

## **Public Governance Committee Symposium, 14 November 2019**

### *Introduction*

The PGC Symposium on *Recruiting the Civil Service of the Future* highlighted the urgency of having great people with the right mix of skills and competences in the public sector. This has always been a challenge. However, megatrends such as globalisation, demographic change and digital disruption are making profound changes across Member countries to the day-to-day work, workforce and workplace of public servants. Recruitment systems in many cases were designed in and for a different era, where life-long employment and linear career progression in the same industry – even organisation – was the norm. As such, there is a renewed impetus to take stock of recruitment frameworks to ensure they are fair, flexible and fit-for-purpose to recruit, today, the civil servants of tomorrow. While there are pockets of innovation and adaptation across the OECD, in many cases the challenge is scaling initiatives and building buy-in for experimentation.

The Symposium framework examined the issue of recruitment from three angles: branding/attraction, recruitment/assessment, and on-boarding/induction. All three components are closely intertwined, and they imply profound reflection on existing practices and desired outcomes. Senior Civil Servants (SCS) have a key role to play in all three. The OECD [Recommendation](#) on Public Service Leadership and Capability (PSLC) provides a principles-based framework for potential actions aimed at recruiting and developing the public sector workforce of the future. Principles six and seven, in particular, call on adherents to:

- Attract and retain employees with the skills and competencies required from the labour market.
- Recruit, select and promote candidates through transparent, open and merit-based processes, to guarantee fair and equal treatment.

### *Breakout groups*

#### **Breakout Session 1: (Re?)branding the public sector to attract talent**

- *Targeting candidates* – facilitator: Jacques Druart (Belgium): Delegates agreed that a primary challenge in better targeting prospective candidates is the image of the public sector, particularly the perceived organisational culture. Developing better content (e.g. short videos), expanding the use of social media (particularly the advertising functionality, which enables audience segmentation), and engaging earlier with students through internships were all considered as valid avenues.
- *Communicating better* – facilitator: Grace O'Regan (Ireland): Participants focussed on the importance of strategic workforce planning as a key component of more effective communication. Differentiating internal and external branding is important for reaching different audiences, as is market research and branding initiatives.
- *Use of digital technology* – facilitator: Sigrid Berger (*Profil Public*): The breakout group emphasised the importance of putting the user or client at the centre when deploying digital tools for branding efforts.

## Breakout Session 2: Selecting the right skills and competencies

- *Bias mitigation* – facilitator: Simon Claydon (UK): This group discussed the importance of role models and effective storytelling as a way to counter the poor image of the public sector. In terms of bias as a potential barrier to finding and assessing candidates, participants saw an opportunity for hiring managers to shift from a focus on ‘who we need’ to ‘what do we need’ regarding skills/motivation/competencies.
- *People-oriented process* – facilitator: Robert Cloarec (Sweden): The group identified three challenges: the volume and numbers of candidates, how to boost that number, and how to involve the recruiter more actively in engaging with candidates. Delegates noted that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) could help reach people and save time for recruiters to devote to higher-value tasks.
- *Using technology* - facilitator: Stan Lee (Canada): Technology was seen as a way to fight the public sector’s poor image, particularly the relationship between public sector employers and candidates. The complex and clunky process of applying for a government job in many countries contributes to the perception that some jobs depend on having personal connections. Potential solutions included developing a ‘chat bot’ where candidates could ask questions (either to a human or AI respondent) as well as more guidance for candidates and greater emphasis on providing feedback following interviews.
- *Assessing competencies* – facilitator: Simon Loréal (France): Key challenges were assessing both skills that will be useful in the long term and behavioural competences. Innovative solutions were proposed by the group, including scenario- or role-based games as well as developing more robust and user-friendly performance assessment tools with related learning and development components.

## Breakout Session 3: On-boarding: Getting the most from new employees once the contract is signed

- *Fast-track programmes* – facilitator: Matt Kerlogue (UK): This group focussed on two key challenges – branding & attraction and talent development programmes. Delegates observed that talent management teams should be given more support and responsibility to provide input into career development decisions, e.g. through recommending and developing bespoke learning and development activities and/or assignments.
- *Induction programmes and values* - facilitator: Graeme Head (Australia)/Iris Nehemia (Israel): Mentoring was seen as a key aspect of successful induction programmes, particularly when the mentor is external or from a different team. Informal peer networks, periodic training, more interactive training were all suggested as ways to develop organisational culture and boost retention.

### *Key takeaways*

1. **The public sector across OECD members is facing growing pressure to attract, recruit and retain candidates with much-needed skills.** This was one of the guiding themes of the Symposium notes [[GOV/PGC\(2019\)44](#)] and of the OECD Roundtable on the Future of Work in the Civil Service, held on 13 November. PGC Delegates agreed that traditional recruitment challenges still exist, but are being felt much more acutely: the price for inaction now will be greater than in the past. This will mean confronting issues such as legacy IT systems, legislative frameworks, and empowering managers to act with greater discretion while still ensuring transparency and accountability.
2. **Many countries have already begun to address challenges. The way forward is to improve communication and to scale where possible.** The development of civil service award programmes

provide a useful way to recognise innovation and improve communication around common challenges and solutions.

