



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **IMPROVING THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE HIRING PROCESS**

**Report of the Standing Committee on Government  
Operations and Estimates**

**Tom Lukiwski, Chair**

**JUNE 2019  
42<sup>nd</sup> PARLIAMENT, 1<sup>st</sup> SESSION**

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Chair**

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## **NOTICE TO READER**

### **Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons**

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES**

has the honour to present its

## **SEVENTEENTH REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(c), the Committee has studied the hiring process in the public service and has agreed to report the following:



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## SUMMARY

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In the fall of 2018, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates (the Committee) initiated a study of the federal public service hiring process. The Committee held three meetings, received one brief, and heard 16 witnesses over the course of its study.

This report provides information on the composition of the public service, including its diversity. It explains the policy regime under which managers and human resources specialists hire employees, as well as the existing recourse mechanisms for staffing complaints. Finally, it discusses some of the challenges of the federal public service hiring process and offers recommendations on how it could be improved.

The Committee identified four main challenges with the federal public service hiring process:

- managers do not use recruitment programs for students and graduates effectively;
- pools of qualified candidates are not always used to their full potential;
- public service positions are often not advertised externally and are, therefore, often limited to existing public service employees, which limits the federal government's ability to attract new talent; and
- hiring processes are often extremely lengthy.

The Committee makes seven recommendations in the report. Four of the recommendations address the above-mentioned challenges by proposing:

- the development of initiatives to recruit recent graduates, and the promotion and advertisement of recruitment programs for students and graduates to public service managers and the public (Recommendation 2);
- the creation of a database of qualified candidates that is available to all departments and agencies for as long as is necessary (Recommendation 5);
- the improvement of screening and hiring tools and the advertisement of all positions externally, while respecting the requirements of collective

agreements, as appropriate, so that the entire Canadian public can apply (Recommendation 6); and

- the identification of opportunities to reduce the length of the public service hiring process by at least 50%, and the collection and public dissemination of data in the Public Service Commission's annual report on the average number of days it takes to complete each hiring step (Recommendation 7).

# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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*As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.*

## **Recommendation 1**

**That, on a yearly basis, the Government of Canada publish disaggregated data on its workforce by employment equity groups (women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities), by employee type (indeterminate, term, casual, and student) and by position level, and conduct an intersectional analysis by gender. .... 13**

## **Recommendation 2**

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada develop, in collaboration with departments and agencies, initiatives to recruit recent graduates, and promote and advertise its recruitment programs for students and graduates to public service managers and the public..... 14**

## **Recommendation 3**

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada develop a standardized evaluation for hiring processes to be used by all departments and agencies, and that the results of those evaluations be made public..... 18**

## **Recommendation 4**

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada explore the feasibility of implementing an internal recourse mechanism in every department and agency through which employees can file complaints regarding hiring processes and ensure these mechanisms are consistent across the federal public service. .... 18**

## **Recommendation 5**

**That the Government of Canada create a database of qualified candidates accessible to all departments and agencies and that it allow access to that database to be extended as often as necessary..... 27**

**Recommendation 6**

**That the Government of Canada improve its screening and hiring tools and advertise all positions externally, while respecting the requirements of collective agreements, as appropriate, so that the entire Canadian public can apply..... 27**

**Recommendation 7**

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada, in collaboration with departments and agencies, identify opportunities to reduce the length of the public service hiring process by at least 50%, and that the Public Service Commission of Canada collect and publicly disseminate data in its annual report on the average number of days it takes to complete each hiring step..... 27**



# IMPROVING THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE HIRING PROCESS

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## INTRODUCTION

*“Canadians rely on public services every day to make their lives safer, healthier and more prosperous.”*

Debi Daviau, President,  
Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, 4 October 2018

After two briefings on the public service hiring process, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates (the Committee) adopted a [motion](#) on 4 October 2018 to undertake a study relating to that process.

Between September 2018 and April 2019, the Committee held three meetings, received one brief, and heard from 16 witnesses, including federal officials from the Public Service Commission of Canada (PSC) and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS), representatives from public service unions, and representatives from the private sector, as well as one academic. The full list of witnesses is available in Appendices A and B and the list of briefs is available in Appendix C.

## A SNAPSHOT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

*“Greater diversity and inclusion have been linked to better results for organizations, including higher productivity, lower turnover, better decision-making informed by diverse perspectives and enhanced overall performance and results.”*

Jean-François Fleury, Assistant Deputy Minister, Governance,  
Planning and Policy Sector, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer,  
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 1 April 2019

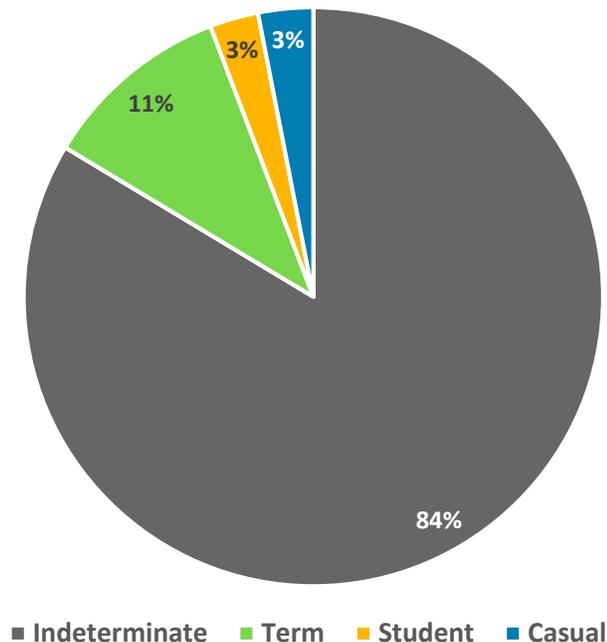
According to [GC Infobase](#), as of 31 March 2018 the federal public service had a total of 273,571 employees, over 40% of whom were employed in the National Capital Region.



The total federal workforce has consistently increased since 2015, when the public service had 16,500 fewer employees.

Most federal employees are assigned permanent (or indeterminate) positions; in 2018, permanent employees accounted for 84% of all federal employees, down from 87% in 2014 (the earliest year for which data are available). As presented in Figure 1, term employees account for 11% of the federal public service, while students and casual employees each represent another 3%.<sup>1</sup> [Chris Aylward](#), National President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, told the Committee that “over the last several years, the majority of new hires are precarious workers. They’re terms. They’re casuals.”

