majority of calls neatly falling within a relatively narrow range, as

Figure 12: Duration of Transition from Application Deadline to Interview Date
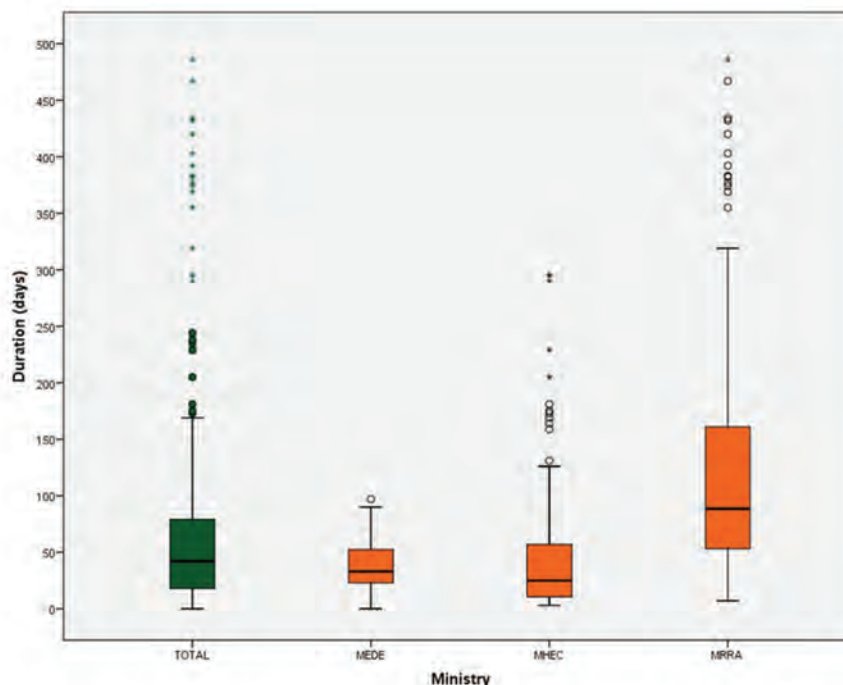
is in fact exemplified through its interquartile range of 23 to 53 days. Similarly, in the case of MHEC, the narrow interquartile range of 11 to 57 days indicates a generally positive trend in terms of timeliness towards completion of this stage; however, the fourth quartile (corresponding to 25 per cent of the Ministry's caseload) indicates substantial delays, with the range for this quartile reading 57 to 295 days.

2.6.8   Finally, and in stark contrast to the previously referred Ministries, MRRA's data with respect to this stage of the process certainly draws NAO's attention. When compared to the aggregated data, MRRA's registered duration in completing this stage of the process is characterised by significant, and at times, substantial delays. This is rendered amply evident through the Ministry's interquartile range of 54 to 157 days, and by its fourth quartile range of 157 to 486 days.

2.6.9   Further to the above analysis, in NAO's review of the method of application for particular vacancies across the Public Service, PAHRO indicated various points of relevance. All applications relating to headship positions within the Public Service must invariably be submitted through the Government

Recruitment Portal. Other posts and positions may be similarly applied for through this Portal, yet under these circumstances, one may also opt to submit a more conventional paper-based application form.

2.6.10   When a particular call includes an examination, PAHRO stated that applicants have to apply through the latter mentioned paper-based method, as such examinations must be followed up by payment. Following meetings with NAO, PAHRO indicated that attempts had been made at integrating the Government payment gateway into the recruitment portal. This would have effectively addressed the aforementioned limitation. However, difficulties persisted and plans for the integration of the payment gateway were subsequently put aside.

2.6.11   One particular comment put forward by PSC, which assumes particular relevance when contextualised against the above presented statistical overview, relates to the selection system's adaptability, or lack thereof, to the number of applicants for a given recruitment call. PSC consider the number of applicants, particularly when this is significantly high, as a determining factor in influencing the duration of the whole recruitment process.

2.6.12 A second factor identified by PSC as limiting the overall effectiveness of the recruitment process relates to the selection tool employed. Traditional selection methods that are currently in use involve structured interviews, examinations carried out under the auspices of the Department of Examinations, and/or practical trade tests. However, PSC indicated it recently introduced multiple-choice type tests, which represent a less rigid mechanism and a more flexible approach, while simultaneously ensuring the attainment of increased objectivity and improved effectiveness of the selection process. Such alternative selection methods are intended to complement the individual interview. Nonetheless, PSC considers it imperative for such forward looking initiatives to be regulated, and to this end, deems it necessary for ministries/departments to seek its clearance prior to the administration of these alternative assessment tools.

2.7 Selection Board Reporting and Final PSC Approval

2.7.1 The selection process carried out by the selection board, which normally entails individual interviews, is organised into a schedule. Following the successful administration of all interviews, the suitability of each candidate vis-à-vis the vacant post/position is duly evaluated, and corresponding reporting requirements are adhered to.

2.7.2 The results accordingly awarded to each of the interviewed applicants are formally reproduced in two main forms, referred to in the Public Service Management Code (clause 1.1.7.11) as an assessment sheet and a result sheet. The assessment sheet entails a breakdown of awarded marks according to the previously established sub-criteria as set by the selection board, which are then totalled in the case of each of the individuals interviewed. The second form, the result sheet, inherently presents the maximum and pass mark set, the name and identity card number of each eligible applicant in the final order of merit (thereby ranking the interviewed individuals) and the final mark obtained by each applicant.

2.7.3 Once the selection board finalises this aspect of the selection process, a formal report encompassing all of the above, is submitted to the PSC and to the respective Director General / Director concurrently. In essence, this report indicates the:

   a. Number of applicants;
   b. Number of eligible and ineligible applicants;
   c. Number of applicants actually interviewed;
   d. Number of applicants who were absent; and
   e. Number of applicants who withdrew their application.

Further details regarding the finer aspects of this part of the recruitment process are presented in section 1.1.7 of the Public Service Management Code.

2.7.4 The report serves a reconciliatory purpose, allowing PSC to verify the original number of applicants against those that attended the interview, withdrew or were found ineligible. Although this report is forwarded to the respective head of department, as well as to the PSC, the latter only takes note of the report at this stage of the process.

2.7.5 From the forwarded data, NAO calculated various duration metrics corresponding to the time taken for the selection board to complete its report after the interviews were carried out. Data corresponding to this stage of the process is represented in Figure 13, and as illustrated in the aggregate box-plot, has a range that extends from 0 up to 300 days, and an interquartile range of 4 to 51 days.

2.7.6 Ministry-level analysis of this same stage of the recruitment process, once again, yields contrasting results. Selection boards entrusted with MEDE and MRRA recruitment calls rank positively when compared to the aggregate data figures. In fact, the interquartile ranges of these two Ministries stand at 1 to 24 days and 2 to 29 days, respectively.

2.7.7 On the other hand, selection boards entrusted with MHEC recruitment register less favourable duration metrics, with the interquartile range in the case of this Ministry ranging from 20 to 64 days. Of further concern to NAO in this regard are the significant number of recruitment calls that extended beyond the 50 day mark. To this effect, MHEC registered 58 calls that took longer than 50 days to transition from the date of interview held

Figure 13: Duration of Transition from Interview Held to Submission of Selection Board Report
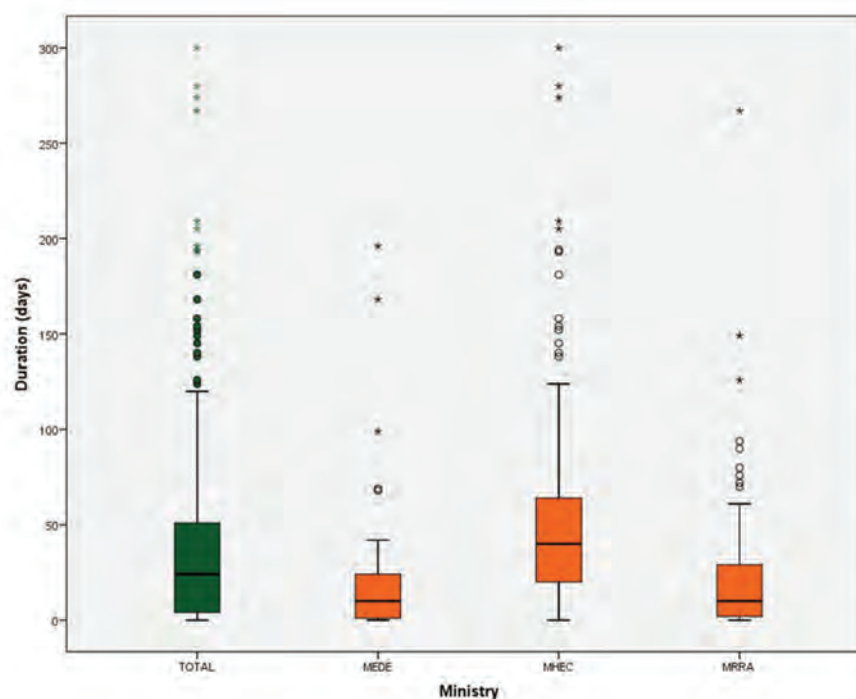
up to the submission of the selection board report, essentially representing 36 per cent of all MHEC recruitment calls corresponding to the audit period.

2.7.8   Following the report put forward by the selection board to the PSC and the respective head of department, it is now the head of department who is tasked with responsibility for submitting one's views. Here, the Directors General or Directors are to express whether they are in agreement with the conclusions reached by the selection board, and submit their own recommendations, or otherwise, for the appointment of the successful candidate, or candidates, in the order of merit. At this stage of the process, submitted recommendations by the head of department are made to the PSC, while copying PAHRO in this exchange of correspondence.

2.7.9   As per NAO analysis, the average time taken for the submission of views by the recruiting Directors General or Directors corresponding to the analysed 303 calls was that of 19 days (Figure 14 refers). While the interquartile range for this stage of the process was that of 6 to 22 days, the range was that of 0 to 297 days. Out of the 303 calls analysed, 22 calls, representing approximately seven per cent of all calls, took longer than 50 days to advance beyond this stage of the recruitment process.

2.7.10   Ministry-level analysis presents a highly homogenous spread of results, with each Ministry accounting for an approximately equal volume of outliers. In fact, out of the above-referred 22 outliers (which took longer than 50 days to advance beyond this stage of the recruitment process), 11 corresponded to MHEC recruitment calls (reflecting seven per cent of all Ministry calls), six to MEDE (corresponding to nine per cent of Ministry calls) and five to MRRA (corresponding to seven per cent of Ministry calls).

2.7.11   During meetings held with NAO, PSC indicated that circumstances in which Directors General or Directors object to the selection boards' report are a very rare occurrence, and in fact, there had been no such instance during the term of the current Commission. However, a head of department may object to a selection result on the grounds of the selected applicant having a serious disciplinary record – something which should not be taken into account by the selection board itself, which should base its assessment of applicants on the approved selection criteria and sub-criteria. Given such a scenario, a successful applicant's serious disciplinary record may still warrant being taken into consideration before an appointment is

Figure 14: Duration of Transition from Selection Board Reporting to Submission of Views by Head of Department
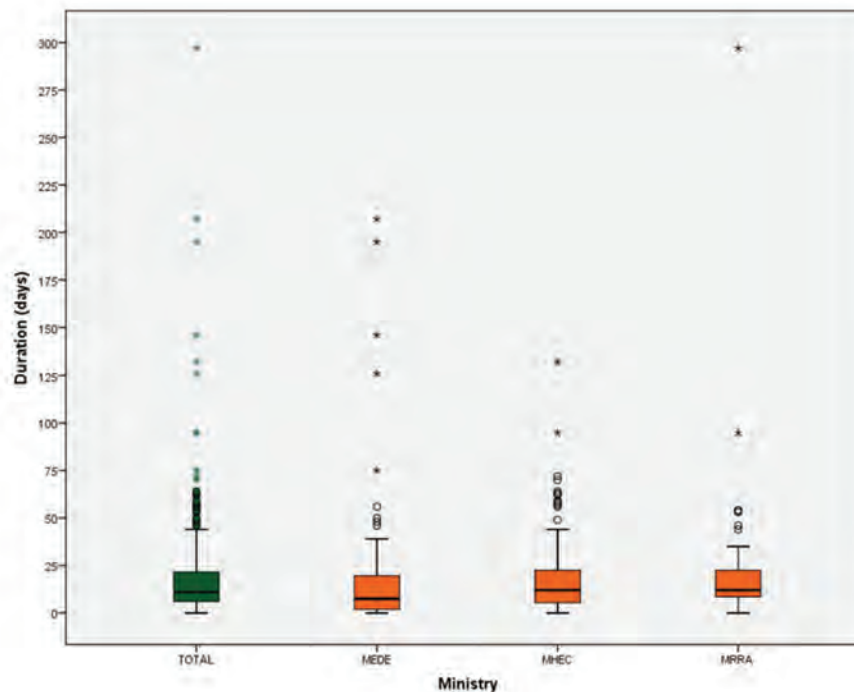
made, and to this end, a concerned Director General or Director may address a situation such as this by virtue of paragraph 1.1.7.17 of the Public Service Management Code.

2.7.12 Following the submission of views by the respective heads of department, the final checks prior to onward transmission for Prime Minister approval are carried out. Here, PAHRO submits feedback to the PSC regarding the verification of existent vacancies. It must be clarified that PAHRO verifies the number of vacancies, without reference whatsoever to the successful applicant/s to be recommended for appointment, since this is a matter exclusive to the PSC. Subsequent to this, PSC issues its final approval of the selection results, thereby allowing for PAHRO to inform the respective Director General or Director to publish the result and in turn contact the successful candidate.

2.7.13 These published results remain valid for a one-year period (determined by the date of certification fixed by the Executive Secretary, PSC), which essentially means that, should any other vacancies specifically corresponding to the recruited post/position arise during that timeframe, the related posts/positions will be automatically offered

to the next successful candidate according to the established order of merit.

2.7.14 This final verificatory process carried out by PAHRO and PSC was analysed in terms of duration and corresponding data is presented in Figure 15. From the 296 reviewed cases, NAO concluded that the average time taken for this stage of the recruitment process was that of 14 days, and ranged from 0 to 138 days. The interquartile range pertaining to this verificative stage of the process was established at 5 to 16 days.

2.7.15 Further analysis of the ministry specific data analogous to this stage of the recruitment process illustrates highly divergent results. The verificatory process undertaken by PAHRO and PSC with respect to MRRA calls ranged between 1 and 27 days. The interquartile range corresponding to this same Ministry and sub-stage was of two to six days. On the other hand, this same process with respect to MHEC and MEDE took notably longer to complete, most significantly in the case of the latter referred Ministry. In the case of these two Ministries, the interquartile range for MHEC calls was that of 7 to 17 days, while that of MEDE calls was of 9 to 22 days.

Figure 15: Duration of Transition from Submission of Views by Department Head to Final Verification by PAHRO and PSC
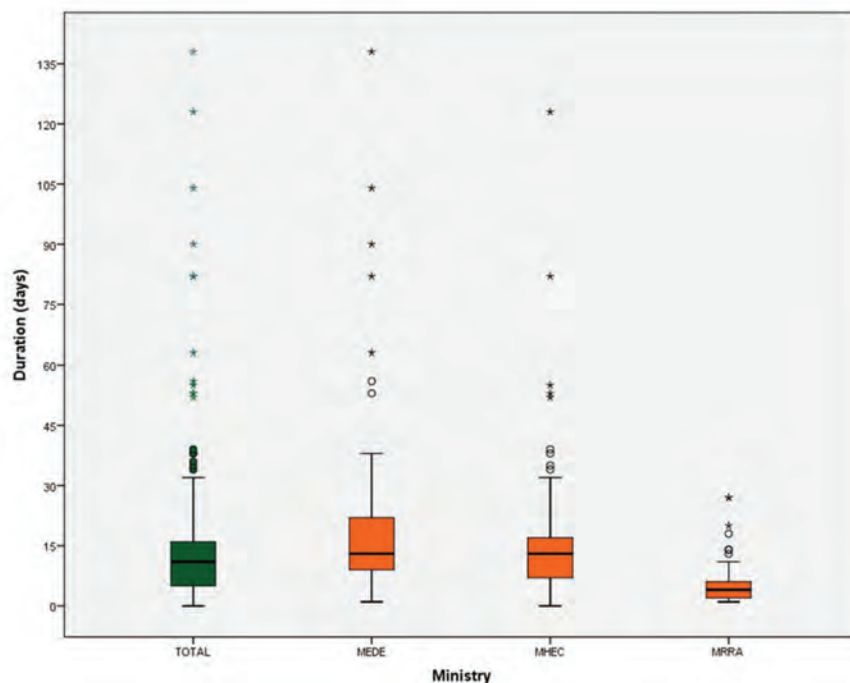
2.7.16 In view of the above, MEDE stated that certain calls, such as is the case with the recruitment of teachers, result in a substantially longer duration in the coordination of numerous selection board reports and eventual onward transmission to PAHRO and PSC. Under such circumstances, MEDE indicated its responsibility in managing multiple selection boards, essentially relating to the same call, and therefore, the comparative increased delay may be attributed to this factor.

2.8   Petitions

2.8.1   Applicants may present petitions relating to perceived injustices vis-à-vis the recruitment process to the PSC. When instituted, petitions made to the PSC result in deviations to the standard recruitment process, with the nature of the deviation contingent on whether the claim was submitted prior to the publication of results, or following publication.

2.8.2   During meetings held with PSC, NAO was informed that in the case of petitions submitted prior to the publication of interview results, such claims generally related to the outright omission

of a particular applicant from the selection process due to the board's consideration of the applicant as ineligible for the respective vacancy. Petitioning applicants are entitled to submit formal representations to the Commission.

2.8.3   Under such circumstances, the PSC requests an explanation from the selection board detailing why the petitioning applicant was deemed ineligible with respect to that particular call. Once the selection board has forwarded its reply, the Commission vets the reasons put forward by the board, finalises its position and accordingly informs the applicant or the selection board. Here, the final decision falls under the PSC's responsibility.

2.8.4   The second type of petitions are those submitted after publication of the interview results, essentially submitted by candidates who were found to be eligible for the vacant position, yet who were ultimately not selected for the post following the selection process. Under such circumstances, the petitioning applicant has a 10 working-day time-window within which to submit representations contesting the validity of the published result. It is pertinent to note that this time-window commences

upon publication of a notice in the Government Gazette stating that the relevant results have been issued and are subsequently available for viewing (on the official notice board of the PSC as well as that of the department concerned). The actual results are not published through such notices, but simply referred to.

