

**ELECTORAL OFFICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
MANAGEMENT BOARD PAPER**

Date of Meeting:	August 2010	Prepared by:	Lisa Cherry, HR Officer
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2010 Casual Staff Pool

(a) The Management Board is asked to consider proposals on procedures to be used to establish a pool of casual workers for elections, registration and other duties by 31 December 2010.

(b) **Background**

During 2009 and early 2010 HR Officer undertook an external recruitment drive in connection with both European and Parliamentary elections incorporating both national and local advertising. There were approximately 2,700 new applicants processed and specific testing was carried out for appointment of all count assistants including new and experienced staff. Currently, there are approximately 500 runners; 400 count staff and 1,500 poll staff held on reserve lists.

In relation to office based election staff, all Area Officers were asked if they required additional casual Electoral Assistants (EAs) prior to the 2010 election. The Newtownabbey Area Office was the only office that wished to recruit additional EAs. There is a current EA list of 176 staff.

(c) **Summary of Existing Practice and Procedure**

Experienced poll staff are re-appointed through an internal review procedure on an annual basis and the shortfall is made up through external advertising – no test; no interview. However, all count staff appointments are subject to passing a test. EAs are recruited through an advertisement/ interview process and used as and when required. All recruitment campaigns and selection procedures adopt sound practices which conform to the provisions of equality legislation.

(d) **Issues for consideration**

1. Options:

- I. Retain the current pool to work at the 2011 election ie reappoint all election staff held on EROS and use existing reserve lists. Undertake recruitment exercise to make up the shortfall.
- II. Establish a complete fresh pool of all election staff during late 2010 for both poll and count which would mean undertaking an NI wide advertising campaign to recruit and test all election staff for appointment to the next election.

2. Testing procedure – design and delivery method.

(e) **Advantages and Disadvantages**

Option I – Re-appointment of existing staff

Advantages:

- Count staff on existing 2010 EROS and reserve lists have already been tested and gained experience; this process complies with EONI's recruitment policy re retention of reserve lists to 2011.
- Using experienced and skilled staff lowers the risk of mistakes.
- Only new count staff will need tested – less costly and resource intensive.

Disadvantages:

- Equality representation in terms of both religious communities and gender will not be redressed as effectively as an external drive for a new staff pool would facilitate.

Option II - Recruit a complete new pool of staff

Advantages:

- Testing all election staff may improve efficiency;
- Measure more likely to effectively address the under-representation of men and Roman Catholics working at elections.

Disadvantages

- There will be substantial costs involved in relation to advertising and testing applicants including hiring test venues.

- The HR Section will require additional staff to undertake the major task of recruiting a new staff pool - applicants may be in the region of 10,000.
- Re-testing staff who have already passed a test and worked at the recent 2010 election may be disproportionate to time/effort involved.

Testing Procedure:

HR Section liaised and met with representatives from both SHL and HR Connect to ascertain potential costs for testing all election staff (see Annex A):

Option A:

Procure a standard accuracy test which can be delivered on-line and would cost in the region of £55k to test 10,000 applicants.

Option B:

Procure a standard paper based accuracy test which may be delivered at various venues across Northern Ireland by. To administer a paper version of the test would cost approximately £30k including hiring of test venue.

Option C:

HR Officer could develop an in-house test. There would be additional costs for each test venue, materials and additional staff to cope with the task of administering the testing of applicants.

Evaluation of testing procedure options - The on-line test (Option A) would need to be procured through an accredited test provider and would provide more benefits than the other options given its superior and professional approach. Online testing is the latest fast growing way to provide efficient and accurate test results. Option B which is a paper based test procured through an appropriate testing centre. Although it is less costly it is a huge exercise that would put considerable pressure on EONI's small HR Section if it were administered by EONI staff. Option C is not recommended – if EONI were to develop an in-house ability test that has not been trialled through a test

validation process using norm data/groups to minimise risk, it would have a zero defence to any challenges particularly in relation to its integrity and equality compliance. HR Officer met with Head of Recruitment from HR Connect and was strongly advised against developing an in-house test.

(f) **Equality Implications**

As a designated Section 75 public body EONI must have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. As part of its 6th Article 55 review, EONI agreed with the Equality Commission that it would review its use of standing lists in 2010 and review its pool of staff. The HR Officer has been liaising with the Equality Commission on the progress of this including EONI's proposal to postpone the review of its current pool of poll staff. The Commission has confirmed that postponing a recruitment drive is EONI's decision and they have acknowledged the clear business reasons set out by the HR Officer for doing so.

Applications for 2010 count staff were 50:50 community background and the monitoring breakdown of appointees has improved from the European Election.

(g) **Human Rights Act** - Not applicable.

(h) **Resources implications of options**

Option 1 would be the least costly, however, there are resource implications for both options in relation to recruitment eg advertising costs.

(i) **Personnel implications of options**

Additional human resources would be required by the HR Section to cope with the high demand of application forms received in response to election requirement campaigns.

(j) **Presentational/media issues** - Not applicable.

(k) **Time constraints**

The NI Assembly elections and referendum are scheduled for 5 May 2011 and Council elections are expected to be held on the same day.

(l) **Evaluation of options**

There are 3 elections scheduled for 2011. Option II would involve a recruitment campaign to establish a complete new pool of staff and recruitment for this fresh pool would need to begin in September 2010 – this would involve a great deal of work in a tight timescale, in addition to costs for the testing process and additional HR staff for recruitment administration. However, given that all elections are likely to take place on the same day, AEOs will presumably need to rely heavily on their experienced staff and Option I would minimise the risk of mistakes. Also, in light of public sector budget cuts, EONI needs to keep costs to a minimum and Option I would be less costly and would enable a pool to be produced by 31 December 2010 using existing/reserve staff and supplementary advertising for poll staff. It is anticipated that no additional count staff will be required or EAs, but this will be confirmed with Area Officers following staff review. Given the tight timescales involved, option 1 will enable the HR Officer to properly plan a fair participation recruitment system after the May 2011 as there will be no elections during 2012 and 2013.

(m) **Recommendation**

Option I which includes a commitment to recruit a fresh pool of election staff after 2011 election, using an on-line testing procedure for all staff as part of the recruitment process.