

Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme

General Council Report 1262

(Meeting/s of 30 June 1993, 29 September 1993)

Claim that it be made a requirement in the case of an interview for promotion to any level, whether departmental or inter-departmental, for which staff in grades represented by the PSEU are eligible, that all members of such interview boards must have completed a formal programme of training in interview selection.

Claim that interview board members be required to have been formally trained in interview selection

1. The claim was that it be made a requirement in the case of any interview for promotion to any level, whether departmental or interdepartmental, for which staff in the grades for which the Public Service Executive Union are eligible, that all members of such interview boards must have completed a formal programme of training in interview selection.

2. The Staff Side in support of the claim stated that, in the absence of proper training for members of interview boards, management could not be certain that the selection was, in all cases, resulting in the best candidates being selected. This was obviously a disadvantage for management and was also unfair to candidates who could not be satisfied that the interview boards making an assessment of their ability were trained to the highest standards and were, therefore, in a position to make a fair and correct assessment of the relative merits of candidates. This was leading to a situation where interviews could not be said to be meeting the need to be seen to be fair. The Staff Side accepted that all selection processes resulted in dissatisfaction on the part of unsuccessful candidates. However, unless candidates could be assured that those interviewing them were trained fully to the highest standards possible, they would have a basis for believing that the process had not necessarily been entirely fair. Therefore, while the Staff Side accepted fully the "bona fides" of members of interview boards, the fact was that the lack of training was leading to a sense of grievance which had foundation and at the same time the management could not be absolutely satisfied that they were getting the best candidates in all cases. For these reasons the Staff Side argued strongly for the necessity to ensure that all members of interview boards had received comprehensive training and, in making the argument, the Staff Side pointed out that this was not just important from the point of view of ensuring staff confidence in the system but should be equally of importance to the management to satisfy

them that the selection process was working as it should.

3. The Official Side said that they fully appreciated that formal training was a factor in maintaining and enhancing standards of selection interviewing. The Civil Service Training Centre gave regular courses in selection interviewing and the Civil Service Commission were currently engaged in discussions with the CSTC with a view to increasing the training opportunities available to interviewers frequently used by them. However, it would be wholly simplistic to regard the completion of a training course in selection interviewing as either a sufficient or a necessary condition for competence in this area. The priority in forming any board must be to select the best available people and the Civil Service Commission could draw on experience and expertise in making such selections which was second to none. They frequently used a number of interviewers who, while they may not have received formal training, had, over time, developed a considerable expertise in interviewing. It would not be in the interest of either candidates or management that they should be required to dispense with the services of those interviewers and to substitute others solely on the basis that they had completed a formal training course. The Official Side had no doubt that the imposition of a rigid criterion of the sort sought by the Staff Side would lead to a deterioration in interviewing standards. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that a number of other criteria in had to be taken into consideration in selecting boards, such as the need to ensure gender balance (which the Staff Side have strongly advocated). A reasonable degree of flexibility was required to ensure the most appropriate balance of the relevant criteria in any particular case. Accordingly, while the Official Side accepted the value of training in general and considerable efforts were being made to increase the number of trained interviewers, they considered that the inflexible approach proposed by the Staff Side would be counterproductive in its impact on the standards of interviewing. The selection of boards was a matter for the Civil Service Commission and the Official Side had full confidence in the competence of the Commission to undertake that task. There was no basis whatsoever for the "sense of grievance" referred to by the Staff Side.

4. Following further discussion, it was agreed that a report be drawn up recording discussions on the claim.

5. This report was adopted on 30 December 1993.

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