2.8.5   Petitioning applicants wishing to contest the selection board's decision are directed to submit their petition directly to the PSC. Once received, the Commission forwards such petitions to the corresponding board, which in turn, reviews the points raised by the petitioner and submits its relevant comments and views to the PSC. Once the PSC is in receipt of the selection board's response to points raised, it assumes responsibility for comparison of the two renditions, and evaluates the circumstances accordingly.

2.8.6   Should the PSC be of the opinion that the petition forwarded by the applicant is justified, it issues a revised result reflecting the changes emanating from this intervention. If, on the other hand, the Commission opines that the decision of the selection board was a valid one, and should therefore stand unchanged, it informs the petitioner accordingly, providing a detailed and exhaustive point-by-point response to the submitted petition.

2.8.7   During meetings with NAO, PSC indicated that apart from the aforementioned applicant-initiated petitions, the Commission itself may solicit inquiries on its own initiative. To this extent, the PSC is entitled to request clarifications on the final results, make queries, and if it deems necessary, request the drawing up of an amended result, or completely omit a particular interview's results if the circumstances so merit. In the latter case, the Commission would subsequently instigate the commencement of a fresh selection process, under the same call for applications, yet carried out by a different selection board.

2.8.8   From the forwarded data, NAO analysed the duration metrics associated with petitions submitted before, and those submitted after the publication of results. Out of 340 recruitment calls, 14 calls had petitions that were submitted prior to the publication of results, thereby representing four per cent of all calls. On the other hand, 21 petitions were submitted following the publication of results. Analysis of this category of representations indicated an average duration of 41 days, a range of 7 to 118 days, and an interquartile range of 18 to 57 days (Figure 16 refers).

2.8.9   In view of the above, PSC commented on the substantial time taken for petitioners to

Figure 16: Duration of Transition from Final Verification by PAHRO and PSC to Adjudication of Petition
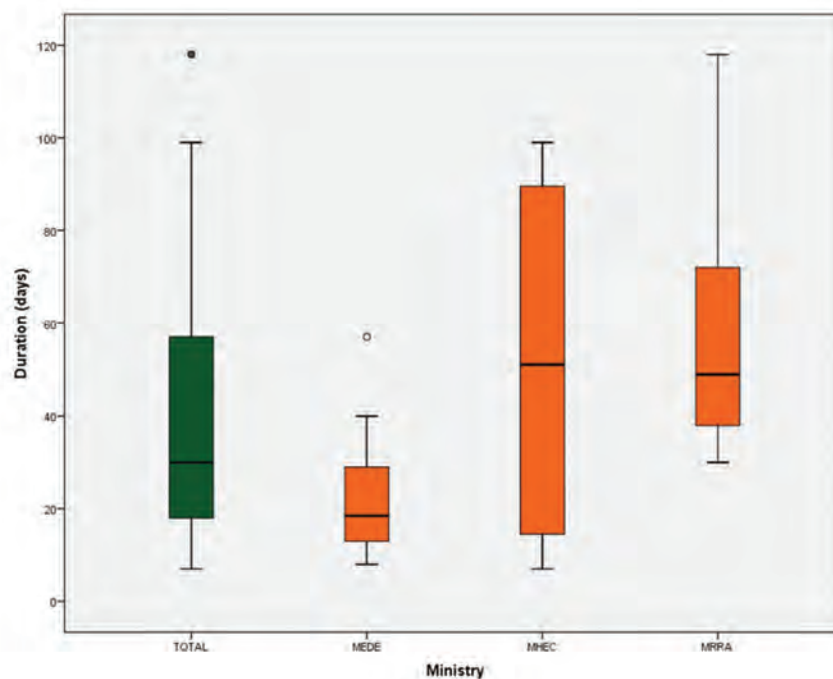
receive a reply to submitted contestations. PSC stated that this duration bore a direct link with the time taken awaiting feedback from the respective selection board. To this effect, one potential solution proposed by the PSC was the establishment of a unit specifically tasked with compliance duties. Such a unit would notionally be responsible for the adoption of a more active role in resolving pending petitions and auditing completed recruitment calls. In fact, such a recommendation was also proposed in a report prepared by the Management Efficiency Unit (2009, April).

2.8.10   The establishment of such a compliance unit must be contextualised against an ever-increasing trend of submission of petitions. To this end, the planned compliance unit would instigate a greater sense of expedience with respect to the adjudication of petitioned calls, holding discussions at the departments' premises and carrying out on-site verifications. The scope of the proposed compliance unit covers public sector recruitment, as well as Public Service recruitment. This would be in line with the delegation of the selection process, as envisaged by the Public Administration Act (2010, Cap. 497), and the resulting reorientation of the role of the PSC to one of supervision, monitoring and regulation, while a more active role is subsequently assumed by the line departments directly involved in the recruitment process.

2.9   Finalisation of the Recruitment Process

2.9.1   The recruitment process culminates to an end through three relatively straightforward sub-steps. The first of these steps involves the submission of the PSC's recommendation for the appointment of the top placed candidate or candidates to the

Prime Minister. Once the Prime Minister approves of the proposed recommendation (which essentially constitutes the second step of this final process), it is then PAHRO's responsibility to inform the respective department so as to issue a letter of appointment to each appointee (hence constituting the third step). With this latter step accomplished, the overall recruitment process may be classified as completed.

2.9.2   NAO analysed the duration of each of the aforementioned sub-steps of this final stage; however, data corresponding to MEDE was only available for the third sub-step. As stated in section 1.6, the retrieval of such data through the case-by-case review of each file was not considered feasible by the audit team, particularly when considering that data for the third sub-step was in fact available, which subsequently allowed for the establishment of the overall duration metrics.

2.9.3   Analysis of data corresponding to the submission of PSC recommendation to the Prime Minister following due verification by PAHRO and the PSC itself results in two highly contrasting data sets (Figure 17 refers). On the one hand, MRRA related data all fits into the narrowest of ranges, from 4 to 13 days, with an average completion time of eight days. On the other hand, although the interquartile range pertaining to MHEC data ranges from 3 to 10 days, which somewhat conforms to MRRA related data, its range is considerably and notably wider. Out of the 159 MHEC recruitment calls analysed, 22 of them, representing 14 per cent, took longer than 30 days to complete this most straightforward of tasks. These outliers certainly render the analysis of MHEC data an ambiguous and confounding task, particularly when one considers that it is the same organisation, the PSC, which is simultaneously processing both sets of calls.

Figure 17: Duration of Transition from Final Verification by PAHRO and PSC to Submission of PSC Recommendation to Prime Minister
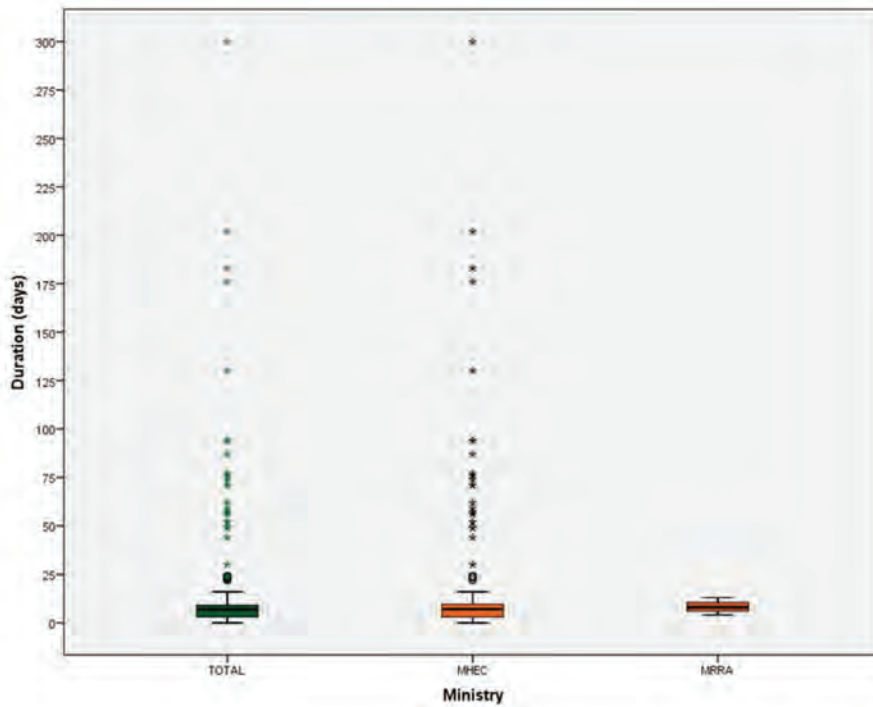
2.9.4   The second sub-step of this final stage of the recruitment process essentially involves attainment of the Prime Minister's approval, the analysis of which, in terms of duration, is presented in Figure 18. In the case of the vast majority of recruitment calls, this stage of the process was often accomplished in under 15 days, with 149 out of the 154 calls analysed (representing 97 per cent) falling under this threshold.

Figure 18: Duration of Transition from PSC Submission to Prime Minister to Prime Minister's Approval
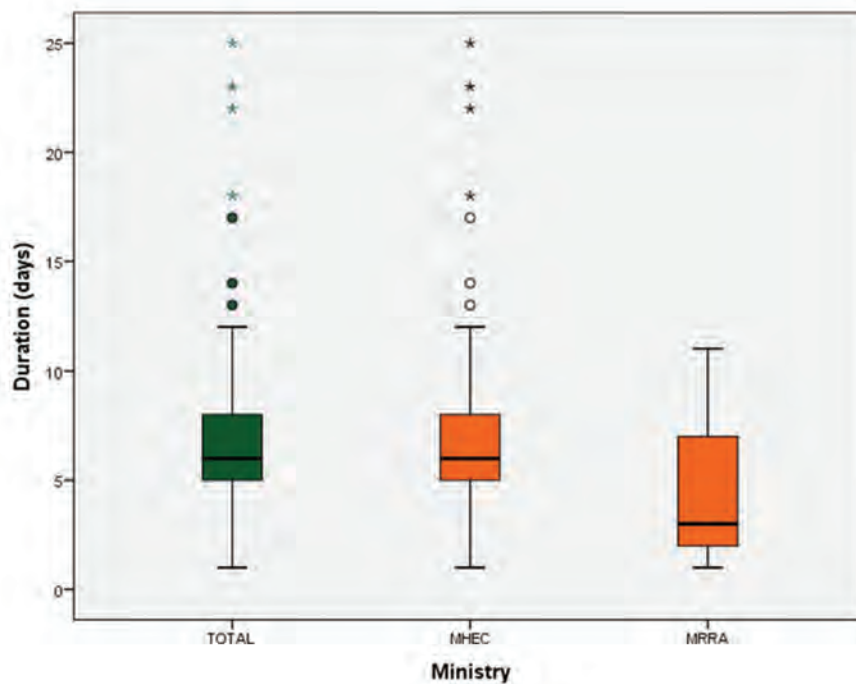
2.9.5 As previously indicated, the overall recruitment process ends when the successful applicant or applicants are notified of their appointment by the recruiting department. Analysis of this stage indicates that the average time taken for the formal notification of successful applicants with respect to the 255 calls analysed was that of eight days (Figure 19 refers). Ministry-level analysis presents a highly homogenous spread of results, with each Ministry accounting for only slight variations when compared to the others.

2.10 An Overview of Recruitment Metrics

2.10.1 For the purposes of this audit, defining the commencement of the recruitment process may present somewhat of a contentious point. From a theoretical perspective, recruitment commences once a gap in an organisation's human resource capabilities is identified and the necessary corrective measures that seek to redress such a shortcoming are instigated. Applying such a line of thought to the recruitment process described in the preceding text would notionally draw parallels to the capacity building process, which most closely formally captures the sense of identifying human resource requirements. Axiomatically, the end-point of the

process is represented by the submission of formal notification to the successful applicant or applicants by the recruiting department.

2.10.2 Bearing the above definition in mind, NAO analysed the overall duration of the 144 recruitment calls reviewed. It was only possible to analyse 144 out of the total 340 calls due to incomplete data, often attributable to missing capacity building dates, or provided capacity building dates that were incongruent with the remainder of the process. Analysis of the aggregated data established an average time taken of 418 days, with a range of 102 to 958 days and an interquartile range of 261 to 561 days. Although MEDE data is presented in Figure 20, this in fact corresponds to only 18 recruitment calls, as data pertaining to the Ministry's remaining calls, 82 in all, was not available with respect to the capacity building stage.

2.10.3 Within this understanding of recruitment, ministry-specific data corresponding to MHEC and MRRA presents a clear and somewhat concerning snapshot of the duration of Public Service recruitment. MHEC fares somewhat better off than MRRA, reporting an average duration of 346 days, an interesting range of 102 to 871 days, and an interquartile range of 233 to 449 days. On the

Figure 19: Duration of Transition from Prime Minister's Approval to Notification of Successful Applicant
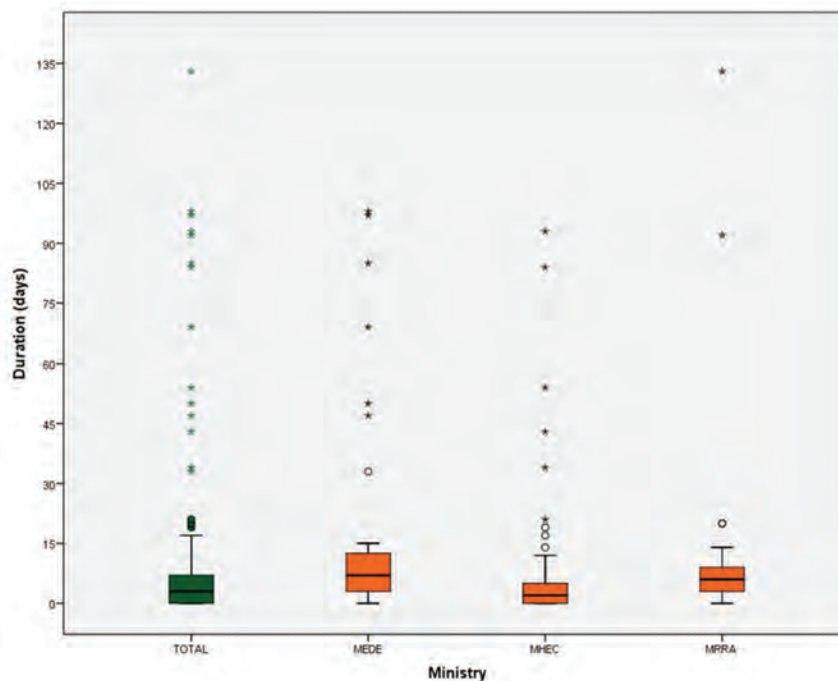
other hand, MRRA records an average duration of 529 days, a more delayed range (when compared to MHEC data) of 266 to 958 days, and a similarly shifted interquartile range of 385 to 661 days.

2.10.4 Two main arguments may be put forward with regard to the validity of establishing the capacity building stage as the formal commencement of the recruitment process. The first of these arguments was already expounded upon in section 2.2, and essentially focuses on the fact that all approved calls are authorised en masse by the Capacity Building Committee, resulting in artificial delays registered due to the limited processing capabilities of the respective HR sections within the recruiting ministries.

2.10.5 The second argument was that put forward by PAHRO, when stating that MFEI, at times, delayed the scheduling of capacity building exercises due to budgetary constraints. NAO is of the opinion that such considerations should not bear impact on the

metrics put forward with respect to Public Service recruitment. Therefore, a more pragmatic definition of the recruitment process would effectively eliminate the capacity building stage as the first step of the process, and more accurately consider the submission of draft call stage as that closest to reality.

2.10.6 This second, more practical perspective is the focus of NAO's analysis, the results of which are presented in Figure 21. In this context, aggregate data reflecting the duration from the submission of draft call stage, up to the notification of successful applicant ranges from 92 to 878 days. The average of the 262 calls analysed was that of 264 days, while the interquartile range stood at 177 to 299 days.

2.10.7 Analysis of ministry-level data yields interesting insight into variances between one ministry and another. MEDE and MHEC present a highly similar distribution of results with the most notable difference being a higher upper range in the

Figure 20: Overall Duration of Recruitment Call – From Capacity Building Stage up to the Notification of Successful Applicant Stage
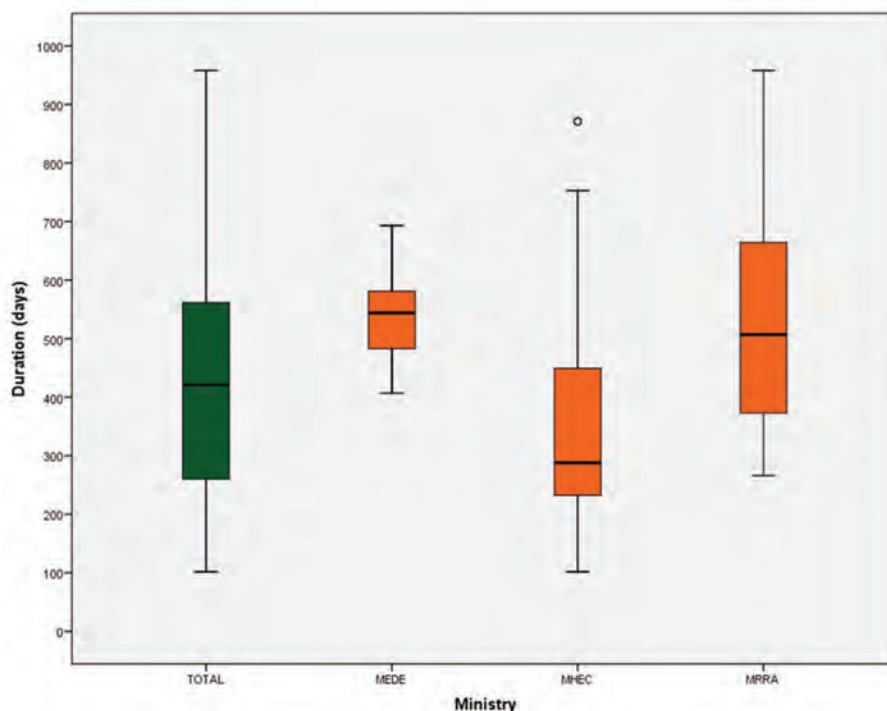
Figure 21: Overall Duration of Recruitment Call – From Finalisation of Draft Call Stage up to the Notification of Successful Applicant Stage
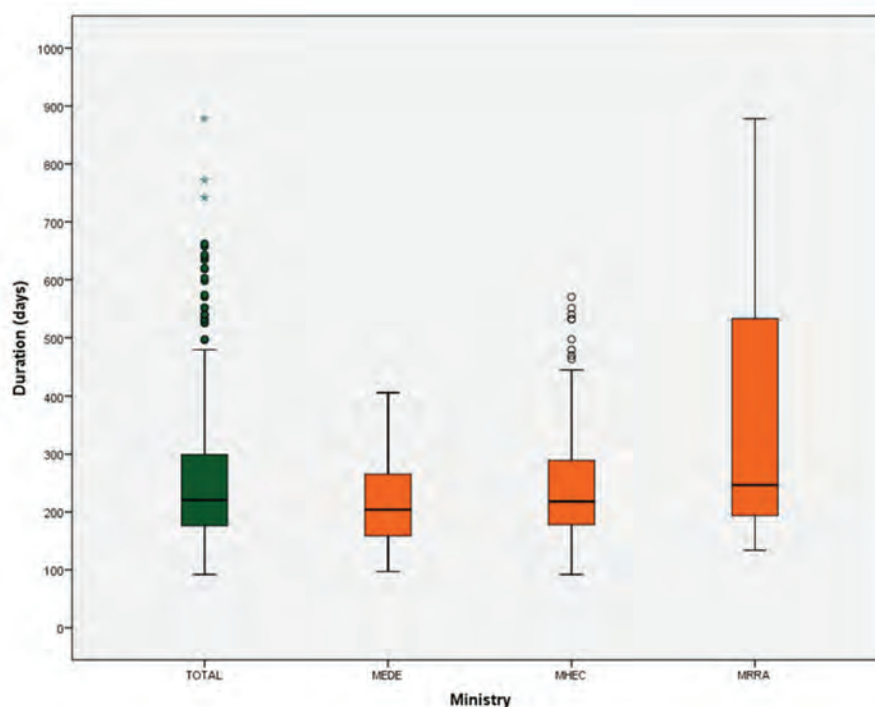
case of the latter referred Ministry. As illustrated in Figure 21 and subsequently indicated in Table 3, the average duration for MEDE recruitment calls was that of 215 days, while its interquartile range stood at 159 to 265 days. Similarly, the average time taken for MHEC calls to be completed was that of 245 days, while the interquartile range in the case of this Ministry extended from 178 to 289 days.