**Figure 1—Federal Public Service by Employee Type, 2018**



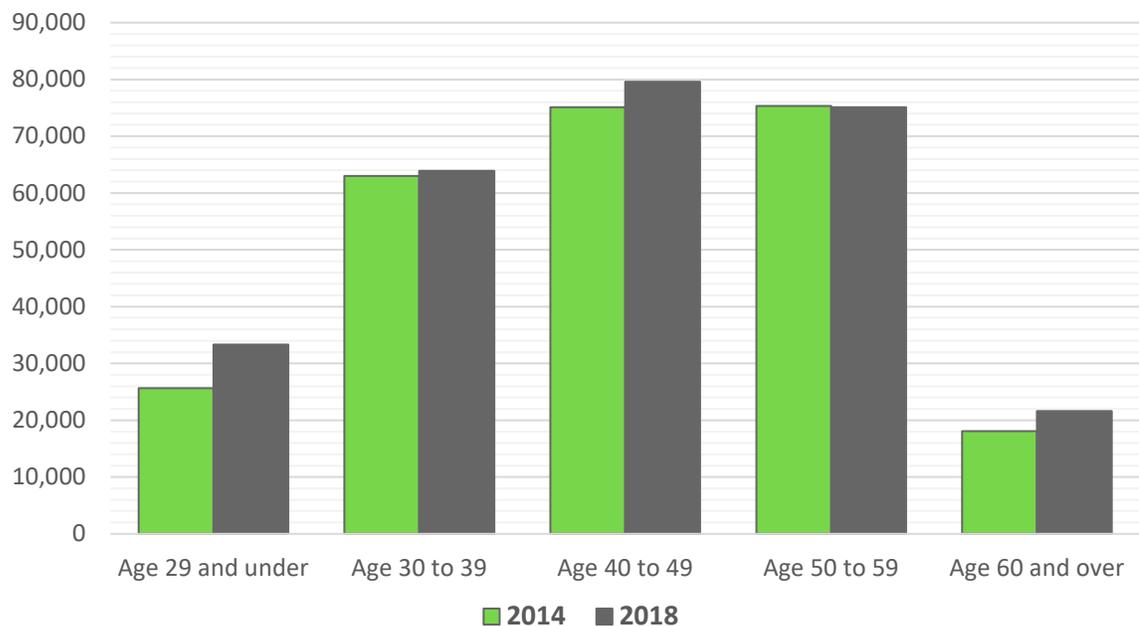
Source: Figure prepared using data obtained from Government of Canada, [GC Infobase](#).

In 2018, the average age of a public service employee was 45. As presented in Figure 2, most public service employees were in the 40 to 49 and 50 to 59 age groups in 2014 and 2018. However, 2017 was the first year since 2014 when there were more employees in

1 For types of employees, indeterminate “refers to employment for an indefinite length of time,” term “refers to employment for a fixed length of time,” casual “refers to employment for a maximum of 90 days per calendar year in a given department or agency,” and student “refers to employment through one of the student employment programs.” Public Service Commission of Canada, [Building Tomorrow’s Public Service Today: Annual Report 2017–18](#), p. 21.

the 40 to 49 age group than in the 50 to 59 age group — a trend that continued in 2018. Recognizing that many public service employees are approaching retirement and that millennials are underrepresented in the public service (21–22%) compared with their representation in the overall labour force (34%), [Patrick Borbey](#), President of PSC, pointed out that 55% of the new employees hired in 2017–2018 were under 35 years of age and that some recruitment programs target millennials.

**Figure 2—Federal Public Service Employee by Age Group, 2014 and 2018**



Source: Figure prepared using data obtained from Government of Canada, [GC Infobase](#).

In terms of first official language, the proportion of English-speaking employees compared to French-speaking employees has remained relatively constant from 2014 to 2018. In 2018, 70% of public service employees identified English as their first official language, while the remaining 30% identified French as their first official language. Women represented the majority of public service employees (55%) during the same period.

## Diversity

On the subject of diversity, [Mr. Borbey](#) said that the federal government is not only the biggest employer in the country, but also the most diverse. [Carl Trottier](#), Assistant Deputy Minister, Governance, Planning and Policy Sector, Office of the Chief Human



Resources Officer, TBS, explained that Canada’s demographics are changing. Immigrants account for two-thirds of the population and their numbers are expected to grow in the next two decades, while youth represent almost one quarter. In addition, the Indigenous population is projected to grow at twice the rate of the general population. Mr. Trottier emphasized, therefore, that the public service has to keep pace with these changes in the general population.

The federal government has developed initiatives to increase diversity within the public service. [Mr. Trottier](#) explained that this work is “based on the recommendations that came out of the joint task force, as well as other reports that were tabled recently, such as the collaboration circle for federal Indigenous representation and the report on diversity and inclusion in the public service.” [He](#) said that the 2018 federal budget proposed the creation of the Public Service Centre on Diversity, Inclusion and Wellness, whose goal is “to support departments and agencies in creating safe, healthy, diverse and inclusive workplaces.” He added that TBS has been working on increasing diversity and inclusion in the public service through the development of a diversity and inclusion strategy and a multi-year action plan that includes targeted recruitment efforts.

Under the [Employment Equity Act](#), there are four employment equity designated groups: women, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities. [Mr. Trottier](#) explained that even if the public service is representative in each of the four designated groups, there are gaps in certain occupational groups and levels such as women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and Indigenous people in executive positions. He argued that targeted recruitment and the elimination of barriers in areas where representation gaps exist improve diversity and inclusion in the public service. As an example, he cited summer employment opportunities for Indigenous students and for post-secondary students with disabilities.

