

# ILO STAFF UNION

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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SECOND SESSION

30 October 2008

### Recruitment and selection - 2008-09

#### I. RAPS 2009/1

Initially, the Recruitment, Assignment and Placement System (RAPS) was set up, as said by HRD in the interests of efficiency and speed. Yet, for the two sessions that were held in 2008-09, 33 posts were posted till 4 March and 14 others appeared in form of an addendum with a deadline until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2009. This was largely the result of the lack of foresight and accumulated backlog of HRD and the managers in submitting their list of vacancies. In the first six months, working against time and on a voluntary basis, the staff's representatives examined some 50 vacancies. This they did in two stages: verification of the job description, and subsequent monitoring of the proper conduct of the competitions.

##### A. Verification of the job description

The staff representatives had comments to make on more than half of the job descriptions they looked at; in over 80 per cent of the cases the job description was corrected, which is satisfactory. For the most parts, the comments by the Staff Union concerned the following:

- **language requirements:** lack of consistency, languages often included because it was the language spoken by the unit chief rather than for the sake of the linguistic balance within the unit;
- **experience:** impossible to quantify for a subsequent examination or specific test in order to eliminate potential candidates;
- **educational background:** insufficient for the grade of the post to be filled, different requirements for two posts belonging to the same Job family;
- **generic or specific tasks :** deliberately tailored to suit a candidate already picked out by the responsible chief, increase in the workload without the post being regraded;
- **method of filling the vacancy:** systematic resort to an internal/external competition where in the Staff Union's opinion there could have been a sufficient number of internal candidates (short-term or TC).

In this preliminary procedure, the staff representatives found that the unit responsible for classifying the posts exercised only minimal control and that HRD was there not to enforce the rules and procedures but just to carry out the wishes of the unit chiefs. They often had the impression that they were doing the work of the classification unit. This should be easy to put

right since in over 80 per cent of the cases the three parties involved (HRD, unit chief and Staff Union) eventually reached agreement.

## **B. Selection procedures and outcome of the competitions**

Of the 47 RAPS 1/2009 posts (not counting the addenda):

- 13 went to internal candidates
- 3 were suspended
- 2 was declared unsuccessful
- 2 are still pending
- 3 were cancelled
- 24 went to external candidates – in at least 3 cases to candidates already working in the Organization under different types of contract.

From the standpoint of the staff representatives the ratio of successful external candidates for P4 and P5 posts (grades which are normally destined for the career development of existing officials) is far too high, especially since it may be even higher when posts that are declared unsuccessful are then filled by direct appointment within the following two months.

From its careful scrutiny of all the files concerned, the Staff Union has noted the following major irregularities:

- **The shortlisting of candidates is often arbitrary and lacking in transparency.** In most cases there is a preliminary selection of candidates based on the views of the responsible chief, even though a serious and objective selection may already have been made following the strict criteria laid down by HRD. The fact that the responsible chief can draw up a shortlist without any particular justification opens the door to every kind of abuse and irregularity. It is often at this stage that internal candidates are eliminated in favour of external candidates favoured by the responsible chiefs.
- **Candidates still all too often attend an assessment centre only after they have already undergone a technical assessment.** There has been a significant improvement in this area, even if this is thanks only to the Staff Union's tenacity and its systematic refusal to accept any procedure that goes against the Staff Regulations. However, there were still five cases where the technical assessment took place before the assessment centre.
- **Technical evaluations vary widely**
  1. Some of them involve a written examination. Where this is the case, the file often makes no reference to the marking system and to the criteria for success.
  2. Others are based strictly on interviews. A report is drawn up on the interviews in which the members of the jury can apply a system of weighting to the initial findings without offering any kind of explanation. Because of this lack of transparency the Staff Union has several times been surprised at the outcome of competitions where the best candidates were not ranked best in the technical test.
  3. The composition of the jury can be highly arbitrary and unsuited to the precise nature of the post. Moreover, the jury members representing HRD rarely have a clear opinion of their own and tend to go along with the responsible chief.

4. Sometimes juries do not establish a clear ranking among the candidates and this can easily spoil the chances of candidates who tie for position, because the decision is ultimately taken by senior management.

- **The Cabinet does not need to offer any justification for a decision it takes that is contrary to the jury's recommendation.**

## **II. Other problems encountered**

### **A. General Service posts**

- The Staff Union has had to intervene again and again because of overloaded and wrongly graded job descriptions that end up doing a disservice to the successful candidates.
- There are also unexplained differences and inconsistencies in the selection procedures. For several identical posts (mainly secretarial and book-keeping posts), for example, an objective and transparent selection process based on a standard examination should normally always end up with the best internal candidates being at the top of the list. However, since the shortlisting by certain unit chiefs is not objective or based on quantifiable criteria, candidate can find themselves at the top of the list in one competition and not even shortlisted for another. All this needs to be standardized, and it would be really helpful if HRD could in future play a bigger role in GS competitions.
- In a few cases the Staff Union has come across individual units employing practices that are strictly against existing rules. In each instance it has succeeded in having a stop put to such practices.

### **B. Abusive recruitment**

Despite all its vigilance and the close attention it gives to the whole selection and recruitment process, the Staff Union regrets to say that instances of abusive recruitment or appointment (i.e. for which there has been no competition and which are not covered by the Staff Regulations) are still regularly coming to light. These cases of abusive recruitment and appointment can be divided into several categories:

- a. Recruitment under a technical cooperation contract, whereas the tasks involved are obviously part of the administrative support. Responsible chief are resorting more and more to this way of getting around the rules and thus avoiding a competition, which they see as hampering them in their work. Unfortunately, too, people looking for employment are easily fooled by this kind of abusive practice, since in fact, even if they have the illusion of being recruited by the Organization on a fixed-term contract, in the long term they have no career prospects and none of the benefits that go with them, such as promotion, titularization, etc. Slowly but surely, a two-speed system employment for the same job is emerging, and for an Organization that is advocating decent work throughout the world this is clearly unacceptable.
- b. Selection or transfer of officials outside established rules and without any justification.
- c. Recruitment of officials from other organizations
- d. Recruitment of officials under article 4.2 (e) of the Staff Regulations on the grounds of the supposedly highly technical nature of the post.

This kind of abusive recruitment and appointment inevitably gives rise to enormous frustration and bitterness among existing staff members and in effect contradicts all the administration's claims to being in favour of a healthy and transparent selection and recruitment policy.

In a normal labour relations environment, the comments and recommendation of staff representatives concerning irregularities in the selection procedure should in most cases be the subject of frank and constructive discussion. But here in the ILO any observation on the part of the Staff Union legitimately questioning the outcome of a competition is looked upon as a direct attack on the management's prerogatives and is more often than not ignored, in a deliberate snub to the collective bargaining agreement that was signed a few years ago. True, if there is no social dialogue the staff's representatives can always resort to a judicial appeal, but this is a long, unpleasant, expensive and generally unsatisfactory procedure for all the parties concerned.

This year the Staff Union has asked for three competitions (two RAPS and one GS) to be cancelled outright because of procedural irregularities. These are now going before the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO because, in spite of the irregularities reported and the Union's recommendation that the selection process be cancelled, the appointments have nevertheless been confirmed by senior management.

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