

Finance and Personnel

INTRODUCTION

The directorate has four parts – the Personnel Office, the Finance Office, the Recruitment Office and the Registry. The overall purpose of the directorate is to provide personnel support for Members and the Secretariat from recruitment to pensions including financial and accounting systems and the provision of stationery, filing systems and reprographic services.

Personnel Office

FUNCTION

The purpose of the Personnel Office is to provide a high-quality, customer-focused service which concentrates on the development, implementation and administration of a wide range of personnel functions on behalf of Assembly Members, their support staff and staff working throughout the Assembly Secretariat.

The Personnel Office provides a wide range of services to its customers including the payment of salaries to Secretariat staff and Members. The Personnel Office is also responsible for administering the Members' pension scheme for MLAs as well as the principal civil service pension scheme for members of the Secretariat staff.

The Personnel Office also provides a service for Members in that it pays salaries to their support staff on their behalf out of their office costs allowance. It also transfers appropriate contributions to independent pension providers in respect of personal pension plans arranged by individual members of the support staff.

As well as salary and pension payments for the Secretariat staff and so forth, the Personnel Office is responsible for the development and implementation of a wide range of personnel

policies arising from terms and conditions of employment. These policies include such matters as staff appraisal, probationary monitoring and reporting; the provision of equal opportunities advice and guidance in line with the Assembly's equal opportunities policy; the administration and maintenance of further education and external training provisions; the monitoring of sick absence and subsequent inefficiency action where appropriate; dealing with unacceptable conduct and behaviour and the application of appropriate disciplinary procedures. The Personnel Office is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Assembly's childcare scheme and the provision of the Assembly's travel service. It is also responsible for the ongoing identification and provision of training for Secretariat staff including the development and delivery of the Assembly induction programme.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD

1 APRIL 2002 TO 31 MARCH 2003

To continue to deliver the services required to Assembly Members and Secretariat staff and so forth, a number of priority tasks were identified within the Personnel Office business plan for the period up to the end of March 2003. These tasks included the development and implementation of an Assembly equal opportunities policy, the identification of training needs for all Secretariat staff, the development of a facilities agreement between management and trade union side, the development of a staff handbook detailing terms and conditions appropriate to the business of the Assembly and a review of the pay and grading structure for Assembly Secretariat staff.

All of these tasks were completed during the period of this report.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2003-04

- To ensure the smooth transition of the service provided by the Personnel Office from the current Assembly to its successor following the next Assembly election;
- The delivery of training to Secretariat staff as identified by the training needs analysis;
- The development and implementation of Assembly terms and conditions and the production of a staff handbook; and
- The development of an Assembly pay and grading structure.

Finance Office**FUNCTION**

The purpose of the Finance Office is to obtain for the Assembly the resources it needs; to approve and control the use of funds made available; to maintain proper accounts of the Assembly's financial activities; and to promote effectiveness and efficiency in all the Assembly's operations.

The Finance Office is responsible for the payment of allowances to Members and Secretariat staff and the reimbursement of all legitimate creditors. All payments must be made within a 30-day limit, though the office strives for a much shorter timescale. The office provides support and advice to Members, directorates and Assembly staff on all financial matters. To help with financial control, directors and budget holders are supplied with regular information on expenditure within their areas of responsibility.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD**1 APRIL 2002 TO 31 MARCH 2003**

The main challenge during the period was to implement a new payment and financial management system within the Assembly. The system was successfully implemented, including the introduction of resource accounting. Some progress has also been made with resource budgeting.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2003-04

- Delivery of high-quality services to Members, the Commission and the Assembly Secretariat;
- Provision of support and guidance to new and returning Members following the elections; and
- Continued upgrade of financial systems focusing on the introduction of online procurement services.

Recruitment Office**FUNCTION**

The Commission, in taking forward this very substantial recruitment programme, has developed comprehensive recruitment procedures, which are based on the merit principle and are delivered through competence-based assessment. All positions within the Assembly are advertised in the *Belfast Telegraph*, the *Irish News* and the *News Letter* and for the more senior appointments advertisements are also placed in the *Irish Times*, *The Times* and relevant specialist publications.

During the period of this report, 19 separate recruitment competitions have been organised covering a wide range of posts including the Clerk to the Commission, Head of Internal Review, Senior Procurement Officer, Deputy Editor of Debates, Education Officer, Assembly Clerk, Assistant Clerk/Office Manager and Research Officer.

From the 1,186 applications received, 71 appointments were made. Analysis shows that of the 71 people appointed by the Commission, 38% are drawn from the Northern Ireland Civil Service, with 62% coming from a range of employment backgrounds, including the community, voluntary and private sectors. Further analysis indicates that 27 appointments are from the Catholic community, 42 from the Protestant community and two appointments are classed as 'not determined'. The gender breakdown of people appointed to the Assembly is 31 male, 40 female.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2002 TO 31 MARCH 2003

To meet the Commission's requirements, the Re-cruitment Office has developed, implemented and managed an effective staffing and recruitment strategy. The Recruitment Office has developed a range of documented assessment and selection processes in accordance with fair and open competition. All recruitment policies and procedures adopted by the Commission are, of course, also consistent with current employment law.

During the period of this report, 19 recruitment competitions were organised on behalf of the Commission for a varied range of posts from Clerk to the Commission to clerical supervisors and clerical officers in Payroll and Finance.

During the period April 2002 to March 2003, 3,627 application forms were issued in response to the advertisements, 1,186 applications were processed and 71 appointments made.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2003-04

The Recruitment Office of the Northern Ireland Assembly was fully established during 2002-03, and staff are now trained in all areas of assessment and selection, fair and open competition and equality matters. That training will continue into the year 2003-04 and beyond to ensure that Recruitment Office staff keep up to date with all fair employment legislation and employment law so as the Assembly Commission can continue to ensure the fair and equal treatment of all applicants.

Once suspension is removed, it is the Recruitment Office's plan to continue to:

- Proceed with seven competitions that had been advertised but have yet to be interviewed; and
- Proceed with 12 competitions that were interviewed but from which appointments are still to be made.

The Recruitment Office also has plans to advertise a further 26 competitions. Posts to be filled range from director posts through to heads of divisions through to information technology, secretarial/ typist, information and security-related posts.

Additionally, as vacancies in the Assembly Secretariat are currently all filled through open competition, further posts will be advertised which have arisen, and will continue to arise, through natural wastage.

Registry

FUNCTION

The purpose of the Registry Office is to provide office stationery and so forth, to look after postal arrangements for outgoing mail, especially for Members, to ensure that reprographic services are serviced and working, and to provide a filing system for the Assembly Secretariat.

ACTIVITIES DURING THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2002 TO 31 MARCH 2003

During the past year, arrangements were put in place to use the Government Purchasing Agency's EROS computerised ordering system to order stationery from contracted suppliers.

A stock-level control system has been set up within the Registry Office, and separate stationery ordering systems have been introduced for Members, parties and constituency offices. More efficient arrangements were also put in place for delivering stationery to constituency offices.

A computerised file record system for the Assembly was also developed and put in place following guidelines laid down by the Public Record Office.

During the year an efficient file storage system was developed and is now fully operational within the Stationery Office.

The staff newsletter, *Assembly Lines*, continues to be published and issued on a quarterly basis.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2003-04

- To ensure the smooth transition of the services provided by Registry from the present Assembly to its successor following the next Assembly elections; and
- To develop a series of service standards to meet the ongoing needs of customers.