3. **The public sector can draw on partners outside government.** As illustrated by the involvement of the [Volcker Alliance](#) (US) and [Profil Public](#) (France) in the Symposium, organisations outside government such as think tanks and start-ups in the ‘Govtech’ space can be engaged by the public sector as partners in recruiting the civil service of the future. For example, the Volcker Alliance has demonstrated the value of building relationships with university career departments as a way to access talent. *Profil Public* is working on co-creating engaging content to improve the image of the public sector. Engaging with these and other types of organisations will require vision, storytelling and trust on the part of public sector hiring managers.
4. **Candidates and employers often want the same things – the challenge is how to innovate to achieve this.** In many OECD countries, the legal framework governing recruitment to the civil service is relatively rigid. While this may discourage whole-scale experimentation with recruitment processes and overhauling job categories, it means that the onus is on managers and leaders to identify where they have ‘room for manoeuvre’ in tweaking, adjusting or amending existing processes and procedures – and in developing their own capacity as managers and developers of talent.
5. **There is little consensus on what precise skills will be needed in the future, but it is already clear that some manual tasks and roles will disappear.** The challenge for public services is to upskill and re-train existing staff in those categories of at-risk jobs in order to reduce the pressure on recruitment processes to fill the gaps. This implies gathering data and making it accessible and relevant to decision-makers and, where appropriate, the public. Initial work has begun in some Member countries (e.g. Israel) on mapping professions most at risk from automation and on developing strategies to anticipate change better and plan accordingly by training or alternative employment options.
6. **There is no ‘magic bullet’ for what attracts candidates.** Going beyond stereotypes related to particular groups (“Millennials all want \_\_\_”, for example) requires more data and better use of data. Greater engagement with unions, informal staff associations, staff, themselves at all levels and prospective candidates using tools such as focus groups, employee surveys, exit interviews, etc. can provide valuable insights. These insights should be shared and used as a basis to design pragmatic and flexible solutions for different groups of staff related to work-life balance (e.g. flexible working arrangements) and career development (e.g. relevant and accessible learning and development modules).
7. **User-centred design is important, but seen to be missing across many countries – at least systematically.** Delegates noted that re-designing or scaling up employer branding efforts is important to reach target demographics, especially ones with skills that are in high demand. But although isolated examples of good practice exist in their administration, there was broad agreement that a path forward is a greater emphasis on identifying and integrating the needs of the users – i.e. job candidates – to the recruitment process.
8. **Differentiation of message is important.** The public sector across the OECD has many aspects likely to appeal to talented candidates. But it often fails to convey those messages effectively and to tailor messages to different audiences, e.g. students vs. mid-career or experienced professionals. This implies a need to develop a focus on what aspects of the total employment offer are most likely to appeal to different groups, and highlighting those elements visibly in communication campaigns.

9. **Recruitment is not only the job of the Human Resources Department.** In the context of the Future of Work, line managers will have increasing responsibility for identifying, recruiting and developing talent. The role of Human Resource departments will be to streamline and in some cases automate processes to create more time for high-value actions and initiatives related to talent management.
10. **Political leaders and senior civil servants should be aligned in their efforts to ensure a flexible, competent workforce.** The political-executive interface is the driver for change across the OECD, with political will a catalyst for reform and improvement. Senior Civil Servants should be supported and enabled to ‘speak truth to power’ and lobby effectively for the necessary change.

**Key questions that emerged:**

- *How can PGC delegates ensure that strategic human resource management (SHRM) is a priority for leaders and senior civil servants?*
- *How can the public sector learn from other sectors (e.g. the start-up sector) more adept at appealing to candidate values and intrinsic motivations?*
- *How can public sector employers draw on user insights to generate actionable feedback? Who needs to be included in this group – candidates, existing staff, managers, etc.?*
- *How can individual Ministries and departments develop their own ‘brand’ and offer while ensuring consistent messaging across government?*
- *How can the public sector provide greater discretion to managers to bring in the talent they need while still respecting the integrity of the recruitment process?*

*Next steps*

The Symposium will inform discussions at the next meeting of the Working Party on Public Employment and Management (PEM) in May 2020. The Symposium highlighted in particular the desire among countries to learn from each other, and the PEM will look to take this forward through a pilot series of webinars in 2020 focussing on examples of good practice. This will also align with the work of the PEM on the Future of Work. There are three broad components to this work.

First, as evidenced in the Symposium, more and better data is essential to understanding the changes to the public sector work, workforce and workplace. As such, the PEM will revise the scope and shape of its data collection instruments. This purpose is to update the questions, themes and modules in order to develop a more precise understanding and baseline across a range of SHRM topics, including recruitment, in line with principles of the PSLC Recommendation.

Second, the PEM will work on developing a range of options for countries to dig deeper into the topics raised during the Symposium and implement the principles of the PSLC Recommendation. This will include a toolkit and a series of case studies on specific examples of good practice in leadership development, learning and development strategies, employee engagement, employer branding, and recruitment systems.

Finally, the Secretariat will continue to support PGC and PEM delegates to ensure they are actively planning and developing their public workforces to meet the needs of today and the future. The next PEM meeting will provide a platform for rich and deep exchange, and the Secretariat stands ready to accompany specific country initiatives with tailor-made analysis and collaborative system (re)design.