[Jane Stinson](#), Research Associate at the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, shared the results of her research about the number of women in non-permanent positions in the public service from 2005 to 2014. She indicated that during that period, “the number of women in non-permanent positions has grown steadily in the federal public service,” while “the number of permanent positions for all women fell by about 6%.” She added that “[Indigenous] women, racialized women, disabled women, and able-bodied white women have all experienced an increase in non-permanent or precarious employment during this time, some groups more than others.” According to her research, the number of racialized women in precarious employment grew the most, by 21%, from 2005 to 2014. She recommended that the federal government put more effort into reporting and monitoring its employment data to better understand the changes occurring in its workforce. To that

end, she suggested the Government of Canada expand its data reporting to include additional subcategories, so that intersectional analyses can be more easily conducted.<sup>2</sup>

During her testimony, [Ms. Stinson](#) explained that she used “special data runs from the public service employment survey.” According to the [Government of Canada](#), all employees in participating core public administration departments and separate agencies are eligible to participate in the survey. “These include indeterminate, term, seasonal, casual and student employees, as well as Governor in Council appointees. Ministers’ exempt staff, private sector contractors or consultants, and employees on leave without pay were not eligible,” a Government of Canada summary of the survey’s results explains.

An important feature of the survey is that it is not mandatory — employees are given the choice to participate. In 2014, 182,165 employees (71.4%) responded out of over 250,000 employees to whom the survey was sent.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, some variables are self-reported (i.e., gender, members of employment equity designated groups, employee status, position levels, years of service, etc.).

The Government of Canada publishes data on employment equity designated groups in the federal public service. However, the latest data available is for the year 2014.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 presents the distribution of equity designated groups in the federal public service in 2014 by type of employment and gender. As shown in the table, most women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities were indeterminate employees, rather than term or seasonal employees. However, among the four employment equity groups, women accounted for a larger proportion of term employees than their male counterparts, while men in the four employment equity groups accounted for a larger proportion of employees in seasonal positions.

While the rate of precarious employment for women was 14.2% higher than for men, for visible minorities— the demographic with the highest rate of precarious employment— the rate for women was 21.2% higher. Overall, the 2014 data on the distribution of equity designated groups in the federal public service by type of employment and gender do not suggest that women in the four equity designated groups have a high rate

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2 According to the [Government of Canada](#), intersectionality “examines how sex and gender intersect with other identities such as: race ethnicity, religion, age and mental or physical disability.”

3 Government of Canada, [2014 Public Service Employee Survey – Summary Report](#).

4 Government of Canada, [Employment Equity in the Public Service of Canada](#).



of non-permanent and precarious employment in the public service. Given that these data are now over five-years-old, it is not clear whether these trends persist.

**Table 1—Distribution of Equity Designated Groups in the Federal Public Service by Type of Employment and Gender, 2014**

	Gender	Indeterminate	Term	Seasonal	Total	Precarious Employment (%)
Public Service	Women	92,287	5,649	142	<b>98,078</b>	5.9
Public Service	Men	78,973	3,899	406	<b>83,278</b>	5.2
Public Service	<b>Total</b>	<b>171,260</b>	<b>9,548</b>	<b>548</b>	<b>181,356</b>	<b>5.6</b>
Indigenous People	Women	5,225	319	18	<b>5,562</b>	6.1
Indigenous People	Men	3,514	134	29	<b>3,677</b>	4.4
Indigenous People	<b>Total</b>	<b>8,739</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>9,239</b>	<b>5.4</b>
Persons with Disabilities	Women	5,158	196	11	<b>5,365</b>	3.9
Persons with Disabilities	Men	4,850	162	13	<b>5,025</b>	3.5
Persons with Disabilities	<b>Total</b>	<b>10,008</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10,390</b>	<b>3.7</b>
Members of Visible Minorities	Women	12,032	1,017	4	<b>13,053</b>	7.8
Members of Visible Minorities	Men	10,165	690	11	<b>10,866</b>	6.5
Members of Visible Minorities	<b>Total</b>	<b>22,197</b>	<b>1,707</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23,919</b>	<b>7.2</b>

Source: Table prepared using data obtained from Government of Canada, “Distribution of Designated Groups in the Public Service of Canada by Type of Employment and Gender,” [Employment Equity in the Public Service of Canada](#).

## Recruitment Programs

There are five recruitment programs available to managers in the public service.<sup>5</sup> The first three are for the recruitment of students, while the last two are for graduates and are considered targeted recruitment:

- [Federal Student Work Experience Program](#) (FSWEP), which targets full-time secondary and post-secondary students for full-time and part-time positions;
- [Post-Secondary Co-Operative Education and Internship Program](#), which offers full-time positions to full-time post-secondary students;
- [Research Affiliate Program](#), which is for hiring full-time post-secondary students to conduct research related to their degree program for the duration of their studies;
- [Post-Secondary Recruitment](#) (PSR), which targets graduates from colleges and universities for entry to mid-level positions; and
- [Recruitment of Policy Leaders](#) (RPL), which targets and recruits graduates into the federal public service. It takes into account candidates' advanced educational and professional qualifications to recruit policy analysts for higher levels of responsibility. In 2017–2018, 21 people out of 1,500 applicants were hired through this recruitment program as reported by [Mr. Borbey](#).

[Mr. Borbey](#) explained that in 2017–2018 almost 13,000 students were hired in the public service through the three student recruitment programs, and that FSWEP accounted for more than half of the hires. FSWEP includes four targeted inventories to ensure that the public service reflects the Canadian population:

- the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity, through which 186 Indigenous students were hired in 2017–2018;
- the Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities (formerly known as Youth Accessibility Summer Employment Opportunity), through which 61 students with disabilities found employment in 2017–2018;

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5 Public Service Commission of Canada, [Recruitment Options for Managers](#).



- the Canadian Armed Forces Reservist Student Employment Opportunity;  
and
- the Young Women in Public Safety Internship Program.

[Mr. Borbey](#) said efforts have been made to increase the number of women in STEM fields and highlighted the creation, in 2018, of an inventory for pre-assessed candidates for computer science positions in which 30% of the applicants were women and for which PSC asked managers to consider women first as an employment equity group.

However, [Mr. Borbey](#) added that in 2017–2018 only a small proportion of PSR applicants were hired — 711 out of 4,300 qualified candidates for the five career streams based on needs identified in consultation with departments and agencies. To increase managers' use of these recruitment programs, he suggested that PSC raise awareness among managers about the advantages of these programs.