2.10.8   In stark contrast to MEDE and MHEC is the data corresponding to MRRA. Notably distinct in the case of the latter is its interquartile range, which significantly extends from 196 days to 530 days, presenting a far lengthier third quartile. Bearing a markedly higher average and a substantially extended range than the other two Ministries, these statistics stood at 353 days and 134 to 878 days, respectively.

2.10.9   Table 4 provides a stage-based analysis of the average duration of the overall recruitment process. Two total durations are presented on the right-hand side of the table, one incorporating the draft call stage, and the other excluding this same stage from the overall recruitment process. In calculating the percentage duration, represented in the lower row corresponding to the aggregate total, as well as each respective Ministry, the draft call stage was not incorporated.

Table 3: Overview of Recruitment Duration (Excluding the Drafting of Call Stage)

Category	Average (days)	Range (days)	Interquartile Range (days)
Aggregate Total	264	92 – 878	177 – 299
MEDE	215	97 – 406	159 – 265
MHEC	245	92 – 570	178 – 289
MRRA	353	134 – 878	196 – 530

2.10.10 In general, the two most time-consuming stages of the recruitment process appear to be the verificatory process carried out by PAHRO at the start of recruitment (representing 18 per cent of the averaged aggregate total duration) and the selection process itself, that is, the interview held (accounting for 25 per cent of the average aggregate total duration). This observation by NAO is largely consistent with data presented in the PSC Annual Report (2011), which similarly states that these same two steps result in the greatest prolongation of the recruitment process.

2.10.11 In this context, PSC emphasised that PAHRO have a very demanding and time-consuming task in verifying every draft call for applications prepared by all ministries and departments in the Public Service. Draft calls may contain errors or be in conflict with the relevant classification agreement between government and unions, and verification may require extensive discussions between PAHRO and the department concerned.

2.10.12 An interesting aspect corresponding to the NAO analysis presented in Table 4 relates to the submission of the selection board report stage, which accounts for a significant portion of the time taken in completing a recruitment call (14 per cent of the average aggregate total duration). Under these

particular circumstances, the aggregate results may have been somewhat skewed by MHEC data relating to this specific step in the process, which on average, is approximately double that of MEDE and MRRA.

2.10.13 A similar incongruence apparent when comparing the stage-based averages of each of the reviewed Ministries emerges with respect to the already mentioned interview stage. Further analysis indicates highly divergent data with respect to MRRA, which takes approximately three times as long to be completed in the case of this Ministry as compared to MEDE and MHEC. NAO opines that this stage of the process directly contributes to the lengthier duration noted in the case of MRRA calls, with this stage of the process alone corresponding to a staggering 40 per cent of the total time taken.

2.11 Recruitment within General Service Grades

2.11.1 The Resourcing Directorate within PAHRO is responsible for the initiation of recruitment action with respect to General Service grades. In a similar manner to recruitment in the case of non-General Service grades, the capacity building exercise held with each respective ministry serves as a source of information, enabling PAHRO to compile service-

Table 4: Stage-Based Average Duration of the Overall Recruitment Process

Stage	Draft Call	PAHRO Verification	PSC Approval	Issuing of Call	Application Deadline	Interview Held	Selection Board Report	Submission of Views by Head of Dept.	PAHRO & PSC Final Verification	PSC Recommendation to PM	PM Approval	Letter of Notification to Applicant	Total (incl. Draft Call)	Total (excl. Draft Call)
Aggregate	190	49	16	15	22	69	39	19	14	19	7	8	418	264
(%)	n/a	18	6	5	8	25	14	7	5	7	2	3	n/a	100
MEDE	252	52	14	6	24	38	20	22	21	n/a	n/a	16	533	215
(%)	n/a	24	7	3	11	18	9	10	10	n/a	n/a	8	n/a	100
MHEC	147	49	9	9	23	48	52	17	15	19	7	5	346	245
(%)	n/a	19	3.5	3.5	9	19	21	7	6	7	3	2	n/a	100
MRRA	233	45	33	34	19	140	26	21	5	8	5	10	529	353
(%)	n/a	13	10	10	6	40	8	6	1	2	1	3	n/a	100

wide capacity requirements with regard to General Service grade complements.

2.11.2 In proposing service-wide recruitment of General Service posts, PAHRO also factors in the impact of envisaged retirements. When submitting such plans, PAHRO ordinarily forecasts the service-wide requirements over a three-year period, while simultaneously accounting for the budgetary implications of such recruitment. PAHRO indicated that on occasion, circumstances extraneous to this Office's control, such as the requirement to seek fresh budgetary approval, resulted in delays in summoning the first successful candidates.

2.11.3 Once capacity requirements are determined, PAHRO fulfils the role of a pseudo ministry in seeking MFEI financial clearance. PAHRO proceeds to issuing the relevant calls for recruitment corresponding to the various General Service grade levels when the required budgetary approval has been provided. MFEI's role in the endorsement of such recruitment was considered highly influential by PAHRO, and in fact, it indicated that on one particular occasion, MFEI had initially endorsed the proposed capacity requirements only to later suppress or revise such authorisation, essentially due to budgetary constraints.

2.11.4 The first part of the selection process, in the case of the indicated entry-level General Service grades, is a written examination. This examination is undertaken by delegated authority under the auspices of the Director and Board of Local Examinations, based and subject to the standards established by PAHRO.

2.11.5 Candidates who are successful in this first stage of the recruitment process are subsequently invited for an interview. In the case of recruitment of Principals, the examination stage is then followed by an extended group interview, and finally, an individual interview. A similarly staged approach is employed in the internal selection process utilised when recruiting Senior Principals, with an examination stage immediately followed by an in-depth individual interview.

2.11.6 From 2007 up to 2010, PAHRO managed seven General Service grade recruitment calls, four of which were internal, while three were external

service-wide calls. Table 5 presents an overview of the time taken in completing the recruitment cycle, commencing with correspondence between PAHRO and PSC, ranging to the date when the first candidate assumed appointment.

2.11.7 The overall average duration of the General Service recruitment calls represented in Table 5 was that of approximately 500 days. In the case of the external calls, the recruitment process is dominated, in terms of duration, by the publication of results and the relevant appointment of the first placed candidate stages. Together, these two stages account for 89 per cent of the duration of the overall process.

2.11.8 The stage termed publication of final results in fact encompasses a number of other stages, including the time-window for applications to be submitted, the appointment of selection boards, the actual selection process, as well as the endorsement of final results. While this stage lasted an average of 234 days (corresponding to 49 per cent of the overall duration), the interval until the first candidate assumed appointment stood at a significant average of 195 days (corresponding to 40 per cent of the overall duration).

2.11.9 With respect to the internal General Service calls presented in Table 5, the stages of the recruitment process bearing the most significant intervals are the final three steps, that is, the PSC approval of the relevant selection board, the publication of final results and the first placed candidate assuming appointment. Percentagewise, and in relative order, these three steps corresponded with 33, 28 and 23 per cent of the average total duration.

2.11.10 Following meetings held with NAO, PAHRO indicated that the deployment of newly recruited General Service grade employees was previously based on the assessed urgency indicated by the respective ministries. Therefore, under such a system, the first ranked officer would be assigned to the ministry deemed to be in most urgent need of the said recruits, and so on and so forth for subsequently ranked successful candidates.

2.11.11 PAHRO indicated that this system has now been replaced by a more elaborate system that

Table 5: Duration of General Service Grade Recruitment

	Call	Correspondence with PSC	Correspondence with Department of Examinations	Call Issued	PSC Approval of Selection Board	Publication of Final Results	First Candidate Assumed Appointment	Total Duration
		(days)						
External	Principals	n/a	5	10	n/a	255	217	487
External	Clerks (I)	n/a	72	33	n/a	231	69	405
External	Clerks (II)	n/a	29	4	n/a	217	297	547
Internal	Senior Principals	37	97	30	173	93	193	623
Internal	Executive Officers	86	(14)	26	133	135	33	399
Internal	Senior Messengers	(103)	114		62	245	133	451
Internal	Messengers	20	22	24	312	115	112	605

Notes:

1. Negative figures indicate that action instigated was carried out before the preceding step. In the case of correspondence with PSC, the preceding step was clearance obtained from the Principal Permanent Secretary and MFEI.

2. The merging of cells in the case of the Senior Messenger call relates to unknown data corresponding to those two specific steps, which could be subsequently established when considering the two steps together.

essentially seeks to match the academic background of newly recruited staff with the pool of existing vacancies at hand. For example, in the case of appointees to fill the posts of Principal, the area of specialisation of the university degree in their possession is matched in terms of best fit with the vacancies at hand across all ministries. Similarly, for example, in the case of clerks, officers with an accounting background are ordinarily placed within MFEI or within Departments of Corporate Services, those with a science background are assigned to MHEC, while those with a strong grounding in languages are placed within the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry for Home Affairs.

2.11.12 In view of the above, PAHRO further commented on how a major difficulty encountered in assigning certain new recruits to particular ministries or departments essentially related to the nature of their academic qualifications. Therefore, by means of example, a Principal with a post-graduate degree in archaeology has a very narrow range of potential departments or government entities in which one's academic preparation could be applied within an occupational setting.

2.11.13 Notwithstanding the above-described revision in terms of deployment, PAHRO nonetheless factors in the element of urgency in addressing recruitment requirements across the diverse ministries and departments. In this context, PAHRO establishes urgency through two main sources of information, namely, the capacity building meetings held with the various ministries, and through sustained communication with the respective Directors Corporate Services.

2.11.14 With regard to General Service grade recruitment, PAHRO indicated that the majority of vacancies are filled by serving public officers. Directors Corporate Service play a centrally important role with respect to the internal promotion of staff in General Service grades. They are tasked with providing PAHRO with feedback as to whether a particular applicant's work-related tasks are suitable for the envisaged higher rank once this same officer is promoted, or whether such a promotion would necessitate the assignment of additional tasks more in line with the now higher grade.

2.11.15 In addition, PAHRO indicated that candidates applying from outside the Public Service ordinarily fail to be selected due to poor performance in the written component of the selection exercise, particularly in the Maltese language component. The content of the exam papers specifically set for this written part of the selection process is established by the Department of Examinations.

2.11.16 Following the successful deployment of selected candidates, a key measure indicating the success, or otherwise, of General Service grade recruitment is reflected in the retention rate of such employees. In this sense, the retention period has been established at a one-year cut-off, and the rate corresponding to the General Service grade recruitment calls are presented for each external call in Table 6. Findings indicate that the successful retention of newly recruited employees is not an issue for concern, with rates ranging from 95 to 98 per cent.

2.11.17 PAHRO indicated that a number of factors impact upon the success, or otherwise, of General Service grade recruitment, foremost among which is the salary pegged to particular Public Service vacancies. Generally, this compares poorly to other public sector vacancies and the private sector. One proposed solution put forward by PAHRO for countering difficulties relating to staff retention involves the introduction of accelerated career progression pathways. Essentially, employees who choose to further pursue their studies and academic development would be automatically eligible for a far more rapid progression from one salary scale to a higher salary scale. For example, clerks reading for a diploma level course would be automatically

Table 6: Retention Rate of General Service Grade Recruitment Exercises

	Call	Number of Applicants	Number of Successful Applicants	Number of Successful Applicants who Assumed Appointment	Employees who Resigned / Retired within One Year of Appointment	Retention Rate
External	Principals	606	266	237	7	97%
	Clerks (I)	1,095	344	244	6	98%
	Clerks (II)	862	371	176	9	95%
Internal	Senior Principals	141	96	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Executive Officers	1,198	306	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Senior Messengers	107	61	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Messengers	56	38	n/a	n/a	n/a

promoted to an Assistant Principal grade upon successful completion of the course. Such incentives are envisaged as a source of positive contribution towards staff retention, while simultaneously encouraging the further development of the Public Service workforce.

2.11.18 Finally, PAHRO indicated that one of the major problems relating to the recruitment of General Service grades, particularly from the entry-level of Principal Officer downwards, is that prospective candidates are tested on knowledge, rather than competencies, that have already been tested through the possession of academic qualifications. The testing of different personal qualities, characteristics, abilities and aptitudes from those already tested would be a more appropriate means of selecting the most suitable candidates for duties within the Maltese Public Service. Standardised computer-based psychometric tests could potentially be administered in a fraction of the time it takes to complete present General Service recruitment exercises.

2.11.19 The case for such a shift in selection methodology is further augmented by the fact that this system has already been successfully tried and tested in the case of selection for headship positions. Furthermore, tapping into candidates' applied knowledge by means of case studies and discussions could be one possible avenue of accurately assessing suitability for Public Service appointment.

2.12 Conclusions

2.12.1 NAO's principal concern with regard to the management of Public Service recruitment relates to the pervasively poor, or at times, inadequate information management infrastructure, particularly apparent in the case of PAHRO, yet also prevalent in varying extents in the case of PSC and the reviewed Ministries.

2.12.2 In the case of PAHRO, NAO considers the poor application of modern database technology and the lack of standardisation with respect to information management procedures as limiting overall efficiency and effectiveness. This latter issue regarding standardisation, or the lack thereof, is rendered immediately apparent following the review of various databases forwarded by PAHRO to NAO, which appear to serve more of a log or register of file movement, rather than a detailed record of completed and pending action points.

2.12.3 In the case of the reviewed Ministries, NAO noted that human resource-related information management protocols were somewhat lacking. Requests for data by NAO, although fully entertained, instigated the laborious transcription of data from hard copy format to electronic databases. NAO considers the utility of electronically maintained data as an integrally important component of the ministry-level human resource management function, and the creation or maintenance of such databases should not be limited to addressing ad hoc requests such as that created by means of this audit, but should be maintained as a standard practice.

2.12.4 The duration in transitioning from the capacity building stage to the draft stage of the recruitment process represents a considerable amount of time taken. NAO acknowledges, and considers reasonable, possible justifications put forward in this respect, including the serial processing of calls by a limited HR section following the en masse approval of all requested recruitment, as well as the notional delay attributable to the relevant financial clearance issued by MFEI.

2.12.5 Nonetheless, an element of the delay associated with this stage of the recruitment process certainly merits management attention. With regard to MRRA, recruitment delays tie in with the reorganisation and restructuring of the Ministry, yet NAO still considers the postponement of all recruitment activity for over a year to represent significant inefficiency, which could have been addressed through appropriate planning. On the other hand, while NAO commends MHEC on its rapid processing of the majority of its recruitment calls, the Office is somewhat concerned at the excessive delays prevalent among the remaining substantial minority.

2.12.6 NAO is somewhat concerned at the extent of time taken for PAHRO to conduct the necessary

verifications required. The average duration of 49 days and the significant number of calls with delays far greater than that indicate ample scope for improvement. Yet, NAO acknowledges that improvement in this regard should not exclusively focus on PAHRO, as this issue is in fact a multifaceted one. Better information management systems within PAHRO should contribute towards process improvement; however, quality control efforts remain a key area of concern, and it is in this context that the role of the line ministry/department becomes key. Higher quality submissions will notionally shorten the compliance process, as will the series of outreach meetings carried out by PAHRO; yet, for as long as the onus of verification remains embodied within PAHRO, it will be PAHRO's responsibility to shorten those instances of recruitment calls characterised by their considerable delay at this initial verificatory stage.

2.12.7 NAO fully supports Government's initiative in establishing standing selection committees across all ministries. This revised system for selection board appointment should fine-tune an already highly efficient system, and de facto, address the small, yet nonetheless significant, cases of undue delay. Furthermore, NAO notes the soundness of approach in utilising a regular pool of former public officers in composing the above-referred standing committees, which should ultimately result in increased expertise (through the sheer increase in exposure to selection processes) of those conducting selection exercises.

2.12.8 With respect to the issuing of call stage, the incongruent results presented in the case of MRRA recruitment calls is cause for concern to NAO. As rendered amply evident in the case of MEDE and MHEC, this aspect of the recruitment process is a straightforward stage, entirely within the immediate control of the recruiting ministry. The unnecessary and general prolongation of recruitment in the case of MRRA clearly emerges when compared to the other Ministries, and NAO considers this stage as subject to significant potential improvement.

2.12.9 The selection stage represents a pivotal part of the overall recruitment process, and once again, NAO's attention converges on the highly contrasting statistical results yielded following ministry-level analysis. Consistent with its overall positive performance are the selection boards corresponding

to MEDE calls, which in NAO's opinion, clearly reflect the employment of good practice. On the other hand, and less positive in this respect, were the results put forward in relation to MHEC. Here, NAO's concern is limited to the small number of recruitment calls that extended well beyond the average duration, and therefore possibly warrant further management scrutiny and review.

2.12.10 Of greater concern to NAO are the results corresponding to MRRA appointed selection boards, which notably account for a considerable delay, especially when juxtaposed against MEDE and MHEC data. NAO acknowledges that the revalidation process undertaken following the Ministry's restructuring has undoubtedly contributed towards the extensive time taken in completing this stage of the recruitment process. Nonetheless, NAO maintains that these excessive delays correspond to actual HR deficiencies and vacancies identified across the Ministry, and should not be written off on the basis of restructuring-related arguments.