Some programs are designed to recruit people with specific technical experience. These, [Mr. Trottier](#) explained, include the Interchange Canada program, which facilitates temporary assignments of individuals in and out of the core public administration, Canada's Free Agents program,<sup>6</sup> and the Privy Council Office's fellowship program. According to him, these programs "and other innovative recruitment initiatives help fast-track the ability to bring in or mobilize new talent as we work in partnership with departments and the Public Service Commission to increase talent access."

Lastly, a few witnesses discussed training and support for new employees. [Mr. Fleury](#) explained the importance of supporting new employees and that both the Canada School of Public Service and individual departments and agencies play a role in that regard. The Canada School of Public Service provides orientation training to all new public service employees that offers foundational learning on values and ethics and explains the way the public service operates, while departments and agencies give specialized departmental orientation and establish performance agreements and learning plans. [Mr. Trottier](#) underscored the importance of ensuring that "effective support tools and practices are in place to support onboarding and capacity for new recruits, including talent management, learning plans and the development of career management tools." He added that "[f]urther work is needed with respect to

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6 Canada's Free Agents is a "cloud-based staffing model in order to reduce barriers to matching talent to business needs. As free agents, these public servants have the freedom to choose projects and assignments that match their skills and interests, and are available for rapid deployment across the entire federal government. As of March 2018, three departments are hosting free agent programs." Government of Canada, [Public Service Renewal](#).

engagement of stakeholders outside the government, such as community organizations, professional associations, universities, colleges, technical schools and private sector leaders in talent acquisition.”

## Committee Observations and Recommendations

The Committee believes that the public service should represent the Canadian population and its diversity and recognizes that the federal government has been moving in the right direction in that regard. However, it encourages the Government of Canada to develop initiatives and programs to attract and hire more women in certain fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, more people with disabilities, more Indigenous people, and more members of visible minorities. Moreover, these people should not be hired solely for entry-level positions.

The Committee believes that Canadians should have access to disaggregated data on the public service by employment equity groups (i.e., women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities) so that intersectional analyses can be more easily conducted. It also encourages the Government of Canada to conduct, on a yearly basis, an intersectional analysis of its workforce by employee type (i.e., indeterminate, term, casual, and student) and position level.

During the course of the study, the Committee was reminded of the need to recruit recent graduates. Committee members were surprised to learn that only a small proportion of qualified post-secondary applicants were actually hired by departments and agencies through recruitment programs. The Committee therefore encourages the Public Service Commission of Canada to work with departments and agencies to increase the number of younger employees among its ranks and to promote and advertise its recruitment programs for students and graduates to managers so that a higher number of qualified applicants are hired.

Consequently, the Committee recommends:

### Recommendation 1

**That, on a yearly basis, the Government of Canada publish disaggregated data on its workforce by employment equity groups (women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities), by employee type (indeterminate, term, casual, and student) and by position level, and conduct an intersectional analysis by gender.**



## Recommendation 2

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada develop, in collaboration with departments and agencies, initiatives to recruit recent graduates, and to promote and advertise its recruitment programs for students and graduates to public service managers and the public.**

## HIRING POLICY REGIME

*“Canada’s public service is built on the foundation of merit and non-partisanship. I am proud that the Public Service Commission has been safeguarding these two principles for over 110 years now.”*

Patrick Borbey, President,  
Public Service Commission of Canada, 20 September 2018

PSC has the authority, under the Public Service Employment Act (PSEA), to make appointments, or hire employees, to and within the public service. However, PSC has delegated many of its appointment authorities to deputy heads of departments and agencies<sup>7</sup> who can, in turn, sub-delegate that authority under certain circumstances.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Borbey explained that federal departments and agencies operate under a delegated model where deputy heads are responsible for the hiring practices within their departments. He added that deputy heads “have a great deal of flexibility when it comes to how employees are hired.” The role of PSC is to oversee the overall staffing process and to develop programs and initiatives for the entire public service, including post-secondary recruitment.

According to PSC’s Appointment Delegation and Accountability Instrument, which was revised on 1 April 2016 along with PSC’S Appointment Policy, deputy heads can make appointments only to and within their organization, and must adhere to the terms and conditions established by PSC. The objective of the Appointment Policy is that “[a]ppointments to and within the public service shall be based on merit and free from political influence.” Its expected results are the following:

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7 Government of Canada, Appointment Framework.

8 Government of Canada, Appointment Delegation and Accountability Instrument.

- a nonpartisan and representative workforce of individuals drawn from across the country, benefitting from the diversity, linguistic duality and range of backgrounds and skills of Canadians;
- appointment processes designed so as not to discriminate or create systemic barriers;
- appointment processes conducted in a fair and transparent manner and in good faith;
- appointments of highly competent persons who meet the needs of the organization; and
- timely correction of errors and omissions.

Under the PSEA and the [Public Service Employment Regulations](#), the candidacy of a person who has a priority right is considered before all others. Various levels of priority are subject to an order of precedence. A person with a priority right to appointment and the essential qualifications for the job will be hired. In 2015, the [Veterans Hiring Act](#) added a statutory priority entitlement right that takes precedence above all others: members of the Canadian Armed Forces released for medical reasons that are attributable to their military service.<sup>9</sup>

In response to a question, [Mr. Borbey](#) explained that PSC consults union representatives through the Public Service Commission of Canada Joint Advisory Council and adjusts its pilot projects, initiatives, and strategies — based on their comments — before implementing them. However, several union representatives said that the Public Service Commission of Canada Joint Advisory Council offers limited opportunities to provide feedback on policies and initiatives. [Debi Daviau](#), President of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, noted that “opportunities to actually submit ideas for improvements are rare. Moreover, it’s the Public Service Commission of Canada reporting on their initiatives. It’s more of a reporting than it is an opportunity for us to get into a meaningful exchange.” Lastly, [Mr. Aylward](#) indicated that, based on his six years of experience sitting on the Public Service Commission of Canada Joint Advisory Council, its effectiveness should be questioned.

[Mr. Borbey](#) told the Committee that in 2016, PSC reduced the departments and agencies’ staffing-related administrative burden with the introduction of a new direction in staffing, which decreased the number of staffing policies from 12 to one.

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9 The full list of people with priority rights is available in the [Legislative Summary of Bill C-27](#), p. 2.



Furthermore, PSC encouraged departments and agencies to simplify their job advertising. [Mr. Borbey](#) shared that pilot projects were developed to use plain language in job advertising, but that work remains to be done as some managers tend to include several selection criteria to reduce the number of candidates they have to evaluate.

The Committee was informed by [Mr. Aylward](#) that, under the new direction in staffing, departments and agencies have to self-audit their staffing processes, but several do not have the necessary resources. He suggested that self-auditing results be shared with unions and that the PSEA be changed to include provisions on staffing in collective agreements, which he believes would accelerate staffing processes through the addition of parameters and timeframes. This suggestion was supported by [Dany Richard](#), President of the Association of Canadian Financial Officers.

According to [Mr. Aylward](#), the delegated model used for hiring in the public service can create “serious accountability issues” that could lead to arbitrary staffing decisions and the appearance of favouritism. [He](#) advocated for a centralized model under which PSC would be responsible for all hiring. [He](#) also proposed that PSC increase centralized staffing oversight to conduct more audits and studies on staffing morale and the speed of staffing processes. [Greg Phillips](#), President of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, was in favour of this suggestion and encouraged the federal government to increase funding for more regular auditing of all departments.

[Mr. Phillips](#) suggested that changes to the PSEA and the introduction of new staffing policies be made following proper consultation with bargaining agents. In his view, this kind of consultation would result in better outcomes, harmonious labour relations, and effective joint problem-solving.

## Recourse Mechanisms

The Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board (PSLREB) was created on 1 November 2014 to administer the collective bargaining and grievance adjudication systems for the federal public sector and parliamentary employees. The PSLREB “is also responsible for resolving staffing complaints under the [PSEA] related to internal appointments and layoffs in the federal public service.”<sup>10</sup>

[Mr. Aylward](#) remarked that complaints to the PSLREB can be made under only very limited circumstances, such as “[when] candidates are not appointed as a result of abuses of authority in determining merit, in choosing between an advertised and non-

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10 Government of Canada, [Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board](#).

advertised internal appointment process, or in not assessing candidates in their official language of choice.” In his opinion, the PSLREB is more legalistic, cumbersome and intimidating than the previous system of appeal boards. He added that remedies under the PSLREB are limited. [Ms. Daviau](#) criticized the timeliness of the PSLREB hearings while mentioning that it takes more than 24 months to be heard and decisions take an additional six to 12 months to be rendered.

[Mr. Aylward](#) further commented that the *Public Service Employment Act*, which came into force in 2003, “encourages departments to create their own internal recourse mechanism, which results in a lack of consistency across the federal public service. The only informal recourse the Act requires is informal discussion.” He suggested empowering PSC with the ability to “demand that departments have clear and transparent mechanisms for working with unions and members on staffing issues.”

[Mr. Phillips](#) said that the staffing process is neither transparent nor easy to understand for employees. Moreover, according to him, employees do not trust recourse mechanisms and are fearful to speak up or file a complaint. [Mr. Richard](#) advocated for a “stronger whistle-blower protection act that actually allows people to speak up and say that this was an unfair treatment of their candidacy and they want someone to fix it.” [Mr. Phillips](#) explained that it is often unclear why a person has been screened out of a selection process and that when recourse mechanisms are used, especially informal discussion processes, questions from employees are often ignored and processes are frequently carried out in a hasty manner.

Finally, [Mr. Phillips](#) said that employees can only challenge decisions in staffing processes under very narrow circumstances, which leads to cynicism and the feeling that managers cannot be held accountable. He added that the recourse is minimal when a staffing decision is successfully challenged.

## **Committee Observations and Recommendations**

The Committee supports efforts made to reduce the administrative burden that departments and agencies face concerning hiring processes and encourages the Public Service Commission of Canada to help managers and human resources specialists use plain language in job advertising.

It encourages the Public Service Commission of Canada to improve its consultation mechanisms with public service union representatives, such as consultations through the Public Service Commission of Canada Joint Advisory Council, before implementing pilot projects, initiatives, and strategies related to hiring in the public service.



The Committee believes that hiring processes must be audited to identify areas of improvement and that the results of these evaluations should be made public. It is also of the opinion that, in addition to the Federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board, which hears formal staffing complaints, all departments and agencies must put in place internal recourse mechanisms for staffing complaints, and that those mechanisms must be consistent across the federal public service.

Consequently, the Committee recommends:

### **Recommendation 3**

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada develop a standardized evaluation for hiring processes to be used by all departments and agencies, and that the results of those evaluations be made public.**

### **Recommendation 4**

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada explore the feasibility of implementing an internal recourse mechanism in every department and agency through which employees can file complaints regarding hiring processes and ensure these mechanisms are consistent across the federal public service.**

## **OVERCOMING SOME CHALLENGES**

*“What we’re seeing right now is that people are going to private sector firms because they can make you an offer within a week. They’ll do an interview. They’ll like what they see, have a couple of tests, and there you go. You have a job.”*

Dany Richard, President,  
Association of Canadian Financial Officers, 4 October 2018

During the course of its study, the Committee heard about several challenges with the public service hiring process, including the staffing culture, issues related to fairness and favouritism, the length of the process, and the use of contract workers and consultants.

### **A More Innovative Staffing Culture**

Mr. Borbey told the Committee that over the years the public service staffing culture has become cumbersome. Although some progress has been made to simplify the staffing

process, he added, there is still room for improvement. Part of the problem, however, is that the human resources culture within the public service is risk-averse, focused on short-term needs, and “places too much emphasis on internal staffing rather than recruiting the best talent from wherever it may be.”

[Mr. Borbey](#) said that in an effort to modernize public service recruitment, PSC is developing a digital recruitment platform, which will:

- allow candidates’ information – education, qualifications, official language results, confirmation of security levels, and accommodation requirements, once submitted, to be used multiple times for similar positions;
- offer real-time regular feedback on the status of an application;
- provide hiring managers up-to-date labour market information to help inform their choice of recruitment strategies;
- provide access to state-of-the-art assessment tools such as unsupervised Internet testing;
- be inclusive and accessible by design.

[He](#) added that through user consultations PSC identified the need for a staffing system that managers could actively use to quickly create job descriptions for new positions based on common language pulled from an electronic system. In his view, that system should also include a feature that would allow deputy ministers to monitor the time it takes to complete each step of the hiring process and should notify them when the completion of a step has exceeded a predetermined timeframe.