2.12.11 The reporting element of the aforementioned selection boards is also characterised by its marked disparity, with good practices exemplified by MEDE and MRRA, and a rather poor performance registered with respect to MHEC. In the case of the latter Ministry, a substantial number of calls extend well beyond the 50-day mark, causing NAO to raise concern with regard to the governance structure within which such selection boards operate.

2.12.12 In addition to the above, extensive delays in the submission of views by heads of department with respect to particular cases, once again confirms the need for greater management control and scrutiny. NAO considers the submission of views by the respectively recruiting heads of department to represent a straightforward step in the overall process, and should never come anywhere near to the 50-day mark, let alone exceed it. This argument is further strengthened when one bears in mind the fact that the vast majority of submissions support the recommendations put forward by the corresponding selection board.

2.12.13 NAO fully supports the PSC on its plans to establish a compliance unit tasked with adopting a more active role in the expeditious resolution of arising petitions. This specialised unit, together with

anticipated improvements brought about by a more accessible selection board (established through the standing selection panel) should result in the hastier resolution of submitted petitions, therefore contributing towards the improved efficiency of the overall recruitment process.

2.12.14 In the three final sub-stages leading to completion of the recruitment process, NAO's attention gravitates towards the submission of PSC's recommendation to the Prime Minister for eventual endorsement. Here, NAO is concerned by the ambiguous and confounding delays emanating from MHEC recruitment calls, which certainly warrant further in-depth analysis and review.

2.12.15 Coalescing the analysed stage-based data yields a holistic overview of notable concern to NAO, particularly with respect to the overall duration of the recruitment process. An average of approximately 38 weeks represents a considerably lengthy period of time taken to complete a standard call for recruitment, and one that certainly leaves ample scope for improvement. Of significance is the fact that NAO's findings with respect to the excessive duration of particular stages (verification undertaken by PAHRO prior to issuing the call and the holding of interviews) corroborate similar patterns already established by PSC, albeit, with the former presenting a somewhat harsher record of measurement.

2.12.16 The cross-comparison of ministry-specific data from this holistic perspective draws upon two major concerns. The first relates to the submission of selection board reports in the case of MHEC calls, while the second focuses on the excessive duration of the interview stage in the case of MRRA calls, particularly when viewed in relative terms vis-à-vis the other ministries reviewed for the purposes of this audit.

2.12.17 NAO's concern regarding the excessive time taken to complete calls for recruitment further intensifies with respect to the resourcing of staff in General Service grades. The reported average of 500 days is, in NAO's opinion, a highly unacceptable duration for completion of what in effect are straightforward standardised calls. Various factors bear influence on this situation, foremost among which is the voluminous number of applications that must be processed for each

call. This certainly impacts upon the time taken for executing the selection process proper, be it by means of written examination, individual interview, or group interview. Another factor, indicative of significant inefficiency within PAHRO, corresponds to the undue delay between the publication of final results and the earliest date upon which the selected candidate assumes appointment. A further indication of inefficiency emerges with respect to the considerable time taken for PSC's appointment of selection boards in the case of internally circulated calls.

2.13 Recommendations

2.13.1 NAO strongly recommends that PAHRO institutes a robust information management infrastructure to establish better management control of its recruitment function. Such an information management system would primarily serve to standardise data recording protocols, ensuring that progress registered on all calls at hand is maintained in a uniform manner, thereby facilitating data retrieval and management reporting requirements. Secondly, NAO considers the closer management control enabled through the envisaged information management system as conducive towards overall efficiency gains, ensuring that PAHRO remains acutely aware of which stage each of its calls is at, allowing for corrective action should inordinate delays be noted.

2.13.2 In line with the above, NAO recommends that human resource-related information management protocols are introduced in an analogous and standardised manner across all ministries. NAO considers the introduction of such procedures to bear a twofold benefit, impacting upon the overall efficiency and effectiveness at ministry and PAHRO level vis-à-vis recruitment. Rolling out such protocols across ministries would bear similar benefits as stated in the preceding point, namely, allowing for better internal management and control of the recruitment function, as well as refining reporting arrangements. Simultaneously, ministry-level standardisation would facilitate the integration of data sharing capabilities, allowing PAHRO to more accurately identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies in a uniformly measured recruitment function across all ministries.

2.13.3 Whereas, in the case of MHEC, the delay in transitioning from the capacity building stage to the draft stage of the recruitment process may be somewhat addressed through the above captured process improvements, the scenario presented by MRRA is notably different. This latter referred context evokes the address of human resource management at a strategic level, and it is in this sense that NAO recommends the consideration of appropriate contingency planning in the eventuality of ministerial restructuring or reorganisation. In NAO's opinion, the indefinite stalling of all ministry recruitment due to organisational reengineering efforts represents poor governance at central government level, particularly given the safeguards afforded by PSC and PAHRO. Moreover, the fact that such restructuring efforts often entail the reallocation of ministry portfolios and not the outright abolishment or creation of new departments serves to indicate the low risk associated with adopting a 'business as usual' approach.

2.13.4 NAO encourages PAHRO to adopt the aforementioned information management system, as this will undoubtedly serve as a vital source of business intelligence, aptly identifying calls requiring action and further verificatory prompting. While fully supporting PAHRO's series of outreach meetings, NAO urges further 'investment' geared at improving the technical expertise of staff tasked with recruitment at line ministry or key department level. In this context, PAHRO's greatest asset is undoubtedly the recruitment-related expertise prevalent among its staff complement, and to this end, PAHRO should endeavour at organising or establishing mechanisms and systems by which such institutional memory can be transferred to line ministry level, where it can tangibly translate in the overall improved quality of submitted calls.

2.13.5 One final recommendation in this regard relates to the substantial number of cases with considerable delays in the verification process. Here, NAO recommends that PAHRO, and corresponding OPM management, scrutinise the factors that have contributed to such prolongation on a case-by-case basis, and in so doing, identify avenues warranting potential improvement.

2.13.6 NAO recommends that MRRA undertake the necessary review of current operating procedures relating to recruitment, with particular attention directed towards stages constituting considerable delay, such as the issuing of call stage. The previously referred information management system, rolled out at ministry level, should serve to aid MRRA management in the identification and rectification of undue delays. Yet this is simply one aspect of possible corrective action, and to this end, NAO encourages MRRA management to further explore the factors particular to this Ministry and account for this negative discrepancy when contextualised against MEDE and MHEC.

2.13.7 With respect to the selection stage of the recruitment process, NAO's recommendations essentially converge and link with previously discussed issues, such as the utilisation of information management systems to address delays on a case-by-case basis, and the strategic level review when circumstances such as those characterising MRRA arise. Furthermore, NAO encourages PAHRO to act as an interlocutor, facilitating the exchange of good practices (as exemplified by MEDE) among the various ministries.

2.13.8 In addition to the above, NAO fully supports the views put forward by PSC, calling for greater flexibility in the utilisation of selection tools deemed more appropriate for simultaneously handling large numbers of applicants in a more efficient timeframe. NAO recommends the introduction of modern and innovative selection methods, in line with current HR practices. Should the deployment of such methodologies warrant corresponding review of established procedures and regulations, NAO considers PSC and PAHRO to be suitably equipped with balancing the need to be fair, transparent and accountable with the exigencies of modern HR management.

2.13.9 In view of the occasional, yet notable delays in submission of selection board reports, NAO recommends that PSC establish reporting timeframes that should, as a general rule, and barring exceptional circumstances, be adhered to. This recommendation assumes particular relevance in light of the establishment of the standing

selection panels. Proposed reporting timeframes should, by default, be incorporated into their terms of reference.

2.13.10 NAO strongly recommends the review of delays associated with the submission of views by heads of department. The Office considers this stage of the recruitment process as bearing the greatest scope for improvement and a clear opportunity for registering efficiency gains. One alternative solution intended at addressing such delay could be the establishment of a fixed reporting timeframe for the submission of head of department views. Under this scenario, heads of department would be bound to submit views within, for example, a ten working day time-window, and failure to do so would, by default, imply agreement with the selection board's recommendation.

2.13.11 NAO encourages PSC to revise and analyse factors that may have contributed to the delay in issuing recommendations to the Prime Minister with respect to MHEC calls.

2.13.12 NAO's recommendation with respect to the recruitment of General Service grade employees centres on the excessive and unacceptably long duration characterising this process. Each of the factors deemed critical and directly contributing to this delay necessitates the implementation of corresponding countermeasures, thereby improving upon process efficiency and effectiveness.

2.13.13 The first factor, relating to the substantial number of applicants and the subsequent delays caused by their sheer volume, accentuates the importance of reviewing current selection tools. Without foregoing the values of accountability, transparency and fairness, PAHRO and PSC should explore other methods of screening and filtering the hundreds of applications it receives with respect to General Service calls.

2.13.14 The second factor, corresponding to indicative inefficiencies within PAHRO when transitioning between candidate selection to subsequent appointment, may be somewhat mitigated by means of process reengineering. One practical solution in this regard could involve increasing the regularity by which such calls are issued, moving away from a call issued once every three or four years to a scenario where such calls are issued on a quasi annual basis. Such a system would essentially imply a rolling succession of standardised General Service recruitment calls, with the expiry of one call closely replaced by a freshly issued selection. PAHRO indicated its agreement with the recommendation put forward by NAO, and stated that it had in fact attempted to devise such a schedule for the period 2010 – 2013, which was largely unsuccessful due to budgetary constraints.

2.13.15 Finally, NAO considers the considerable duration corresponding to the PSC approval of selection boards sub-process in the case of General Service grade recruitment to be an issue that will be eventually addressed by means of the now established standing selection panels. Therefore, their involvement in this respect is considered essential and critically influential in curtailing this stage's delays.

Chapter 3

Key Issues in the Management of Public Service Recruitment

Chapter 3 – Key Issues in the Management of Public Service Recruitment

Various management issues central to Public Service recruitment are addressed in this chapter. Foremost among these is the delegation of authority, which represents a fundamental shift in how recruitment is actuated. This shift is effectively based on a crucial evolution of stakeholder roles, and is associated with a number of significant challenges. Focus is subsequently channelled towards recruitment follow-up, undertaken in order to determine process efficiency and effectiveness. Finally, a number of other management considerations deemed directly relevant to the Public Service recruitment process are also analysed. Here attention gravitates around the ancillary changes to recruitment practices, the cost of the resourcing process, as well as systems employed with respect to prioritisation and training.

3.1 Delegation of Authority

3.1.1 The issue of delegation of authority with respect to Public Service human resource management is one that may be traced back to the Public Service Reform Commission (1989, p. 48) report, which aptly notes that, "*In order to restore credibility and relevance to selection decisions, we recommend that authority to select and appoint all staff other than those in Category A be delegated to heads of department.*" The Reform Commission's report, published well over 20 years ago, instigated a fundamental transformation of practically all organisational aspects of the Public Service, yet the delegation of authority for the selection and appointment of staff by heads of department never completely transpired.

3.1.2 Analysis of PAHRO annual reports (PAHRO, 2009) indicated that attention to the issue of delegation of authority came to the fore during 2008, particularly due to the preparations underway with respect to the then to be published Public Administration Act (2010, Cap. 497). At this preliminary preparatory stage, PAHRO's focus centred on the drafting of necessary plans detailing how the setting up and conducting of selection boards was to be delegated to line ministries.

3.1.3 PAHRO's plans in this regard crystallised around four main aspects, and essentially entailed that:
   a. The composition and conduct of selection boards corresponding to recruitment for non-General Service grades and positions be delegated to line ministries;
   b. The phasing out of the non-technical selection board panel member (ordinarily appointed from among a pool of public officers approved by the PSC);
   c. Selection board chairpersons and panel members be appointed from among a pool of retired public officers; and
   d. PAHRO's role transitions into one more in line with that of a regulator.

3.1.4 This latter point regarding PAHRO's envisioned role within a delegated HR environment, together with how the anticipated transformation was to bear impact across the various line ministries, was one aspect of progress registered in the Department's 2009 annual report (PAHRO, 2010). Moreover, the impetus of driving forward the reform associated with delegation of recruitment

was embodied in a task force composed of the PSC, the Resourcing Directorate, the OPM Policy Research Directorate, as well as the Management Efficiency Unit. One centrally important assignment attended to by this task force entailed the amendment of the Public Service Commission Regulations (S.L. Const.01, 2012), thereby accounting for the revised role of the PSC, as well as the line departments, following the delegation of recruitment to line ministries.

3.1.5   As was in fact already indicated in the preceding chapter, further progress relating to the delegation of authority featured in PAHRO's 2010 annual report, where reference was made to the establishment of standing selection panels across all ministries (PAHRO, 2011). PAHRO, in its role of spearheading the transition towards delegation, focused on the responsibilities of heads of department with respect to the appointment of selection boards from public officers or persons forming part of the standing selection panels. Essentially, the rationale supporting such an initiative is best captured as one that transforms Public Service resourcing into, *"… a more expeditious and delegated selection process, as well as the consolidation of the PSC's role as an appellate body in dealing with petitions whilst utilising the expertise of retired public officers and other suitable and competent persons"* (p.55).

3.1.6   Efforts at implementing the principles of delegation emanating from the Public Administration Act continued to gain momentum throughout 2011, most notably set in motion through an action plan prepared by the Resourcing Directorate (PAHRO, 2012). This action plan addresses the delegation of various recruitment-related matters, namely, the:
   a. Issue of the call for applications;
   b. Renewal of fixed-term contracts;
   c. Promotion after a number of years' satisfactory service;
   d. Attainment of indefinite status; and
   e. Progression/promotion of General Service officers.

3.1.7   Another task force, this time composed of PSC and Resourcing officials, was entrusted with implementing the above-indicated action plan, together with the required amendments to PSC Regulations, as well as the Public Service Management Code. In addition, this task force attended to the two issues bearing direct impact on the line ministries,

that is, the issuing of templates required for the purposes of drafting calls for applications and the establishment of training content. Further to the above, and as already indicated in chapter 2, PAHRO regularly organised a number of outreach meetings with the respective HR sections of the various line ministries, thereby facilitating the Resourcing Directorate's transition towards an enhanced advisory and support role once the delegation comes into full force.

3.1.8   From the in-depth interviews carried out with the various entities involved in this audit, there seemed to be general agreement that the proposed delegation of authority framework would serve to mitigate a number of inefficiencies characterising the presently structured Public Service recruitment process. Moreover, PAHRO indicated that an effectively implemented system of delegated authority would enable and facilitate the transfer of responsibility with respect to certain stages of the recruitment process to the various line ministries and departments, resulting in anticipated efficiency gains. The Directorate was also of the opinion that the present over-reliance of line ministries/departments on PAHRO was one of the main factors contributing to the poor quality of draft call documentation that was often submitted.

3.1.9   In order to ascertain the successful implementation of a delegated recruitment framework, PAHRO stated that it will endeavour to introduce new measures intended to train HR specialists across the various line ministries and departments. Data retrieved from PAHRO's annual reports was further corroborated through a series of meetings held with NAO, whereby it was indicated that specimen draft call templates and manuals relating to standard procedures were circulated among all ministries. As in fact envisioned through the delegated recruitment framework, the establishment of a standard modus operandi based on preset recruitment templates should, in effect, serve to withdraw PAHRO from the day-to-day routine operations associated with recruitment.

3.1.10 Conceptually, and within a delegated recruitment environment, PAHRO's direct involvement would become a necessity only in exceptional circumstances, such as the creation of a new post or position, or in the case of proposed

deviations to the set standard criteria. PAHRO's revised role would notionally condense the drafting and verificatory stages of the recruitment process, which, under a delegated scenario, would be executed by the line ministry/department, thereby leading to anticipated efficiency gains.

3.1.11 As with any other reform, a number of challenges emerge, particularly with regard to the line ministries and departments operating under delegated authority. One of the main challenges in this respect relates to the technical lacunae prevalent at line ministry level. The envisioned delegation of recruitment will further accentuate deficiencies in terms of technical and specialist expertise required for the accurate drafting of calls.

3.1.12 Another challenge deemed relevant by PAHRO related to the centralisation of the HR function within ministries, particularly crystallising around the operational relationships in place between the respective line departments and their corresponding ministry. Drawing on their vast experience in attending to the recruitment requirements of various ministries, PAHRO commented that the major difficulty in this regard often focused on the absence of appropriate communication structures. Such a situation led to line departments addressing correspondence directly to PAHRO, and, in so doing, bypassing the line ministry's dedicated HR section. PAHRO proceeded to emphasise its perceived importance of an increased sense of ownership with respect to the overall recruitment process by the HR sections within line ministries and

their corresponding subsidiary departments. This increased sense of ownership was identified as a centrally important factor influencing the eventual professional development and growth of the various HR sections, in turn duly supported by formally structured reporting relationships.

3.1.13 The most evident risk associated with the delegated framework relates to instances when the respective ministry/department issues calls for vacancies incongruent with established classification and grading systems applicable throughout the Public Service. Under a delegated scenario, such incongruence is not subject to PAHRO scrutiny and their respective and immediate identification will be, in effect, rendered all the more challenging. To this end, PAHRO has indicated that safeguards against such incongruence have already been planned for through the above-referred use of standard templates for already endorsed posts and positions that are to be readily accessed from the PAHRO website. As already established, line ministries/departments are expected to adhere to such specimen templates and liaise with PAHRO in instances when deviations from the set standards are required or anticipated.