[Mr. Borbey](#) also explained that PSC and departments are experimenting with other changes, such as improvements to the second-language evaluation process, the creation of an employee referral program, a talent cloud pilot project, and a free agent program. [He](#) also noted that departments and agencies are making progress towards a change in the human resources culture and are increasingly innovative when hiring. He highlighted the use of various strategies, such as on-the-spot offers at job fairs or creative job advertisements, and stressed that PSC is making efforts to modernize its recruitment programs through the transformation of the [GC Jobs](#) portal, where candidates can apply to available public service positions and partnerships with universities.



On the subject of on-the-spot job offers, [Véronique Gaudreau](#), Director General, Central Programs and Regional Offices at PSC, provided the example of a speed staffing event that took place at the Université de Montréal in March 2018 with six federal departments and which resulted in 32 graduate students being offered on-the-spot conditional job offers. [Mr. Borbey](#) said that all the hiring processes for this pilot project were completed within a month. [Stéphanie Poliquin](#), Vice-President, Services and Business Development at PSC, shared that this pilot project was also used at two other universities — York University and the Université de Moncton.

As a way to improve staffing in the public service and the quality of advice and assistance managers receive regarding hiring, [Mr. Phillips](#) suggested increasing funding for human resources advisors. He also argued that managers, in order to trim their budgets, should not be pressured into hiring employees for lower positions whom they then ask to perform tasks above their pay grade.

[Ms. Daviau](#) observed that there has been insufficient training offered to employees in the public service and that future skill requirements have not been identified. [Mr. Aylward](#) proposed that departments and agencies create staffing plans, complemented by career transition training and mentoring plans, before they begin staffing processes, and that they discuss these plans with union representatives.

Finally, many public service employees lack confidence in the federal pay system, creating obstacles for internal staffing efforts. According to [Mr. Phillips](#), public service employees are often not applying to positions because they fear that changing jobs will create problems with their pay in light of the widely reported complications with the federal pay system.

## Improving Fairness

[Mr. Aylward](#) felt that the public service hiring process lacks fairness and suffered from favouritism. He pointed to the PSC survey report, released in September 2018, [Staffing and Non-Partisanship Survey: Report on the Results for the Federal Public Service](#), which found that 32% of employees who responded to the survey felt that the selection process in their work unit was not conducted fairly and that 54% believed appointments in their work unit depended on who you know.

[Mr. Aylward](#) is also of the opinion that the [Public Service Modernization Act](#) (PSMA) replaced the concept of relative merit with one “that is less fair and more arbitrary” and is defined as “someone who meets the essential qualifications of the position and any additional qualifications or needs that might be considered by the organization currently

or in the future.” He added that the PSMA gave managers “the ability to make appointments, and defined merit based on individual managerial discretion,” which leads to potential for abuse and the appearance of abuse among public service employees. He suggested changing the definition of merit to include years of service, which, according to him, would accelerate staffing processes.

According to [Mr. Aylward](#), managers in the public service are inadequately trained to hire employees, which leads to favouritism. Furthermore, [Mr. Phillips](#) said that managers “are constantly looking for workarounds to the system in order to obtain their candidate of choice. This means that hiring decisions are often open to abuse, and the system becomes about who you know, rather than who is the best person for the job.”

[Mr. Aylward](#) and [Mr. Richard](#) also expressed concerns with non-advertised and acting processes. They explained that indeterminate positions do not have to be posted and hiring managers can simply decide that a particular person is the right fit for the position. Mr. Aylward added that managers are not obliged to choose candidates from the pools of qualified candidates they create after completing the hiring process. Moreover, [Mr. Phillips](#) raised concerns that labour pools often expire after a year unless a manager extends them. [Mr. Borbey](#) acknowledged that sometimes pools are not used properly and said that PSC is “providing guidance to departments [and agencies] on the appropriate use of pools.”

Finally, [Ms. Daviau](#) explained that due to the resources involved in creating pools of qualified candidates, departments and agencies are reluctant to share these pools with each other and feel “ownership over the pool they’ve created.” To address this, [she](#) proposed the creation of government-wide pools of qualified candidates accessible to departments and agencies. In her view, this would help standardize the hiring process throughout the public service. In the same vein, [Ms. Poliquin](#) proposed that candidates be fully assessed before they are placed into pools so that managers are able to hire them directly.

## Expanding Selection Requirements

[Mr. Borbey](#) informed the Committee that the Canadian public service differs from other jurisdictions because not all public service positions are automatically open to the public. He explained that because there are no policies governing the scope of job competitions in Canada, managers have complete discretion and the authority to determine if a position will be advertised internally or externally. [He](#) mentioned that Australia and New Zealand have implemented policies to open public service positions to the public and that the United Kingdom will soon do the same.



[Ms. Poliquin](#) agreed that managers tend to hire employees who already work for the public service and they often hire from their own organization. [Mr. Borbey](#) believed that more external hiring would likely increase the number of visible minorities employed in the public service because, on average, 30% to 35% of external applicants are members of visible minorities. However, [he](#) also recognized the need to modernize evaluative hiring tools to help managers deal with the large volume of candidates that would result from opening all competitions to the public.

In response to a question from a Committee member, [Michael Page](#), Government Lead, Talent Solutions at LinkedIn, commented that his organization, which is the largest professional network in Canada, helps some federal departments recruit despite the fact that it does not have a centralized relationship with the public service. [He](#) added that a formal relationship would ease collaboration and that his view is supported by feedback he receives from departments and agencies. [Mr. Borbey](#) explained that PSC has developed a relationship with LinkedIn, as it was one of the companies that responded to a request for information regarding the transformation of the GC Jobs portal.

[Mr. Borbey](#) explained that departments and agencies have the option of advertising job opportunities on LinkedIn and other social media, but that they must also post the job opportunities on the GC Jobs portal for a minimum of 24 hours to ensure that all Canadians can access them. Job opportunities can also be published in newspapers, and [Mr. Borbey](#) said that positions in the territories are advertised that way.

[Mr. Phillips](#) was concerned with the use of geographic areas as a criterion for hiring since it limits candidates based on where they live. He said that their use is often unbalanced and unfair, and appear to be chosen “to both ease the work requirement for the competitions—fewer applicants mean less work for the competition—as well as to minimize relocation expenditures.” He proposed that, unless there is a reasonable justification for limiting the job competition to a specific area, the qualifying geographic area should be as large as possible to attract the best candidates.

[Mr. Phillips](#) also indicated that an increasing number of positions are arbitrarily assigned higher language requirements without justification, which limits the number of candidates who can apply and hold positions in the public service, including individuals with priority rights such as veterans. Managers are directly impacted since finding qualified candidates becomes more challenging. Furthermore, Mr. Phillips said that second-language training for public service employees lacks funding. He encouraged the federal government to ensure that there are qualified candidates for the position and that funds are available for language training when the language requirement of a position becomes more stringent.

## Reducing the Length of the Hiring Process

The staffing process in the federal public service takes a long time to complete. This is due to a range of factors, which includes a less than nimble staffing culture within the public service and the large number of applicants. [Mr. Borbey](#) told the Committee in September 2018 that it takes, on average, close to 200 days to hire a new employee in the public service using an external advertised process. This length of time is measured from the time the position is posted on the GC Jobs portal to the day the new employee starts working, and encompasses all testing for the position, including second-language requirements and security clearances. Table 2 presents the average number of days it takes to complete each step in the hiring process in the federal public service. However, in the information provided to the Committee, Mr. Borbey mentioned that the duration of the staffing process varies widely by competition and that PSC is working on tracking the average number of days per step using the future digital recruitment platform.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, [Mr. Borbey](#) reported that the waiting period for scheduling second-language evaluations is 30 to 40 days and PSC is hopeful that a new approach to those evaluations would reduce that period significantly.

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11 Correspondence of the Public Service Commission of Canada with the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, 23 April 2019.



**Table 2—Estimated Average Duration of Each Step of the Federal Public Service Hiring Process**

Step	Number of days
Advertise position of the GC Jobs portal	7
Screen applications	49
Assess candidates (tests, interviews, references, etc.)	63
Assess second language	25
Conduct security clearance/check	49
Select candidate	4
Appoint candidate	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>

Source: Table prepared using data provided to the Committee by the Public Service Commission of Canada, 23 April 2019.

[Michael Morin](#), Acting Director General, Policy and Strategic Directions at PSC, explained that several factors contribute to the long wait times — among them, the process of ensuring that people with priority entitlements are fully considered. However, [Mr. Borbey](#) recognized that the process is more complex than what is measured, and that the average length of the process does not include human resources planning for resources and the selection of staffing tools by managers.

When he appeared before the Committee in April 2019, [Mr. Borbey](#) reported that the average number of days to hire new employees was reduced to 193.5 and that the average is 10 days shorter for internal hires than it is for external competitions. In contrast, [Mr. Page](#) indicated that the average length for hiring new employees in the private sector ranges between 50 and 90 days, with significant variations across organizations. He added that the hiring process for lower-level managers is as quick as 40 days in the private sector.

Recognizing that it takes too much time to hire new employees, [Mr. Borbey](#) said that he is personally seized with reducing the length of the process and that PSC is working on it.

In its departmental results framework, PSC committed to reducing the average length of hiring by 10%, which [Mr. Borbey](#) said could be cut much further, to “about half that amount of time.” [He](#) pointed out, however, that PSC has little direct control over the process and [added](#) that the fact that several stakeholders are involved in staffing makes it challenging to develop a strategy to speed up the process. [He](#) added that it is not easy to manage the large number of applications received by the federal public service. For example, he shared that 325,000 people had applied to public service positions in 2017.

[Mr. Borbey](#) explained that the average number of days it takes to hire new employees makes the hiring process a frustrating experience for a number of people, but especially for applicants. As a result, many strong candidates decide to work elsewhere and positions are not filled for long periods of time. According to him, this has an impact on the services Canadians obtain from the federal government. However, he pointed out that the length of time is much shorter for a number of hiring processes, such as public service employees doing lateral moves, candidates in inventories, students, non-advertised positions, and individuals with priority rights. He also gave the example of some departments that are able to hire external candidates in less than 100 days.

Union representatives criticized the length of the hiring process. [Ms. Daviau](#) indicated that the attempts made to shorten the hiring process, including the use of new platforms, electronic recruitment, and increased flexibility, have not resulted in significant improvements. [Mr. Phillips](#) commented that the public service staffing process is cumbersome and complex and that the PSMA has not increased the speed of hiring employees. He expressed concerns with the fact that due to the length of the federal staffing process, talented candidates often choose to work in the private sector. He and [Mr. Aylward](#) suggested increasing the human resources capacity of departments and agencies by hiring more employees and by offering hires competitive wages.

## **Relying Less on Contract Workers and Consultants**

Some union representatives told the Committee that because of the length of time it takes to hire employees, managers tend to rely on contract workers and consultants. [Mr. Aylward](#) provided the example of Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt in British Columbia where, due to the complexity of the hiring process, the base commander “has no other choice but to hire contract workers because he can’t hire public service fast enough.”

According to [Mr. Richard](#) and [Ms. Daviau](#), this practice is more costly, reduces productivity and morale, and lacks accountability. Furthermore, they indicated that it reduces the oversight role of Parliament since contract workers and consultants are not bound by the same ethics code as public service employees, their work is not always



subject to access to information requirements, and they are protected differently than public service employees under the whistle-blower protection regime. Mr. Richard added that the reliance on contract workers and consultants reduces investments made in the public service's internal capacity and has a negative impact on internal expertise. Finally, he suggested that contract workers and consultants "be made to abide by the same ethics and accountability rules as public servants."

[Ms. Daviau](#) told the Committee that the federal government spends an estimated \$12 billion every year on outsourced services. She indicated that there are no data or estimates on the number of outsourced workers in the federal public service, but that thousands of positions are contracted out for long periods of time while these workers are not protected under the PSEA. Staffing delays is one of the reasons the federal government relies so heavily on outsourcing, Ms. Daviau said. She indicated that, according to a PSC survey, more than 63% of managers surveyed are of the opinion that staffing is not quick enough.

To reduce the length of the hiring process and the reliance on contract workers and consultants, [Ms. Daviau](#) suggested that staff training and recruitment for new projects and initiatives be planned at the beginning of project development. She also encouraged the federal government to create skills inventories of employees and a mechanism for departments and agencies to have access to these employees in the short and long term.