3.2 Recruitment Follow-up

3.2.1 Given the importance of recruitment in achieving Public Service outcomes, suitable monitoring and evaluation assumes critical importance, particularly when contextualised against efforts intended to improve process efficiency
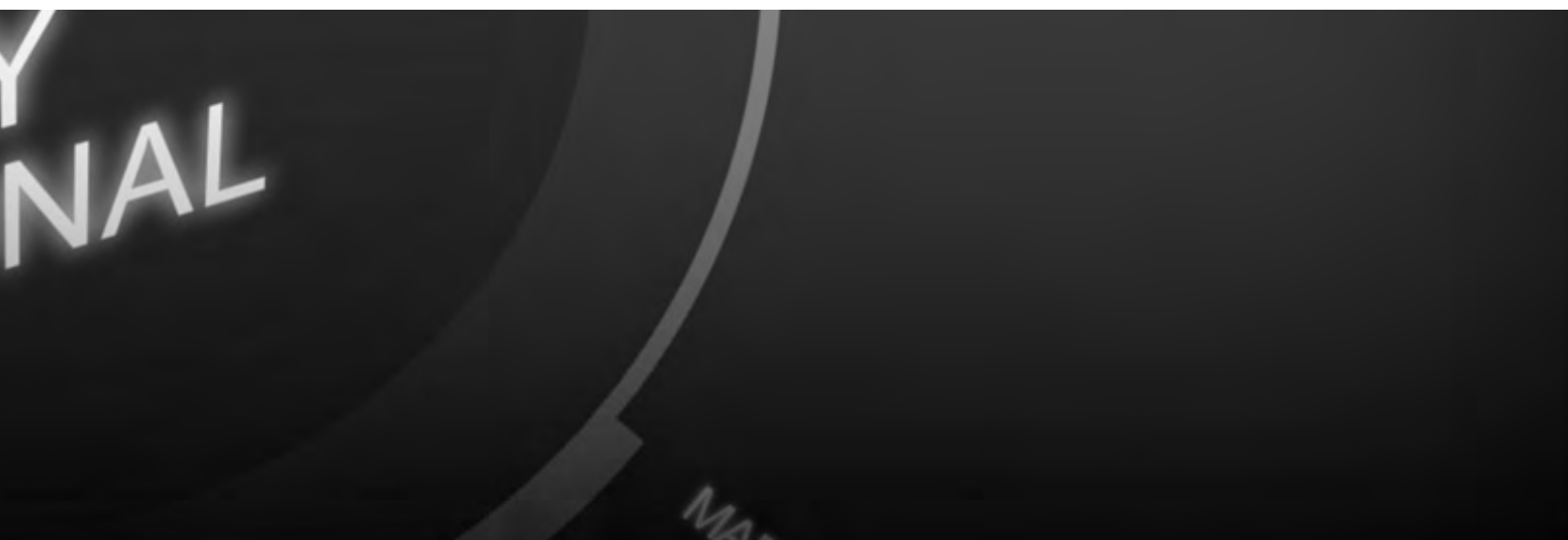
and effectiveness. The monitoring and evaluation efforts carried out throughout the recruitment lifecycle have been amply elaborated upon in the preceding chapter. However, equally important are the feedback mechanisms and follow-up activities undertaken at the post-recruitment stage, that is, after the actual employment of selected personnel. During meetings held with NAO officials, PAHRO representatives indicated that their entity assumed different roles at the post-recruitment stage, in effect determined by whether the respective vacancy filled was a non-General Service or a General Service position.

3.2.2   In the case of non-General Service grades, PAHRO referred to its limited post-recruitment responsibilities, and indicated that the collection, as well as the analysis of feedback relating to the success, or otherwise, of undertaken recruitment efforts was not incorporated into its programme of works. PAHRO indicated that the follow-up of recruitment falls within the domain of PSC operations. However, it also clarified that the Commission's involvement at post-recruitment stage normally relates to the adjudication of submitted petitions, in line with ensuring overall accountability, fairness and transparency of the recruitment process, rather than matters of efficiency and effectiveness.

3.2.3   On the other hand, in cases of General Service grade recruitment, PAHRO is at times involved in the evaluation of the overall effectiveness of undertaken recruitment, particularly through feedback loops and mechanisms that serve to indicate the correctness

of fit of deployed staff. In effect, post-recruitment evaluation, similar to multiple facets of Public Service recruitment, appears to be a shared responsibility, with PAHRO claiming that the monitoring of newly recruited General Service employees is, in the main, the responsibility of the respective line ministry or department of deployment. Nonetheless, PAHRO also indicated to NAO that in certain instances, it directly intervened and reallocated staff in order to address difficulties arising due to original deployment arrangements.

3.2.4   During meetings held with NAO, PAHRO indicated that limitations to the follow-up mechanisms employed in relation to Public Service recruitment may be attributed to the relatively large number of stakeholders involved in the overall process. Moreover, PAHRO also noted how the fragmented overall process, characteristic of Public Service recruitment, further contributes to the limited introduction of feedback systems in-built into the process, which would be notionally indicative of efficiency and effectiveness readings. Of particular insight and relevance to the above is PAHRO's concern that the proposed delegation of authority will not result in the reduction of the significant number of stakeholders involved in the recruitment process, but rather redefine their respective roles so as to better fit into the newly delegated framework.

3.2.5   One key aspect relating to recruitment follow-up and the measurement of success, or otherwise, is the establishment of recruited staff retention rates. With respect to General Service

grade recruitment, this aspect of measurement has already been addressed in the preceding chapter, and clearly falls within PAHRO's remit of responsibility. On the other hand, PAHRO indicated that if any monitoring was to be carried out with regard to non-General Service grade retention, this would fall under the responsibility of the respective line ministry/department.

3.2.6   PAHRO indicated that a number of factors impact upon its perceived low levels of staff retention, foremost among which is the salary pegged to particular Public Service vacancies. Generally, this compares poorly to other public sector and private sector vacancies. One proposed solution put forward by PAHRO for countering low levels of staff retention involves the introduction of accelerated progress pathways. Essentially, employees who choose to further pursue their studies and academic development would be automatically eligible for a far more rapid progression from one salary scale to a higher salary scale. For example, clerks reading for a diploma level course would automatically be promoted to an Assistant Principal grade upon successful completion of the course. Such incentives are envisaged as a source of positive contribution towards staff retention, while simultaneously encouraging the further development of the Public Service workforce.

3.2.7   Another aspect bearing direct relevance to follow-up activities carried out at the post-recruitment stage relates to the training of newly appointed employees. In the case of freshly recruited General Service grade employees, PAHRO, together with other involved stakeholders, coordinate their attendance at a formally organised induction course. PAHRO stated that despite their best efforts to schedule such training prior to the actual commencement of employment of these new recruits, logistical constraints, at times, delay the delivery of such courses.

3.2.8   PAHRO considers induction courses of this sort as appropriate in the comprehensive address of the most salient requirements identified as key to ensuring appropriate on-the-job performance. Furthermore, PAHRO indicated that there is no formally established system that regulates the receipt of feedback on the outcome, relevance and adequacy of courses delivered by CDRT.

3.2.9   Finally, in the case of non-General Service grades, training is organised and scheduled at the ministry's discretion, largely due to the technical nature that such training would entail.

3.3   Other Management Considerations

Recruitment in Transition

3.3.1   The design of the predominantly centralised methodology currently being used in the recruitment process of Public Service employees dates back to the 1960s and has largely remained unchanged in terms of its strategic conceptualisation. According to PAHRO, the slow pace of change and restrictively measured adaptation to a rapidly and continuously changing HR environment may very well be the pivotal cause of inefficiencies registered with respect to the overall recruitment process. A heartening and long overdue response to this concern is represented in the proposed delegation of authority, which, as already discussed, summarily seeks to decentralise recruitment functions towards line ministry and department level.

3.3.2   Although the anticipated change that is to be brought about by the implementation of the delegation of recruitment does in fact reflect a radical departure from the present resourcing system, NAO opines that this change represents merely one facet out of all those worthy of consideration. One such aspect is manifested in PAHRO's drive in pushing towards change in the system by which the career progression of employed staff is governed, particularly with respect to established grades. The present system by which staff progression is determined is one that is generally based on grounds of seniority, with employees simply completing a given number of years of service in order to progress from one grade to the next. Exceptions to the above statement may be readily put forward with respect to certain grades, such as is the case with Principal Officers, who may progress to the grade of Senior Principal Officer by means of examination (although one would have to complete two years of service in the grade of Principal Officer in order to be eligible for possible selection).

3.3.3   As an alternative to the above, PAHRO indicated to NAO that it is recommending the

introduction of a system that would be based on employees completing a pre-established programme or framework of training, which would in turn render them eligible for further progression. Such progression would subsequently be determined by the time taken to complete the established training requirements to the desired standard, and would not focus on the more traditionally weighted aspects such as the duration of employment in their previous post. PAHRO commented that such a system would reward employees who strive towards self-improvement by means of training and education, shifting the focus of progression towards one based more on merit rather than seniority.

Cost of Recruitment

3.3.4   The general absence of appropriately structured and detailed management information systems renders the recording of costs associated with individual recruitment calls a near impossible task.

3.3.5   When queried with respect to the systems employed in the recording of recruitment-related costs at PAHRO, NAO was informed that no costing exercises of this nature have been carried out to date. PAHRO, however, went on to indicate that were it to carry out such an exercise with respect to General Service grade recruitment, it would take into account the salaries of Resourcing Directorate staff, additional costs relating to the examination process (delegated to the Department of Examinations), as well as costs associated with selection board functionaries. Furthermore, another cost equally applicable to General Service and non-General Service grade recruitment, relates to advertisement costs incurred.

3.3.6   During 2011, the PSC processed 290 recruitment calls, while operating at a total cost of €420,698 (PSC, 2011). Assuming that the PSC allocated 50 per cent of its efforts towards Public Service recruitment (with the remaining 50 per cent of its efforts split between addressing disciplinary-related matters and other arising issues), the cost of executing its recruitment function therefore amounts to €210,349. Applying the indicated apportioned cost of recruitment to the 290 calls processed throughout 2011 results in a per call cost of €725.

3.3.7   A similar cost estimation exercise was undertaken by NAO with respect to PAHRO's role and operations in the recruitment process. The salary apportionment for Resourcing Directorate employees attending to Public Service recruitment was estimated at €277,585. Detailed salary figures and workings, including relative staff weighting (utilised in cases where staff members attended to other duties besides Public Service recruitment) are presented in Appendix C.

3.3.8   Comparing the apportioned Resourcing Directorate salary cost of €277,585 to the overall salary expense budgeted for PAHRO in 2011 (€1,118,100) yields a 1:4 ratio. Applying this 25 per cent rate to account for overhead costs results in a Resourcing Directorate Public Service function apportionment of €11,500 (total Operational and Maintenance Expenses budgeted for PAHRO for 2011 stood at €46,000). To this end, total apportioned costs corresponding to the Public Service recruitment function amounted to €289,085, which when applied to the 290 calls processed during 2011, results in an estimated per call cost of €997.

3.3.9   Finally, the last component of this cost estimation exercise centred on costs incurred by line ministries in attending to their various recruitment-related duties when processing calls. All Ministries involved in this audit were requested to submit data detailing costs incurred in view of the recruitment process. Only MEDE entertained NAO's request for information, fully assisting the Office by providing highly reliable and comprehensive data, delineating the systematic involvement of Ministry personnel, and the corresponding time taken to complete each recruitment sub-step. A detailed, yet nonetheless, summarised reproduction of the submitted data by the MEDE is presented in Appendix D.

3.3.10   MEDE data was organised under two classifications, that is, on a per call basis and on a per applicant basis. As is rendered amply evident in Appendix D, a number of recruitment-related tasks carried out by MEDE are executed once, irrespective of the total number of applicants. Such tasks include the preparatory work undertaken in relation to the capacity building process, as well as the drafting of the actual call, among others. In this respect, the Ministry's per call cost estimation amounted to €566. The cost incurred in the case of a number of

Table 7: Estimated Cost per Public Service Recruitment Call

Stakeholder	Estimated Cost per Recruitment Call
PSC	€725
PAHRO	€997
Line Ministry	€566 + €37/€17
Total	€2,288 + €37/€17

other recruitment-related tasks was contingent on the amount of applications submitted. With respect to applications deemed eligible, four tasks were undertaken, namely, the receipt and processing of applications, the pre-interview preparatory phase, the interview process proper and the submission of the letter of notification. The estimated per eligible application cost arrived at was that of €37. The cost of processing applications deemed ineligible and therefore not advanced to the interview stage was that of €17.

3.3.11 Further analysis of MEDE recruitment calls indicated a wide range of eligible applications corresponding to its various issued calls, ranging from 1 to 530. Applying this range to the overall cost estimation presented in Table 7 results in an estimated cost of recruitment that ranges from €2,325 (in the case where one applicant was deemed eligible) to €21,898 (corresponding to the call where 530 applications were considered eligible). These estimated figures do not account for the significant number of applications deemed ineligible and therefore further contributing to costs incurred.

Prioritisation

3.3.12 Given the absence of a central database for case management and prioritisation, PAHRO's employed system for the assignment of priority largely reflects the ministry-based approach adopted in maintaining its data. Desk Officers are assigned the task of administering a number of independently managed databases, each corresponding to a particular ministry, or a logical part thereof in the case of large ministries.

3.3.13 The system employed in establishing priority between different calls for recruitment essentially

mirrors the ministry-based approach utilised by PAHRO with respect to its database management. To this effect, priority is largely established on two levels of operation, that is, across ministries and within ministries. With regard to the former, and by means of example, PAHRO highlighted the sensitivity of vacancies arising within the health sector, or the equally important education sector (making specific reference to teaching positions), which are therefore afforded higher priority status than recruitment calls corresponding to other areas of industry. On the other hand, the ad hoc assignment of priority within ministries was exemplified in the case of European Union fund management related calls, which are prioritised due to their strategic importance.

Training

3.3.14 During meetings with NAO, PAHRO indicated that it coordinates induction courses aimed at orienting the new recruits to their assigned positions. The Directorate also indicated that efforts are made so that this course is scheduled prior to the actual commencement of work of the newly appointed staff rather than afterwards. It however went on to state that this is not always possible, as logistical constraints may at times delay the delivery of such courses. These courses are considered to comprehensively address the most salient requirements identified as key to ensuring appropriate on-the-job performance and are normally of a one-week duration. PAHRO, however, went on to state that although efforts are made so as to maximise the effectiveness of these courses, no formal feedback system is established by which the relevance and adequacy of these courses is comprehensively and critically assessed.

3.3.15 It is important to note, however, that in the case of non-General Service Grades, no training is

provided by PAHRO. It is therefore the responsibility of the respective ministry or department to provide the necessary training to the new recruits, which, PAHRO indicated, they do at their own discretion. PAHRO also pointed out that the reason as to why training to non-General Service Grades recruits is better off being provided by the respective ministry or department is due to the fact the these entities are generally more conversant with the specific technical requirements of the respective position.

3.4   Recent Developments

3.4.1   PSC and PAHRO indicated that, by virtue of Legal Notice 246/2012, amendments to the Public Service Commission Regulations (S.L. Const.01, 2012) came into effect, as a result of which PAHRO was no longer tasked with the responsibility to verify draft calls for applications, and the publication of calls no longer required PSC approval. Against this changing context, PSC and PAHRO stated that calls for applications were now to be issued directly by the relevant ministry.

3.4.2   According to PSC, the thrust of these recently implemented changes to selection processes, entails the assignment of increased responsibility for the recruitment function at line ministry and department level. The Commission also indicated that within this operational context, Heads of Department are no longer required to obtain its approval for the appointment of selection boards.

3.4.3   As indicated by NAO at various instances throughout this report, under such a scenario, PAHRO remains directly responsible only for staffing in general service grades, while shifting focus and evolving towards fulfilment of its strategic function and role.

3.4.4   The aforementioned amendments also provide for the establishment of a standing selection panel in each ministry, with a view at facilitating the appointment of selection boards. This panel would include experienced former public officers. These standing selection panels have been referred to at various instances throughout the report, and PSC further remarked that they are in the process of being set up.

3.4.5   PSC also indicated that the requirement for its approval of selection board members was eliminated. The Commission stated that it is now the responsibility of the respective line ministry or department to appoint selection boards, and subsequently inform PSC of such appointments.

3.4.6   Moreover, PSC informed NAO that calls for applications issued as from November 2012 stipulate that the ten working day timeframe for the submission of petitions commences on the date of publication of the notice on the PSC website (not the Government Gazette) informing the public that the result has been issued. PSC stated that this modification effectively eliminates the time lag of up to one week following the issue of the result that was ordinarily taken to publish the notice in the Government Gazette.

3.5   Conclusions

3.5.1   In principle, NAO fully supports the transition towards a delegated recruitment environment, and shares PAHRO's views in that the transferring of further responsibility to line ministries and departments would notionally circumvent the present situation of over-reliance on PAHRO's checks. The comfort of relying on PAHRO to rectify poorly prepared draft calls may have significantly contributed to the prolonged duration of the verificatory process indicated in the previous chapter.

3.5.2   However, eliminating the safety net provided by PAHRO presents numerous risks that must be anticipated, planned for, and subsequently addressed. NAO opines that transferring PAHRO's vast institutional knowledge will prove to be a fundamentally determining factor in the success, or otherwise, of catering for this risk. A transitory period, mirroring the stage-based system already adopted by PAHRO and PSC, reflects a positive approach in planning for the eventual full-scale rollout of the delegated recruitment function. Furthermore, the training of HR specialists at line ministry level serves to address identified gaps in terms of resourcing-related service provision, while the possible implementation of ministry-wide standard operating procedures will contribute towards streamlining this complex process.

3.5.3 Implementation of the delegated recruitment framework will inevitably result in a fundamental transformation of the role and function of PAHRO. A central component, certainly subject to significant change in this regard, is PAHRO's compliance function, which is due to increase in terms of importance once the respective line ministries absorb the verificatory stage. In NAO's opinion, an integrated information management system duly accessed by PAHRO and all government ministries will aid such compliance checks, thereby allowing the newly empowered regulator to maintain conformity and uniformity amid all involved stakeholders.

3.5.4 Another aspect relating to this transformation revolves around PAHRO's shift from an organisation involved in the day-to-day operational activities associated with recruitment to one more oriented towards the strategic management thereof. In this context, the importance of tasks scheduled at post-recruitment stage, and associated with the measurement of efficiency and effectiveness metrics, assume greater importance.

3.5.5 NAO considers the delegation of recruitment as the beginning of a transformation process rather than its end. This radical departure from traditional means of resourcing serves as the ideal catalyst for encouraging further review, adaptation and modification of current HR policies and practices. PAHRO makes a number of sensible proposals in this regard, driving forward the principle of meritocracy, while simultaneously eroding the vestigial structures of seniority. The criterion of accelerated channels of progression, accessed by those who exhibit initiative, in the form of training undertaken and sustained professional development, is but one example of this strategic redirection in HR focus.

3.5.6 One major shortcoming of the overall government recruitment process is the lack of recorded information with respect to costs incurred. Calculating the cost of such a process is of central importance for the subsequent analysis of efficiency and effectiveness metrics. NAO considers its estimated cost calculation of €2,288 per recruitment call and €37 per eligible application as indicative of the significant cost incurred in this regard, which would therefore justify the necessity of implementing systems purposely designed for the registration of such costs.

3.5.7 Recording and logging of hours spent working on a particular recruitment call through a purposely designed system would enable PSC, PAHRO and line ministry management to accurately determine the total cost of recruitment, or the cost of a typical recruit, which are standard measures of efficiency used by the private sector. In general, NAO is concerned with the fact that all organisations reviewed as part of this audit, barring MEDE, held insufficient management information on recruitment-related costs.