According to [Ms. Stinson](#), there is a financial incentive within the public service to create temporary and precarious positions, as the salaries for these positions are usually lower than permanent ones. Recognizing that the use of casual employees, who are not subject to the PSEA, has increased in recent years, [Mr. Borbey](#) said that PSC is looking into it and that he is particularly concerned with the gender impact of that increase. [Ms. Stinson](#) suggested that the public service create more permanent and full-time positions, and that casual, contractual, temporary, and part-time employees receive the same benefits as permanent employees.

## **Committee Observations and Recommendations**

The Committee encourages managers and human resources specialists in the federal public service to innovate when it comes to hiring new employees, and it sees great potential in the use of plain language job advertisements, social media, and on-the-spot job offers. It believes that developing stronger relationships with stakeholders outside the government would improve the public service staffing culture.

The Committee acknowledges that the creation of pools of qualified candidates after the completion of hiring processes involves significant resources and should, therefore, be used not only by managers within individual organizations, but also across the entire federal public service. Furthermore, expiration dates for these pools should be extended when qualified candidates are still interested in working for the federal government.

The Committee recognizes that it could be challenging for managers and human resources specialists to screen candidates due to the large number of people interested in working for the federal government. It is of the opinion, however, that the benefit of allowing the entire Canadian public to apply to public service positions outweighs the potential cost. It therefore encourages the Government of Canada to model its policies on best practices adopted in other jurisdictions, such as Australia and New Zealand, and to advertise all positions externally with no geographic limitations.

The Committee was concerned about the average length of time it takes to complete hiring processes and thinks that a coordinated effort among the whole public service must be made to reduce that average significantly. It believes that departments and agencies should strongly consider expanding pilot projects that have offered on-the-spot conditional job offers at job fairs — or consider making them a permanent tool — and should plan better for future staffing needs.

Consequently, the Committee recommends:

**Recommendation 5**

**That the Government of Canada create a database of qualified candidates accessible to all departments and agencies and that it allow access to that database to be extended as often as necessary.**

**Recommendation 6**

**That the Government of Canada improve its screening and hiring tools and advertise all positions externally, while respecting the requirements of collective agreements, as appropriate, so that the entire Canadian public can apply.**

**Recommendation 7**

**That the Public Service Commission of Canada, in collaboration with departments and agencies, identify opportunities to reduce the length of the public service hiring process by at least 50%, and that the Public Service Commission of Canada collect and publicly disseminate data in its annual report on the average number of days it takes to complete each hiring step.**



## CONCLUSION

The federal public service is of great importance to the country and Canadians rely on it to obtain services from their federal government. It is therefore crucial that the public service be effective and composed of the most talented employees available. The Government of Canada is the largest employer in the country and should be representative of the diversity of the Canadian population. The Committee believes that a strong public service is essential for the well-being of the country and that by improving its hiring process, the Government of Canada will be more efficient and provide better services to Canadians. The Committee is confident that, by implementing the seven recommendations contained in this report, the Government of Canada will ensure that its staffing processes are conducted in a timely, effective, and fair manner.

In the Committee's opinion, the Government of Canada should strive to hire the best candidates while ensuring the integrity of the hiring process. To achieve this goal, the federal public service hiring process would be improved by:

- developing initiatives to recruit recent graduates, and by proposing and advertising recruitment programs for students and graduates to public service managers and the public;
- creating a database of qualified candidates that is available to all departments and agencies for as long as is necessary;
- improving screening and hiring tools and advertising all positions externally, while respecting the requirements of collective agreements, as appropriate, so that the entire Canadian public can apply; and
- identifying opportunities to reduce the length of the public service hiring process by at least 50%, and collecting and publicly disseminating data in the Public Service Commission of Canada's annual report on the average number of days it takes to complete each hiring step.

## APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

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The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the Committee at its meetings related to this report held during its study of the hiring process in the public service. Transcripts of all public meetings are available on the Committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<b>Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women</b> Jane Stinson, Research Associate	2019/04/01	166
<b>LinkedIn</b> Michael Page, Government Lead Talent Solutions	2019/04/01	166
<b>Public Service Commission</b> Patrick Borbey, President Stéphanie Poliquin, Vice-President Services and Business Development	2019/04/01	166
<b>Treasury Board Secretariat</b> Jean-François Fleury, Assistant Deputy Minister Governance, Planning and Policy Sector, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer	2019/04/01	166



## APPENDIX B LIST OF WITNESSES

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The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the Committee at its meetings related to this report held during its briefing on the public service hiring process. Transcripts of all public meetings are available on the Committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p><b>Public Service Commission</b></p> <p>Patrick Borbey, President</p> <p>Véronique Gaudreau, Director General Central Programs and Regional Offices</p> <p>Michael Morin, Acting Director General Policy and Strategic Directions</p>	2018/09/20	143
<p><b>Treasury Board Secretariat</b></p> <p>Carl Trottier, Assistant Deputy Minister Governance, Planning and Policy Sector, Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer</p>	2018/09/20	143
<p><b>Association of Canadian Financial Officers</b></p> <p>Nicolas Brunette-D'Souza, Labour Relations Advisor</p> <p>Dany Richard, President</p>	2018/10/04	147
<p><b>Canadian Association of Professional Employees</b></p> <p>Deborah Cooper, General Counsel</p> <p>Greg Phillips, President</p>	2018/10/04	147
<p><b>Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada</b></p> <p>Debi Daviau, President</p> <p>Emily Watkins, Senior Advisor to the President</p>	2018/10/04	147
<p><b>Public Service Alliance of Canada</b></p> <p>Chris Aylward, National President</p> <p>Amy Kishkek, Legal Officer Representation and Legal Services</p>	2018/10/04	147



## APPENDIX C LIST OF BRIEFS

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The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the Committee related to this report in the context of its briefing on the public service hiring process. For more information, please consult the Committee's [webpage for this study](#).

**Association of Canadian Financial Officers**



## REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 166, 174 and 176](#)) in relation to the Committee's study of hiring process in the public service and ([Meetings Nos. 143 and 147](#)) in relation to the briefing on the public service hiring process is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Lukiwski  
Chair