3.6   Recommendations

3.6.1 The stage-based approach adopted in the implementation of the delegated recruitment environment is fully endorsed by NAO and augurs well for what should prove to be a revolutionary change in terms of Public Service recruitment. Nonetheless, NAO recommends that PAHRO's involvement in this process takes into account a number of critical considerations.

3.6.2 First and foremost, PAHRO should explore means by which to transfer its HR-related expertise to line ministry level. One possible alternative would involve the temporary secondment of PAHRO staff, posted at ministry level to oversee the smooth transition of verificatory duties. Another option that merits due consideration involves the establishment of an IT-enabled support desk within PAHRO, which would notionally be specifically dedicated to troubleshooting arising out of recruitment-related difficulties. Finally, the preparation of manuals and guidelines, such as frequently asked questions booklets, or standard operating procedures guides, may prove to be useful reference documents facilitating the transitory process.

3.6.3 Secondly, NAO recommends that PAHRO, possibly in conjunction with CDRT, develops a suitably comprehensive training programme intended for delivery at line ministry level. An in-depth and structured programme specifically designed for HR employees operating across the various ministries will undoubtedly aid and accelerate the uptake of intended work practices and procedures in relation to Public Service recruitment. Moreover, NAO also recommends that such a tailor-made training course would be far more effective were it to be designed

as an e-learning programme, thereby circumventing logistical difficulties inherent in coordinating among a limited pool of staff spread across the various ministries.

3.6.4   Thirdly, NAO reiterates and strongly recommends the establishment of an appropriately planned information management system, which will aid and assist PAHRO in the better exercise of its regulatory and compliance functions. Management from a distance is an undoubtedly challenging endeavour, yet one that may be rendered somewhat more manageable through the establishment of appropriate controls, aptly embodied in the proposed IT framework. Furthermore, the logging of specific work activities and tasks performed by the various HR functionaries throughout the recruitment process should be planned for and duly electronically registered, thereby ensuring accountability of work undertaken within the delegated environment.

3.6.5   In addition to the above, NAO recommends the further development of PAHRO's strategic role in recruitment by directing increased attention at post-recruitment related activities. Measures of efficiency and effectiveness may be introduced as standard practices, which could notionally include duration metrics in completing particular sub-stages, as well as the process in its entirety, and other useful indicators such as staff retention rates.

3.6.6   One measure of efficiency and economy that is undoubtedly of central importance relates to the measurement of costs incurred. In this respect, NAO recommends that a formal and standardised system for the recording of costs incurred is introduced and implemented across all involved stakeholders. This system could notionally be linked to the recording of hours worked on particular recruitment calls by individual employees, in what could effectively be conceptualised as a project-based timesheet of

sorts. Once again, NAO considers PAHRO's role in establishing such a system as integrally important in its anticipated success.

3.6.7   Furthermore, PAHRO is ideally and strategically well placed to introduce standard assessment reports relating to the quality and aptness of fit of newly recruited employees. Such reports may be best regulated by means of an officially documented probation policy framework, with submitted reports serving as confirmation of appointment, or otherwise. In NAO's view, PAHRO's role in this regard centres on the drafting, implementation, management and eventual review of such a policy. Actual compilation of assessment reports would be a task assigned to the newly engaged employee's respective manager.

3.6.8   Finally, NAO urges PAHRO to consider developing an appropriately regulated and detailed system for the tapping of feedback at employee exit stage. Irrespective of the methodology employed, be it through an exit interview, or a structured questionnaire, collecting employee feedback at this critical stage may indeed serve as a vital source of insight into potential process improvement.

3.6.9   NAO fully supports and strongly recommends the uptake of revisions proposed by PAHRO with regard to staff progression. Strengthening the principle of meritocracy will serve to further align the Public Service's recruitment function with modern management codes. Empowering employees by allowing them to determine the rate at which their career may progress, rather than relying on the accrual of years of service as a means of determining eligibility, is certainly a step in the right direction. To this end, NAO recommends that PAHRO embraces its catalytic role in driving forward necessary changes to HR policies, procedures and practices, more in line with its revised role of championing Public Service HR reform.

Chapter 4

Ministry-Level Perspectives on Recruitment

Chapter 4 – Ministry-Level Perspectives on Recruitment

This final chapter adopts a ministry-level perspective on the various management issues deemed centrally relevant to Public Service recruitment. Foremost among which is the analysis of the corresponding HR management structures and functions instituted by each of the Ministries reviewed as part of this performance audit. Following this analysis, a thorough examination of the recruitment-related challenges faced by the audited Ministries is expounded upon, highlighting issues of HR staff technical expertise, capacity building considerations, as well as centre and subsidiary coordination, among others. Finally, attention is also directed at information management concerns, ministry-level HR training requirements and the envisaged delegation of authority.

4.1 Ministry-Level HR Management Structure and Function

4.1.1 The roles and responsibilities assumed by PAHRO and PSC constitute an undoubtedly important part of the recruitment process, as has in fact been rendered amply evident in the preceding chapters. Yet, an equally pivotal role is played by the particular ministry instigating recruitment, whose corresponding functions and responsibilities dovetail those of PAHRO and PSC, thereby completing the process as a whole. While there is great uniformity across the various ministries as to what recruitment-related tasks fall within their remit, the means by which such tasks are to be achieved is largely left to the discretion of each ministry. The following section provides a brief overview of the strategic approaches

adopted with respect to HR management by the three Ministries reviewed in this audit. The implementation of established strategy is highly contingent upon an appropriately designed HR structure, which varies distinctly from one ministry to the other.

Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care

4.1.2 The MHEC operates its recruitment function by means of a Director Human Resources who heads the Human Resource Department and reports to the Permanent Secretary. Recruitment within MHEC is largely characterised by its decentralised approach, which is in stark contrast with the strategic orientation exhibited by MEDE and MRRA (as further elaborated upon in the ensuing text).

4.1.3 The recruitment process within MHEC is generally executed as follows:

a. Preparatory work undertaken in view of capacity building exercises;
b. The issuance of calls and the consequent receipt of applications;
c. The setting up of selection boards;
d. The publication of interview results; and
e. Necessary communication with different organisations involved in the recruitment process, such as PAHRO and PSC, as well as internal stakeholders, namely, the various departments falling under MHEC's direct responsibility.

4.1.4 As alluded to above, the MHEC's HR function is embodied within one centralised HR section, which is in turn supported by other subsidiary

sections posted within the different entities under the Ministry's responsibility. The composition of each of the subsidiary sections varies according to the department within which they are based, and therefore operational relationships between the different entities and the Ministry's central HR section differs. All subsidiary HR sections are held accountable for the work that they carry out; however, MHEC indicated its concern with regard to the fact that these sections operate within a system where no suitable infrastructure and no rigid or appropriate communication framework is in place. During meetings held with NAO, the Ministry also indicated that the Officers assigned to these sections lack adequate HR-related training, and consequently do not have the required expertise to suitably address the detailed technicalities associated with the recruitment process. Such a deficiency, more often than not, results in the Ministry's central HR section having to carry out the required planning for each of these entities in order to ascertain the desired degree of efficiency and effectiveness.

4.1.5   Although MHEC has indicated that most of these smaller sections lack the necessary training to carry out their operations with utmost efficiency and effectiveness, it has pointed out that the recruitment function within Mater Dei Hospital is in effect providing satisfactory results. The Mater Dei Hospital recruitment function is not only recruiting new personnel in a highly adequate manner, but is also carrying out numerous HR-related administrative processes, including the provision of induction courses for newly appointed staff and the submission of relevant reports to the Ministry's HR office.

4.1.6   In view of discourse already presented relating to the delegation of authority of the Public Service recruitment function, a similar exercise entailing the decentralisation of MHEC's recruitment capacity is also underway. MHEC indicated that the formulation of such plans stemmed from efforts intended to limit occurrences of line departments under the Ministry's responsibility dealing directly with PAHRO, thereby subverting the central HR section's critical involvement in the overall process. Such a practice poses the obvious risk of major disorganisation with respect to the Ministry's concerted resourcing efforts and the weakening of

overall management control over the recruitment process.

4.1.7   Notwithstanding the above, MHEC is aware of the various risks associated with adopting a decentralised HR management structure, and nonetheless, considers these to be offset by anticipated efficiency gains. The technical nature of recruitment calls arising from MHEC's various departments serves as the major source of positive influence and impetus in the proposed decentralised system. MHEC indicated that the proposed decentralised set-up would entail the establishment of an official Ministry-wide modus operandi, detailing which recruitment related issues have to be addressed centrally through the Ministry's HR section, and which are to be assumed directly by the recruiting line department. This proposal would essentially involve each entity assuming responsibility for its own resourcing function, while MHEC's role would entail supervision of this transition through ambassadors purposely allocated to each entity.

4.1.8   Under such a decentralised system, the separate HR functions within each MHEC subsidiary are to follow policies and procedures established by the Ministry's central HR function. However, MHEC indicated that it lacks an appropriate IT infrastructure, which it deemed critically important in facilitating and supporting such a set-up. The Ministry considers deficiencies of this sort as potential obstacles leading to complications in the implementation of the proposed decentralised system.

Ministry of Education and Employment

4.1.9   In stark contrast with MHEC's decentralised HR management structure, MEDE's perspective and strategic approach in this regard is highly centralised. During meetings held with NAO, MEDE highlighted the critical importance and necessity of maintaining continuous focus with respect to the recruitment of new personnel. This assumes particular relevance when one considers the fundamentally important role played by the education sector across all strata of society.

4.1.10 The recruitment function in connection with Directorate Educational Service grades and positions falls under the responsibility of the Director
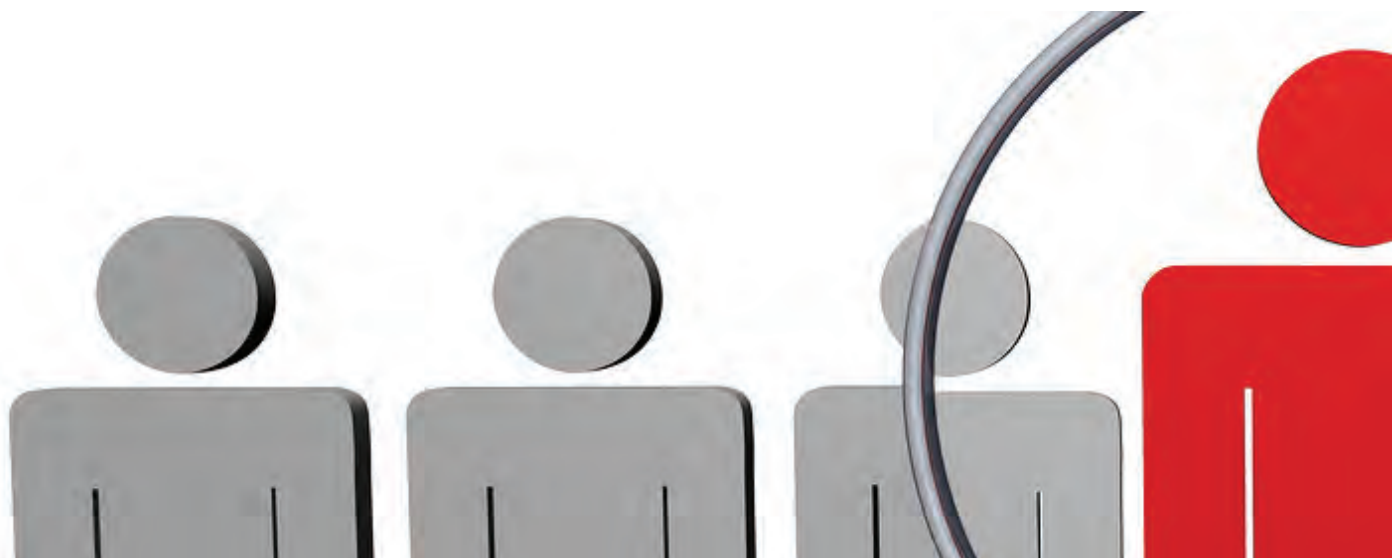
General of the Directorate for Educational Services, who in turn reports directly to the Permanent Secretary. The Director General actively manages and assumes responsibility for the recruitment process through the Human Resource Department. This Department is headed by a Director who is responsible for recruitment, planning, performance appraisal, deployment and customer care. The recruitment section is led by a Service Manager who is responsible for the recruitment-related functions of the Education Directorates pertaining to normal posts and positions within the education class, student services sector, technical services and other college support services. On the other hand, the Support Services Division headed by the Director General Support Services Division is responsible for Ministry recruitment including the recruitment of part-time clerks and part-time cleaners for schools and Colleges. Since September 2012, MEDE has one Director HR who is responsible for all HR matters including recruitment. The Director HR reports directly to the Director General within the Director for Educational Services and to the Director General Support Services Division.

4.1.11 For the purposes of this performance audit, attention directed at MEDE was scoped to solely focus on recruitment-related activities undertaken with regard to the Ministry's education arm, thereby intentionally omitting employment and family-based calls (given the Ministry's restructuring from the Ministry for Education, Employment and the Family to its present set-up).

4.1.12 During meetings held with NAO, MEDE indicated that the current recruitment practices in place are a result of the reform the Ministry underwent in 2007, particularly with regard to the setting up of the Ministry's two Directorates (the Directorate for Educational Services and the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education). This reform bore significant impact on the Ministry's adopted recruitment strategy, with focus initially directed towards the address of students' needs and their respective teaching staff. With the address of this primary strategic goal duly underway, the Ministry has now shifted its attention and assigned priority to the ancillary posts and positions that require resourcing intervention. These are considered to be of paramount importance in supporting the overall provision of educational services.

4.1.13 MEDE argued that, to date, its operations were executed across 101 state schools, through the concerted efforts of approximately 7,000 employees. To this end, the Ministry indicated that such a large operation accentuates the importance of HR management processes facilitated and augmented by means of a thorough system of recruitment needs analysis. Such a system supports MEDE's efforts at determining the different resourcing needs of the multitude of schools under its responsibility. In order to ensure optimum efficiency and effectiveness, such analysis must essentially take place at the grassroots level. It is against this context that MEDE opts to operate its HR recruitment function on a strategically centralised basis. In so doing, Ministry-level centralisation ensures that recruited personnel
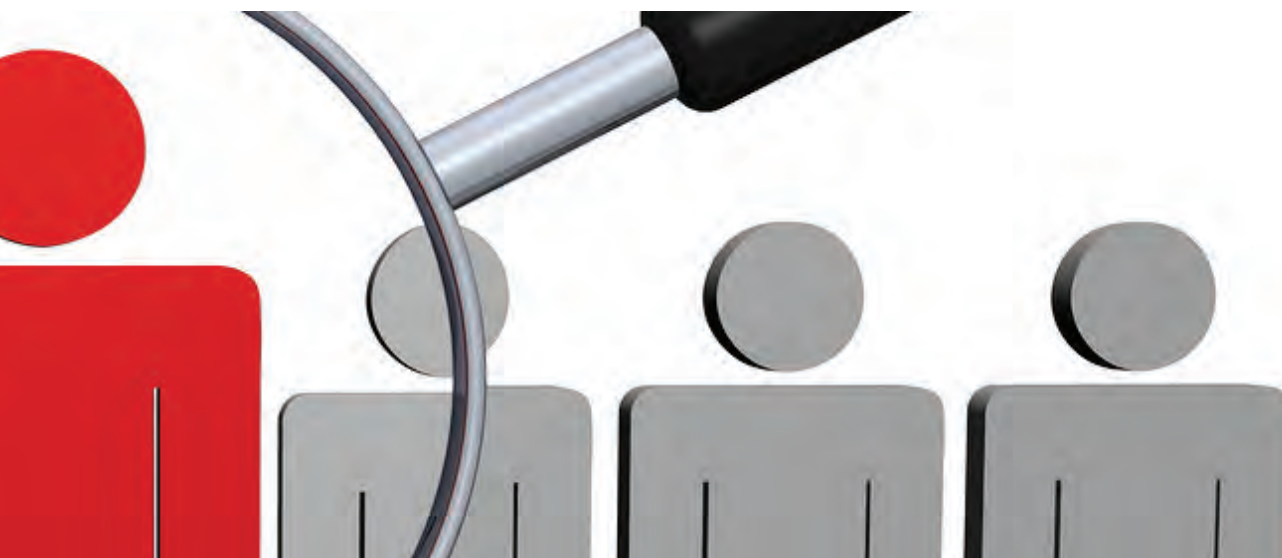
are fairly distributed according to where their respective need is greatest, and therefore utility most pronounced.

4.1.14 It is important to point out that MEDE, in addition to the substantial number of externally published recruitment calls, issues and consequently manages an average of sixty lateral transfers annually. The recruitment process it utilises for this purpose is largely based on that used for external recruitment, yet in this case, without the involvement of PAHRO and PSC. The Ministry has indicated that these lateral transfers are generally issued in January, with corresponding interviews held throughout May and June, and interview results finally published around July.

4.1.15 Due to the nature of work of teaching staff, the Ministry aims to initiate the recruitment process as early as possible, prior to the commencement of the scholastic year. One major constraint in this regard is the fact that new graduates are generally available for employment in August, that is, after publication of their respective university qualifications. This, in turn, limits the time-window within which the recruitment process must be completed, and instigates Ministry action towards a speedy resolution in terms of filling identified vacancies in anticipation of the scholastic year. Also important to note is that already existing staff that are to be internally transferred, are notified prior to the official commencement of the scholastic year. MEDE stated that Heads of School and other School Management Team grades, including Assistant

Heads, are informed of any such transfers by June, whereas teachers, learning support assistants and kindergarten assistants are notified in the beginning of September.

Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs

4.1.16 Diverging slightly from either of the above-described MHEC and MEDE set-ups is the management structure in place at MRRA, which is spearheaded by its Director People Management. This Director reports to the Director General Support Services, who is in turn accountable to the Permanent Secretary. However, it must be noted that during the period 2008 to 2010, which corresponds to the audit period under review, the Director General post was in fact vacant, and therefore, the Director People Management reported directly to the Permanent Secretary.

4.1.17 Similar to MEDE, MRRA has a highly centralised recruitment set-up, which is managed by the Recruitment Section within the People Management and Support Services Directorate. In anticipation of the Ministry's capacity building reporting requirements, Director People Management communicates with all line department heads, requesting their respective feedback on the anticipated human resource requirements together with relevant justifications and budgetary implications corresponding to the start of each calendar year. Once the capacity building templates are formally sent by PAHRO, the Director People Management solicits reconfirmation of the various

original submissions. This pre-emptive approach results in a much-shortened time taken to complete the due templates, as the process is essentially one of verification and confirmation rather than outright commencement.

4.1.18 At this stage, input is also drawn from the Permanent Secretary, who is most suitably positioned and informed with respect to any strategic level changes planned for the Ministry, which would subsequently warrant appropriate resourcing. Once all of this data has been compiled into one integrated response, the Ministry submits its capacity building return, which is then subject to the discussion, review and approval of PAHRO and MFEI.

4.1.19 As already indicated above, MRRA considers a centralised strategic approach to the recruitment process as most conducive towards the development of specialist staff expertise with respect to its HR functionaries. In support of this approach, MRRA emphasised the importance of tailoring its HR function to adequately address the needs of its 18 subsidiary departments, which together employ an approximate 3,200 employees. An aspect bearing further significance in this regard is the wide-ranging diversity in terms of professions and skills tapped through recruitment, particularly in addressing the Ministry's considerably diverse array of involvements, including agricultural and architectural projects, as well as the maintenance of numerous parks, among others.

4.2 Identifying Recruitment-Related Challenges

Wider Economic Backdrop

4.2.1 As indicated at various points throughout this audit report, recruitment, and the various challenges that accompany such a critical organisational process, are best understood within their operational context. One of the most influential factors in this regard is Malta's current economic climate, which presents a backdrop characterised by efforts intended at curtailing government expenditure, a major element of which is recruitment.

4.2.2 In fact, and in direct relation to the above, MEDE stated that the currently strained local economic situation accounts for the most significant challenge being faced by the Ministry, which tangibly manifests itself in the considerable financial constraints in force with respect to recruitment. Under such a scenario, MEDE stated that MFEI exerts notable caution in the approval, or otherwise, of recruitment-related funding, which subsequently impacts upon the Ministry's HR strategy. This scenario however encourages MEDE to constantly prioritise its needs and maximise the current human resources available.

4.2.3 According to MEDE, testament to this issue are the requests for additional ancillary staff that were not approved in successive capacity building exercises. Such a situation inevitably leaves the Ministry short of the required support staff, while simultaneously having to attend to the various clerical and general upkeep duties corresponding to its numerous schools. In view of this, MEDE has indicated that it is exploring the possibility of outsourcing such services to mitigate the risks and challenges posed by recruitment-related limitations. Nonetheless, MEDE stated that eventual outsourcing also implies the increase in required funds under the contractual as well as professional vote items, and would be subject to MFEI approval.

4.2.4 MRRA's concern mirrors that put forward by MEDE, essentially relating to the Government-wide policy of recruiting one new employee for every two that vacate their respective post or position. In MRRA's view, such a policy may not always be applicable, particularly when viewed from a logistical perspective. MRRA and its various departments provide services that are based at distinct locations, which therefore necessitate the presence of a particular employee at a given location. The Ministry argued that two employees posted and carrying out duties at two distinct locations cannot be replaced by one person alone. MRRA considers this Government-wide policy as its major challenge with respect to recruitment, notably envisaging workforce shortages in particular service areas and functions.

4.2.5 Furthermore, MEDE indicated that the classification agreements detailing what salary scale is to be attributed to particular recruitment calls,

based on corresponding qualifications and level of work experience, also posed a major limitation on the recruitment process. During meetings with NAO, the Ministry stated that the rigid structure detailing which qualifications and experience requirements are to fit within which scale, is not always adequate. In principle, MEDE argued that the application of existing classification structures constitutes a sound approach to government resourcing, yet stated that mechanisms enabling flexibility in terms of remuneration should also be established, particularly in cases when specific on-the-job requirements clearly merit a much higher financial compensation package than that offered as per standard classification agreements.

Staffing Level Concerns and Technical Expertise

4.2.6   Another challenge to recruitment identified by the Ministries reviewed related to their limited capacity. This was subsequently further compounded by gaps in technical expertise associated with the respective Ministries' core business. In this regard, MHEC indicated that one major constraint is the sheer volume of recruitment calls that must be processed by a limited pool of HR officials. This load on the Ministry's HR function is additionally impacted upon by the fact that the MHEC's central HR section is primarily composed of officers with a generally administrative background, therefore lacking the medical and technical expertise at times required in preparing calls for recruitment. Moreover, MHEC commented that the lack of technical expertise, combined with the absence of an established system indicating call priority, results in HR staff facing difficulties in processing calls according to their tacit urgency.

4.2.7   MRRA's concern with respect to this particular challenge parallels that presented by MHEC, essentially gravitating around the discrepancy in expertise of personnel employed within its HR section. The expertise referred to in this sense is not HR-specific expertise, but rather, that associated with the particular calls being processed, such as, architecture-related expertise. A basic understanding of such areas would facilitate the processing of corresponding recruitment calls.

4.2.8   Furthermore, MRRA indicated that despite its amalgamation in 2008, there was only one officer responsible for the drafting of recruitment calls, essentially creating a bottleneck. Three other officers were eventually trained and deployed within the Ministry's recruitment unit, and therefore, MRRA considered the staff shortage as addressed.

Centre and Subsidiary Level Coordination

4.2.9   The issue of technical expertise, or lack thereof, cuts across the centre and subsidiary relationship in the case of MRRA. Clarificatory requests put forward by the Ministry's HR section, relating to certain technical requirements warranting further analysis and review prior to submission of the draft call to PAHRO, were at times not addressed in a timely manner by the line department concerned, or provided outright inadequate responses.

4.2.10   MHEC also indicated that it is not an uncommon occurrence for misunderstandings to arise between the central Ministry and its line departments. The Ministry argued that its HR department faced several challenges when prioritising among its various vacancies based on information provided by its line departments. In turn, MHEC also presented the line departments' perspective on the aforementioned coordination difficulties, stating their notable difficulty in understanding the bureaucratic administrative procedure that must invariably be followed in cases of Public Service recruitment. According to MHEC, this lack of awareness with respect to the processes and procedures safeguarding accountability and transparency of government recruitment proves to be a common source of difficulty.

4.2.11   In this regard, MHEC plans for the introduction of appropriate administrative management structures, spearheaded by Chief Executive Officers posted within the various entities falling under the Ministry's responsibility. One of the key functions attributed to this revised management structure is bridging the gap between the Ministry's central HR office and that at the subsidiary level organisation. MHEC further commented on how the lack of bottom-up information supporting the prioritisation process resulted in an overload of calls classified as urgent, thereby undermining recruitment calls bearing valid urgency considerations. The Ministry acceded to the fact that such a scenario calls for better planning, which would somewhat curtail the

impact of ad hoc recruitment requests being by default assigned priority status, and facilitate the improved management of the HR section's caseload as a whole.

Capacity Building Considerations

4.2.12 The critically important function of establishing recruitment requirements through the capacity building exercise was a source of concern to the various Ministries reviewed as part of this audit. In this regard, the challenge identified by MHEC related to perceived time constraints, indicating that the allotted timeframe for undertaking the necessary preparatory work in view of this process was too limited. During meetings with NAO, MHEC indicated that this stage of the recruitment process warrants a significant amount of preparatory work, which when contextualised against the short period of time allotted, results in the Ministry falling behind schedule with respect to its reporting obligations. MHEC referred to the size of its Ministry's operations as a key factor influencing the efficiency with which this process is carried out, alluding to its limited pool of HR functionaries processing a complex array of HR requirements fed from all of its subsidiary departments.

4.2.13 Further to the above, MHEC also made reference to the preparatory work undertaken in relation to capacity building exercises. The Ministry is of the opinion that the current modus operandi in conducting the capacity building exercise is not geared to meet its needs in terms of staff requirements, yet is more oriented towards financially driven goals. While MFEI's efforts at reducing government expenditure are fully acknowledged by MHEC, the latter Ministry nonetheless opined that decisions relating to staffing requirements would best be left to its discretion. To this effect, MHEC indicated that under such a scenario, MFEI would allocate a capacity building financial budget on an annual basis, which would subsequently be managed by the recruiting Ministry. MHEC is of the considered opinion that such an approach would eliminate substantial delays and reduce administrative burdens associated with the present recruitment procedure. The Ministry argues that this is particularly substantial due to the fact that at present, even if the relevant capacity building exercise has been approved, MHEC must still write to MFEI to get financial approval for each individual call.

4.2.14 On the other hand, MEDE's focus shifted towards a strategic concern, stating that the replacement of outgoing staff, together with the expansion of existing services were, in the Ministry's opinion, the most complex aspects of the capacity building and overall HR planning processes. Making specific reference to its complement of General Service grade employees, MEDE noted that one particular difficulty faced in this respect relates to clerks, who are at times redeployed to other Ministries, thereby leaving schools without the required clerical personnel to support operations. To this end, MEDE indicated that it would favourably consider assuming responsibility for the recruitment of General Service grades when operating under the delegated authority framework.

4.2.15 MEDE further stated that the capacity building exercise would be more efficient were it to address instances of new recruitment requests only. Under such a scenario, replacements of outgoing staff, irrespective of whether these replacements are planned or ad hoc, should not form part of the capacity building exercise. Moreover, MEDE's views with regard to the strategic management of the capacity building function largely mirror those put forward by MHEC in the preceding text. To this end, MEDE indicated that once provided with a ministry-level financial budget by the Capacity Building Committee, it would essentially be the responsibility of MEDE to allocate such a budget to corresponding priorities.

4.2.16 MRRA's primary concern in this regard relates to the logistical coordination of capacity building meetings, which at times give rise to delays in the overall recruitment process. In addition, another concern outlined by MRRA was that relating to the Industrial Projects and Services Limited (IPSL) staff redeployment. This company was established in 2003, bearing as its main objective the absorption of employees deemed as surplus to requirements within their respective public sector organisations. During meetings held with NAO, MRRA stated that when requests for recruitment were approved at capacity building stage, first priority was given to IPSL employees. At this stage of the process, a

selection exercise limited to this pool of available IPSL employees is carried out, in order to determine their respective suitability to active vacancies.

4.2.17   Only when this IPSL-related selection process is completed without the successful identification of prospective recruits can PAHRO proceed in issuing the relevant call for recruitment. MRRA commented that this additional selection exercise further contributes to the time taken in completing calls for recruitment. Furthermore, MRRA indicated that there should be one selection process, whereby IPSL and government employees are provided with equal opportunity to apply, and subsequently appoint the candidate with the highest score, irrespective as to whether the successful candidate is an IPSL officer or not. The Ministry argued that prospective internal applicants were interviewed only if no suitable candidate could be found from within the IPSL pool, denoting that internal applicants commenced the selection process at a relative disadvantage.

Selection Board Coordination

4.2.18   A significant challenge brought to light by MEDE relates to complications arising with respect to the set-up and general operations of selection boards during the recruitment process. The Ministry's greatest difficulty in this regard corresponds to finding suitable persons who are willing to fulfil selection board duties. In some cases, one or more members on the selection boards is a Head of School and/or a Head of Department, who are invariably unavailable during school hours due to their professional commitments.

4.2.19   Under such circumstances, interviews are scheduled after school hours, in order to ensure selection board availability, as well as the availability of prospective candidates. However, MEDE has indicated that such an arrangement is somewhat compromised by the relatively low remuneration offered to selection board members, particularly in view of the fact that this duty is carried out outside of normal working hours.

Notice Period

4.2.20   An issue that raises NAO's concern relates to the fact that certain employees may choose to terminate their employment without being contractually obliged to work any notice period. The absence of adequate contractual safeguards, such as the notice period, results in inadequate time assigned to the handover period, and puts added and unwarranted pressure on the speeding up of the recruitment process. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the incoming recruits are presumably obliged to honour the notice period in effect at their respective outgoing places of work. As a result, outgoing staff leaving to further their studies, or simply commencing employment with the University of Malta or MCAST, end up leaving a vacancy that takes a considerable time to be duly filled.

PAHRO Support

4.2.21   A further major challenge identified by MRRA with respect to the level of support provided by PAHRO emerged in relation to the resignation of staff. The Ministry reported that six persons were recruited by means of a recent call for applications, yet shortly after, one of these newly engaged employees resigned. When MRRA submitted a request for the filling of this now vacated post by the next eligible candidate in the order of merit, MFEI and PAHRO once again requested justification as to why MRRA needed this vacancy, when this was simply a case of replacing an employee who was recently recruited and resigned shortly afterwards. Eventually, MRRA was provided with the relevant approval to replace the employee who had resigned after a gap of eight months, at which stage the whole process had to be started from scratch and another identical call had to be issued.

4.2.22   MRRA stated that it considers such delays as bearing a direct impact on the Ministry's capacity for delivering services. In this regard, PAHRO stated that such a procedure forms part of the capacity building process, which is further aimed at monitoring headcount and recurrent expenditure increases.

4.2.23   Moreover, during meetings held with NAO, MRRA indicated that PAHRO's practice of sending queries pertaining to forwarded calls of applications in a staggered manner, rather than compiling them into one intervention, results in a slowdown of the recruitment process and subsequent inefficiency.

According to MRRA, the situation with respect to recruitment for positions is more challenging, as replies by PAHRO are sent after substantial delay. Moreover, instead of sending their approval, the Ministry is faced by additional queries subject to clarification.

4.3   Information Management

4.3.1   At a general level of analysis, NAO noted the diversity of systems in place geared at managing the various Ministries' resourcing function and overall HR management. In this respect, MHEC indicated that information is maintained in a decentralised manner, with each subsidiary level organisation maintaining its own databases. The decentralised approach adopted by this Ministry largely reflects its strategic approach to recruitment; however, MHEC also indicated that the various databases are not coordinated for integration purposes.

4.3.2   The recording of electronic recruitment and HR management-related data by the various line departments within MHEC commenced as late as 2010. Somewhat ambiguous, and of significant concern to NAO, is the fact that requests for HR-related information raised by the Ministry and addressed to its respective line departments were not entertained, with departments quoting data protection considerations as the basis for non-acquiescence.

4.3.3   MHEC also indicated that current information management systems were in a state of flux, clearly acknowledging the need for a more robust system. At present, the Ministry makes use of the Dakar system, as well as a DOS programme, while simultaneously supporting its HR management function with a number of customised Microsoft Excel databases. The major difficulty with respect to the address of this scenario centres on the discouragement of MHEC management to instigate any substantial change to the present systems, given that strategic, government-wide, IT-related direction on this matter is awaited.

4.3.4   Similar to MHEC, MEDE makes use of different types of information management systems.

The Directorate for Educational Services utilises the Schools, Teachers and Students database, which is a program that was purposely developed and customised to suit MEDE's precise needs. This program is assigned to a particular Head of Unit within the Directorate for Educational Services, who administers and manages the system alongside other recruitment duties. On the other hand, the Department of Corporate Services is obliged to make use of HRIMS, which is a Public Service-wide program used for HR management purposes. In addition to HRIMS, the Department of Corporate Services also makes use of other e-learning platforms, and will eventually be reverting to Dakar once this system is introduced across the Public Service. According to MEDE, the diversity of information systems and the lack of a collective database hinders data collection, while the processing and recording of data in hard copy format limits the quick retrieval and corresponding analysis of HR-related data.

4.3.5   During meetings held with NAO, MEDE identified the challenges it faced in the compilation of a comprehensive and exhaustive database with respect to the personnel under its employ. The Ministry indicated that the collection and compilation of this data is largely hampered by the varying circumstances relating to a significant number of its staff. While specifically referring to the uptake of family-friendly measures (for example parental leave and responsibility leave) as one major hurdle for the accurate upkeep of such a database, it also identified other factors, such as study leave, which together render the process of maintaining an accurate staff database all the more challenging. This situation is further compounded by the fact that large portions of MEDE's employee population are of a relatively young age, and therefore, more inclined to utilise family-friendly measures.

4.3.6   Another challenge specifically relevant in the context of MEDE relates to the uncertainty surrounding a given employee's retirement age, that is, whether a person chooses to retire at 61 or at 62 years of age, and whether the employee would have paid sufficient social security contributions in view of pension eligibility considerations. The various options and ramifications of each further complicate the recruitment planning cycle across MEDE.

4.4   Ministry HR Training Requirements

4.4.1   The provision of ministry-level HR section training bears central relevance to the address of challenges encountered and rectification of identified technical gaps. To this end, NAO explored the perceived training needs identified by the various Ministries involved in this audit, particularly attending to how such training could contribute towards increased efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out relevant duties.

4.4.2   During meetings held with MHEC, NAO was informed that no induction courses or specific training programmes were tailored with the specific needs of the Ministry's HR functionaries in mind. Pursuant to this context, MHEC indicated that it had held a meeting with CDRT for the design of a suitable training programme intended at addressing MHEC's HR-related training needs. However, in assessing MHEC's request, CDRT indicated that it would be willing to entertain such a request when the Ministry's somewhat depleted HR section regains full capacity, essentially due to the efficiency considerations relevant to the organisation of such training.

4.4.3   When queried on the same issue, MEDE stated that all personnel within its Ministry's HR function have substantial professional teaching experience, which is considered critically important in the overall management and prioritisation of HR-related tasks such as recruitment. Notwithstanding the above, MEDE indicated that the provision of specialised HR training may be somewhat limited due to resource constraints, and attention being directed to more pressing matters. Furthermore, MEDE stated that when the system of delegated authority comes into effect, it will be centrally important for PAHRO to invest its expertise and skills across all ministries. In this regard, MEDE stated that ministries operating within a delegated environment will inevitably require considerable support, particularly in the early stage of the transitory process.

4.4.4   Similar to the responses provided by MHEC and MEDE, MRRA also stated that no formal training, specifically related to recruitment, had been provided to its HR staff complement. Moreover, the Ministry amplified this point when stating that the specialised

work carried out by the Department of Corporate Services further accentuated the need for specific training related to recruitment. Notwithstanding the lack of formal training, MRRA emphasised the important role played by PAHRO in acting as a source of continuous support and assistance. Expressing similar concerns to those put forward by MEDE, MRRA claimed that PAHRO's role would continue to evolve and gain in importance when the proposed delegated recruitment framework comes into effect. MRRA elaborated upon this argument, stating that in anticipation of the shifting of responsibility for verification of calls from PAHRO to the Ministry, intensive training would have to be carried out as preparation for the absorption of such duties.

4.5   Delegation of Authority

4.5.1   As intimated at throughout this audit report, the anticipated introduction of, and successful functioning of the delegated recruitment framework will certainly be influenced by the various ministries' respective HR departments. Under such a delegated recruitment system, challenges faced by the ministries' central HR sections will change in line with its externally evolving environment. Such change would essentially entail the adoption of a more active role and the inevitable assumption of associated responsibility in the recruitment process of new employees. In view of the above, NAO sought to elicit ministry-level feedback and perceptions on how the planned changes to recruitment are expected to bear impact on their respective operations.

4.5.2   With regard to the above, MHEC acknowledged the fact that the current staff complement within its HR section is neither adequately resourced (with a number of key posts notably vacant) nor are its employees sufficiently trained to shoulder the responsibilities associated with the operational activities of the Ministry's HR function. MHEC officials also indicated the considerable difficulty encountered in attempting to attract potential HR employees with the desired attitude and aptitude for HR-related duties. While fully acknowledging the importance of staff aptitude towards recruitment-related responsibilities, MHEC also referred to the equally important aspect of technical competence. In this respect, the

Ministry conceded that although all of its HR staff is academically qualified, none possess specifically related qualifications and expertise bearing direct relevance to its HR management function. Against this backdrop, MHEC stated that limitations in terms of its technical competence may be accentuated and further brought to the fore by the planned delegated recruitment framework, resulting in potential hindrance to resourcing processes.

4.5.3   Further to the above referred limitations relating to HR-specific competence, MHEC also indicated the considerable difficulty encountered by its central HR function in processing highly technical calls corresponding to the Ministry's core function of health service provision. MHEC emphasised the importance of dovetailing its HR planning function with the technical drafting of recruitment calls.

4.5.4   In addressing similar queries directed at MEDE, the Ministry's predominant response with respect to the proposed delegation of authority related to measures intended to ensure uniformity across the Public Service. In essence, MEDE considers it critically important for the delegation of authority to be executed in a controlled manner, thereby ensuring that equivalent posts or positions present no variations in terms of eligibility criteria, remuneration arrangements, and assigned responsibilities across the various ministries.

4.5.5   Such a scenario would be disadvantageous to all ministries and departments, as it would result in the encouragement of unhealthy competition between various Public Service organisations through poaching and other underhand tactics. In fact, MEDE has already experienced this type of scenario, as there were cases when recruitment requests called for during capacity building meetings were not approved. In parallel, other ministries issued similar calls to those rejected by the Capacity Building Committee vis-à-vis MEDE, and subsequently, staff employed at MEDE requested to be transferred to other ministries. To this end, MEDE considers the implementation of a quality assurance mechanism, in-built into the capacity building and recruitment processes, as the ideal means for ensuring that such circumstances are not repeated.

4.5.6   The above concerns expressed by MEDE were in turn similarly put forward by MRRA.

Despite MRRA's clear support of the proposed reform that is to be brought about by means of the delegated recruitment function, this Ministry nonetheless expressed reservations with respect to the level of monitoring it expected PAHRO to maintain. In line with MEDE's argument, MRRA's concern crystallised around the fact that variations (relating to similar posts) between ministries would inevitably arise under a delegated scenario. One possible solution, proposed by MRRA as a safeguard against this eventuality, is the strict adherence to a comprehensive list of recruitment templates, already approved by PAHRO, and intended to serve as guidance for all ministries to abide by.

4.6   Conclusions

4.6.1   NAO is concerned by the absence of a suitably designed infrastructure and communication framework supporting MHEC's HR management function. This framework, or rather, its lack thereof, underlies potential organisational inefficiency and ineffectiveness, overtly manifested in instances when subsidiary level organisations bypass the Ministry and deal directly with PAHRO. Furthermore, NAO noted a stark incongruence in terms of the decentralised strategic approach adopted with respect to recruitment. This is amply characterised by the notable technical limitations experienced at subsidiary level, which in turn constrain the MHEC central HR office to adopt a more active and direct role, thereby centralising a conceptually decentralised system.

4.6.2   With regard to MRRA and MEDE, NAO noted a number of good practices that emerged in relation to the HR management procedures employed within these Ministries. In the case of the latter referred Ministry, diligence in the planning of anticipated HR requirements impacts upon overall efficiency and effectiveness. This bears particular relevance when contextualised against the somewhat unpredictable circumstances arising due to staff resignations with immediate effect, given that no notice period may be enforced. With respect to MRRA, NAO recognises as good practice the procedure employed by this Ministry in pre-empting staff recruitment requirements. This pre-emptive sourcing of feedback from line departments facilitates the submission of MRRA's response to the PAHRO driven capacity

building exercise, enabling the Ministry to respond in a timely manner, thereby resulting in notable efficiency gains.

4.6.3   In view of the above, NAO is somewhat concerned at MHEC's stated difficulty in adhering to reporting parameters established by the Capacity Building Committee, particularly with respect to the timeliness of reporting obligations. Bearing indirect relevance to this issue is the need to manage and balance the load of incoming recruitment requests at Ministry level, with the corresponding HR staff capacity available for due processing. Shortcomings in this regard will undoubtedly strain the Ministry's limited resources, resulting in a series of efficiency and effectiveness losses across its multiple facets of operation.

4.6.4   Additionally, soliciting the relevant technical expertise required in processing certain calls assumes critical importance. To this end, ministries must devise means of ensuring greater coordination between their HR offices and the respective technical arm to which the proposed recruitment corresponds.

4.6.5   NAO acknowledges the concern expressed by MEDE and MRRA with regard to the Government-wide policy of replacing every two outgoing staff with one replacement. The Office's focus in this respect does not centre on the policy per se, but on the manner of its application. One workaround solution, addressing and circumventing the shortfall in staffing levels brought about by this conservative approach to Public Service recruitment, is represented by the outsourcing of services instead of outright recruitment. Such an option bears consonance with Government's HR strategy, providing the necessary flexibility to scale-up and scale-down operations as and when necessary, while simultaneously mitigating the risks and challenges posed by recruitment-related limitations.

4.6.6   The various difficulties associated with the coordination of selection boards are duly noted and acknowledged by NAO; however, the Office is of the understanding that this issue is now a moot point. The introduction of the Ministry-specific standing selection panels should positively contribute towards the rectification of difficulties and challenges previously relevant in this regard.

4.6.7   As stated on a number of occasions throughout this audit report, the role played by robust information management systems is key in ensuring effective and efficient HR management practices. It is in this context that NAO contends that difficulties experienced by MEDE in maintaining the accuracy of such data further strengthens the need for investment in adequate information management systems.

4.6.8   NAO is concerned with the absence of basic contractual safeguards, such as a notice period, in the case of particular categories of Public Service employees. Although by no means sufficient to initiate and complete recruitment within such provisions, the notice period serves to provide employing ministries and departments with limited staff coverage, easing the handing over period and eventual replacement. In NAO's opinion, the absence of such provisions results in unwarranted pressure on the speeding up of the recruitment process.

4.6.9   NAO fully supports the need for further technical and specialised training directed at HR functionaries posted across all line ministries. This need will certainly assume pivotal importance once the planned delegation of authority comes into full effect. Given that the envisaged delegated recruitment scenario implies a strong element of quality control being assumed at line ministry level, the added technical competence of HR sections should, on a conceptual basis, provide added safeguards in ensuring uniformity of application of recruitment provisions, while simultaneously ensuring adherence to established frameworks.

4.7   Recommendations

4.7.1   NAO considers the establishment of formal governance structures delineating the roles, responsibilities, reporting arrangements and communication systems key to the effective functioning of the desired decentralised set-up at MHEC. The importance of close scrutiny and monitoring of MHEC's relevant HR subsidiary sections is critical, as has in fact been clearly highlighted in NAO's Annual Audit Report (2012). To this end, NAO recommends that due attention is afforded to the formulation of robust governance structures,

thereby imbuing MHEC's HR function with added safeguards to ensure accountability.

4.7.2   Good practices such as those exhibited by MEDE and MRRA are to be commended and, where possible, implemented across other Ministries. In this regard, NAO recommends that a forum for the exchange of good HR practices be identified or designated, conceptually spearheaded by PAHRO, which is strategically well-placed to identify and promote instances of good governance HR practices.

4.7.3   NAO recommends that MHEC considers revising its HR management practices in order to render the capacity building process more efficient. A number of good practices employed by other Ministries may prove to be relevant and beneficial within MHEC's context too.

4.7.4   In view of the stated HR staffing level concerns expressed by MHEC, NAO is of the opinion that benchmarking exercises directed at establishing such requirements may prove useful. The onus of driving forward such measurements would axiomatically form part of PAHRO's remit of responsibility. Common measures identifiable in this regard include the number of recruitment calls that are to be processed by an HR officer within a given timeframe, the expected duration of particular stages in the recruitment process as well as various other performance indicators already amply elaborated upon in the preceding chapters.

4.7.5   NAO is of the opinion that the government-wide policy of replacing every two outgoing staff with one replacement may be best actuated if applied in a strategic and selective manner, customised to the particular sector being addressed. Targeted reductions in staff complements should be well-planned and in line with ministry and department operational objectives. The better overall redeployment of staff, coupled with the two-is-to-one policy, may ultimately yield the desired benefit; yet in the latter case, this measure may prove to be more effective if utilised selectively in cases of surplus workforce capacity, and discarded in cases where logistical and operational circumstances dictate otherwise.

4.7.6   The need for robust information management systems is, in NAO's opinion, at the core of sustained efforts at improving HR management practices at ministry level. This issue has already been addressed from a central management perspective, that is, in relation to PAHRO's involvement in the recruitment process. However, the possibility of introducing appropriately designed systems that serve to facilitate recruitment at ministry level, while simultaneously interfacing with PAHRO, will undoubtedly lead to better coordination and greater efficiency. NAO opines that the challenges created by the diverse employment considerations characteristic of today's workforce, including, but not limited to the various family-friendly measures, must be addressed by means of correspondingly flexible information management systems.

4.7.7   NAO urges PAHRO to instigate the measures necessary in introducing an enforceable notice period across all Public Service employment contracts, thereby easing unwarranted pressure on the recruitment process, and providing ministries and departments with adequate coverage with respect to the handing over of tasks and duties. To this end, PAHRO has indicated that the Public Service Collective Agreement dated 15 October 2012 contemplates the enforcement of a notice period.

4.7.8   In view of the identified need for greater technical proficiency across ministry-level HR sections, NAO recommends that a concerted effort be undertaken so as to redress this weakness. To this end, NAO recommends that CDRT organise a specialised programme of training targeting the various ministries' HR departments. In light of possible logistical constraints, NAO is of the opinion that such training would be most efficient and effective if delivered through an e-learning model, thereby bypassing efforts at coordination of suitably sized groups, and allowing for training to be conducted on an individual basis.

Appendices

Appendix A – Public Service Commission: Comparative Analysis of Selection Processes in the Public Service

	Action	Accountability for Action	Average Number of Days from Preceding Action									
			1993/1994	2001/2002	2003/2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
1	Request for PSC authority to issue call for applications	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	Request for approval of selection board/criteria	HD	46.52	5.68	15.66	6.04	12.54	2.70	2.80	0.07	0.44	0.13
3	Verification of call for applications	MPO/PAHRO	39.8	52.84	36.9	69.31	56.33	33.18	54.55	53.64	28.79	45.83
4	Clarification/s sought by PSC	PSC	8.26	4.02	3.8	0	0	0	0	0	0.05	0
5	Response by Head of Department to PSC queries	HD	24	9.56	8.44	0	0	0	0	0	0.57	0
6	PSC approval of issue of call/selection board/criteria	PSC	49.2	18.9	7.74	6.13	6.07	7.70	8.45	7.33	6.13	5.49
7	Publication of call for applications	Other	7.22	12.72	7.78	8.63	6.56	7.48	9.55	20.28	5.59	6.39
8	Closing date for submission of applications	Other	25.94	26.2	22.8	21.94	23.17	23.08	21.40	22.35	22.68	23.01
9	Holding of interviews	SB	100.6	60.1	53	58.63	59.54	51.42	82.07	54.93	54.48	56.73
10	Submission of report by selection board	SB	20.58	9.5	14.24	10.52	18.02	11.92	15.49	12.79	13.65	14.29
11	Recommendation by Head of Department	HD	15.78	17.72	12.62	19	15.07	14.50	15.27	10.01	10.81	12.61
12	Verification of vacancy	MPO/PAHRO	8.24	9.98	4.94	5.54	9.13	6.96	11.96	3.80	4.01	3.51
13	Clarification/s sought by PSC	PSC	2.9	2.58	0.76	0.22	0.30	1.40	0.59	0.64	0.47	0.59
14	Response to PSC queries	SB	6.82	9.56	2.42	1.22	4.17	0.90	3.13	2.55	1.27	3.73
15	Recommendation by PSC	PSC	16.54	18.3	6.6	6.06	6.81	8.94	6.36	8.25	9.12	6.65
16	Prime Minister's signature	MPO/PAHRO	7	7.74	7.58	7.72	14.33	13.60	8.12	7.23	7.89	10.71
	Total Duration of Selection Process		379	265	205	221	232	182	236	203	166	190
			54 weeks	38 weeks	29 weeks	32 weeks	33 weeks	26 weeks	34 weeks	29 weeks	24 weeks	27 weeks

Source: PSC (2011)

Appendix B – Analysis of Non-General Service Grade Staff Complement According to Grade

Grade	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Variance
Messengerial	404	381	398	383	355	306	272	242	228	201	180	(224)
Medical	613	664	679	715	680	776	775	781	783	790	833	220
Professional (other than Medical)	405	404	423	428	466	458	473	465	464	468	485	80
Nursing / Paramedical	3,796	3,817	3,859	3,949	4,005	3,924	4,045	4,217	4,380	4,643	4,815	1,019
Educational	5,192	5,241	5,238	5,328	5,393	5,291	5,222	5,186	5,153	5,324	5,190	(2)
Police	1,715	1,774	1,809	1,854	1,786	1,799	1,759	1,937	1,888	1,852	1,922	207
Other Departmental	2,178	2,306	2,056	2,169	2,214	2,203	2,127	2,080	1,895	2,043	2,140	(38)
Technical & Supervisory	3,299	3,241	3,110	3,059	2,957	2,855	2,762	2,678	2,612	2,510	2,430	(869)
Industrial Group I	558	846	787	744	717	668	617	567	518	475	444	(114)
Industrial Group II	4,605	4,837	4,170	4,000	3,797	3,578	3,355	3,099	2,813	2,478	2,235	(2,370)
Industrial Group III	1,070	1,019	951	931	890	814	788	741	688	632	585	(485)
Industrial Group IV	703	696	663	645	627	618	577	597	623	599	573	(130)
Other Industrial Grades	589	586	564	557	537	509	506	481	456	430	412	(177)
Part-time Employees	496	374	378	369	331	329	317	315	495	498	439	(57)
Temporary Employees	1,091	986	1,114	1,121	864	1,038	1,217	1,434	1,287	1,263	1,458	367
Contract Employees	509	549	636	631	695	733	757	832	859	706	712	203
Trainees	0	16	17	14	12	6	4	3	3	3	1	1
Total	27,223	27,737	26,852	26,897	26,326	25,905	25,573	25,655	25,145	24,913	24,854	(2,369)

Appendix C – Resourcing Directorate: Public Service Recruitment Salary Apportionment

Staff Role	Salary Scale	Number of Employees	Salary	Aggregate Salary	Weighting	Weighted Salary
Director	4	1	€29,162	€29,162	60%	€17,497
Secretary to Director	11	2	€14,778	€29,556	60%	€17,734
Assistant Director (Departmental Grades) [AD DG]	5	1	€21,871	€21,871	100%	€21,871
Ministry Desk Officer	6	1	€20,411	€20,411	100%	€20,411
Ministry Desk Officer	7	1	€19,085	€19,085	100%	€19,085
HR Policy Manager (reporting to AD DG)	7	3	€19,085	€57,255	100%	€57,255
HR Support Officer	11	1	€14,778	€14,778	100%	€14,778
Senior Clerk	14	1	€12,193	€12,193	100%	€12,193
Assistant Director (Special Issues)	5	1	€21,871	€21,871	50%	€10,936
Officer in Grade 5 (Projects & Policies)	5	1	€21,871	€21,871	50%	€10,936
Assistant Director (General Service Grades) [AD GSG]	5	1	€21,871	€21,871	100%	€21,871
HR Policy Manager (reporting to AD GSG)	7	1	€19,085	€19,085	100%	€19,085
Desk Officer (Transfers, Redeployment & Acting Appointments)	10	1	€15,729	€15,729	0%	€0
Desk Officer (Recruitment, Headship Records & ADs)	10	1	€15,729	€15,729	50%	€7,865
Desk Officer (Progression/Promotion of General Service Officers)	10	1	€15,729	€15,729	50%	€7,865
HR Support Officer (PA to AD GSG)	11	1	€14,778	€14,778	50%	€7,389
Clerk	16	2	€10,816	€21,632	50%	€10,816
Assistant Director (Public Sector) [AD PS]	5	1	€21,871	€21,871	0%	€0
HR Policy Manager (reporting to AD PS)	7	1	€19,085	€19,085	0%	€0
Total Cost						**€277,585**

Notes:

1. Indicated salaries are based on the 2011 Financial Estimates.
2. No allowances have been factored into the above salaries.
3. The entry point salary was invariably used across all scales below 5.

Appendix D – Line Ministry Recruitment Cost Estimations

Task	Per Call / Per Application	Officers Involved	Duration (hours)	Number of Applicants (range)	Cost	
					Per Call	Per Application
Capacity Building Exercise	Per Call	DG	4.00	–	€61.90	–
Consultation before Drafting Call	Per Call	SM	3.00	–	€31.89	–
Drafting of Call	Per Call	EO, AP, SM, ADV	27.00	–	€269.33	–
Recommendation of Draft Call	Per Call	EO, AP, MSG	2.83	–	€16.27	–
PAHRO Verificatory Feedback & PSC Approval	Per Call	SM, EO, PR	5.00	–	€39.01	–
Issue of PAHRO or HR Circulars	Per Call	EO	1.25	–	€7.46	–
Publication of Call	Per Call	EO, CRK	2.00	–	€13.42	–
Assistance and Establishment of Selection Board	Per Call	EO, SM	5.66	–	€34.21	–
Receipt and Processing of Applications	Per Application	EO, CRK	0.25	3 – 864	–	€1.49
Preparation of Advertisement	Per Call	EO, SM	1.16	–	€6.96	–
Pre-interview Preparatory Process (I)	Per Call	CP, SB	1.50	–	€55.68	–
Pre-interview Preparatory Process (II)	Per Application	CP, SB	0.42	3 – 864	–	€15.47
Interview Process	Per Application	CP, SB	0.50	1 – 530	–	€18.56
Submission of Ministry Feedback	Per Call	EO, MSG	5.08	–	€29.50	–
Letter of Notification	Per Application	EO, AP	0.25	1 – 530	–	€1.80
Total					**€565.63**	**€37.32**

Notes:

1. All of the above information is based on calculations undertaken by MEDE and which have been utilised for the purposes of this audit's cost estimation exercise.

2. In cases of petitions being submitted, the cost assigned to this specific process is that of €25.16, and this should therefore be added to the overall cost of the process.

3. Legend of Officers Involved: ADV – Advisor | AP – Assistant Principal | CP – Chairperson of the Selection Board | CRK – Clerk | DG – Director General | EO – Education Officer | MSG – Messenger | PR - Principal | SB – Selection Board Member | SM – Service Manager

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