

# TOP LEVEL APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE (TLAC)

FIRST REPORT TO THE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC EXPENDITURE & REFORM

DEVELOPMENTS & TRENDS: JULY 2011 TO DECEMBER 2012



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## Part 1: Foreword

*This report is prepared for the Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform, Brendan Howlin, T.D.*

*On behalf of my colleagues, I am happy to present the first report of the reformed Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) for the period since our appointment July 2011 – December 2012.*

*In this report we describe developments and trends that are occurring in the TLAC recruitment and selection process. We also raise some considerations for your attention that can support Government policy of open recruitment to attract the best possible candidates to the most senior Civil Service posts.*

*The Appendix contains the revised TLAC policies and procedures for effect from 01 January 2013. We plan to undertake a communications programme on developments to date, the revised procedures, and wider information to ensure potential candidates from all sectors are aware of open recruitment to TLAC posts.*

*I wish to acknowledge the substantial contribution made by my TLAC colleagues in expertise, judgement and time, and to express my great appreciation of their commitment.*

*On behalf of all TLAC members, Minister, may I thank you and your Department for your responsiveness and support to TLAC.*

*Maureen P. Lynott  
TLAC Chair  
February 2013*

## Executive Summary

In 2010 the Government established a policy of Open Recruitment from all sectors to the most senior Civil Service positions. Following that, in mid-2011 the structure of the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) was reformed such that it would have a majority of external members of whom one would be the Chair.

For the period July 2011-December 2012, TLAC has held 35 competitions for posts at Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General level, or equivalent. Over this time, there have been a number of developments in the recruitment and selection process for these posts, including:

- The number of candidates appointed from outside the Civil Service is gradually increasing, and as of 2012 represent 25% of all appointments.
- The majority of these external appointments are from the Private Sector, while levels of both applications and appointments from the wider Public and Semi-state Sectors remain low.
- Women consistently succeed at higher proportions than men at all stages of the TLAC process.
- Mobility, or movement of Civil Servants to TLAC level posts in other Departments, is steadily increasing.
- TLAC, with the support of the Public Appointments Service, has used retained executive search services in addition to the PAS recruitment campaign for Secretary General posts and by exception for Assistant Secretary General posts. This is done to ensure the widest possible pool of suitable candidates is available for these most senior Civil Service positions.
- TLAC has prepared revised Policies and Procedures and these are attached to this document.

From the reformed TLAC experience to date, areas for consideration have arisen including:

- Continuing to develop awareness of open recruitment with the Private Sector and wider Public Sector, rather than the historical position of the Civil Service not recruiting external candidates.
- Examining and addressing the reasons for the consistently low levels of applications and appointments from the wider Public and Semi-State Sector, particularly given the benefits of movement amongst these sectors.
- Examining and addressing the reasons for the relatively low level of applications from women, even though women consistently outperform their male counterparts at all stages of the TLAC process including appointment.
- Clarifying the sometimes negative perceptions of the calibre of civil servants given the TLAC's experience of a high standard of candidates from the Civil Service.

It is the TLAC's view that an assessment of barriers, real and perceived, that may exist regarding open recruitment and access to senior positions in the Civil Service should now take place, followed by an active programme of communications.

## The Role of TLAC

- The role of TLAC is to support Government objectives that the recruitment and selection process for the most senior Civil Service positions is accessible to the widest pool of qualified candidates from all sectors.
- TLAC identifies the best candidate(s) for each position and makes recommendations to the relevant Minister or Government as appropriate.
- TLAC operates under the Code of Practice of the Commission for Public Service Appointments in accordance with the principles of merit, consistency, accountability, probity, best practice and professional confidentiality.
- TLAC operates in an independent manner and strictly on the basis of open competition and merit.
- Subject to certain exceptions, TLAC deals with all posts at and above Assistant Secretary level or equivalent in the Civil Service.

## Reformed Committee Structure

In line with the Programme for Government commitment, the restructuring of the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) was announced in April 2011. The Government decided that the new membership of The Top Level Appointments Committee should comprise, (i) Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; (ii) Secretary General to the Government; (iii) two other senior public servants appointed for three year terms and; (iv) five members from outside the civil service appointed for three year terms, one of whom would be the chairperson.

In July 2011 Minister Howlin announced the 5 external appointments to TLAC as:

- Ms Maureen Lynott, Management & Performance Consultant (Chairperson);
- Dr Dorothy Scally, Professional Development Consultant;
- Mr Martin Murphy, Managing Director, Hewlett Packard Ireland;
- Mr Clive Brownlee, Praesta Ireland;
- Mr Kevin Empey, Head of Human Resources, Tower Watson.

These 5 appointees joined the following Senior Civil Service Members:

- Mr Robert Watt, Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure & Reform;

- Mr Martin Fraser, Secretary General to the Government;
- Mr Tom Moran, Secretary General, Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine;
- Ms Brigid McManus, Secretary General, Department of Education & Skills  
(succeeded by Ms Josephine Feehily, Chairman, Office of the Revenue Commissioners).

The first competition under the restructured Top Level Appointments Committee took place on the 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011. In total the TLAC held 35 competitions from that date to end 2012 and 34 appointments were made by Ministers/Government. There was a total of 1073 applications for these posts.

**The TLAC process, explained more fully in the Appendix to this Report, consists of:**

- An initial recruitment and selection process by the Public Appointments Service in conjunction with TLAC (recruitment campaign, shortlisting, preliminary interviews).
- Interview of TLAC candidates by a TLAC panel.
- Recommendations to Minister/Government.

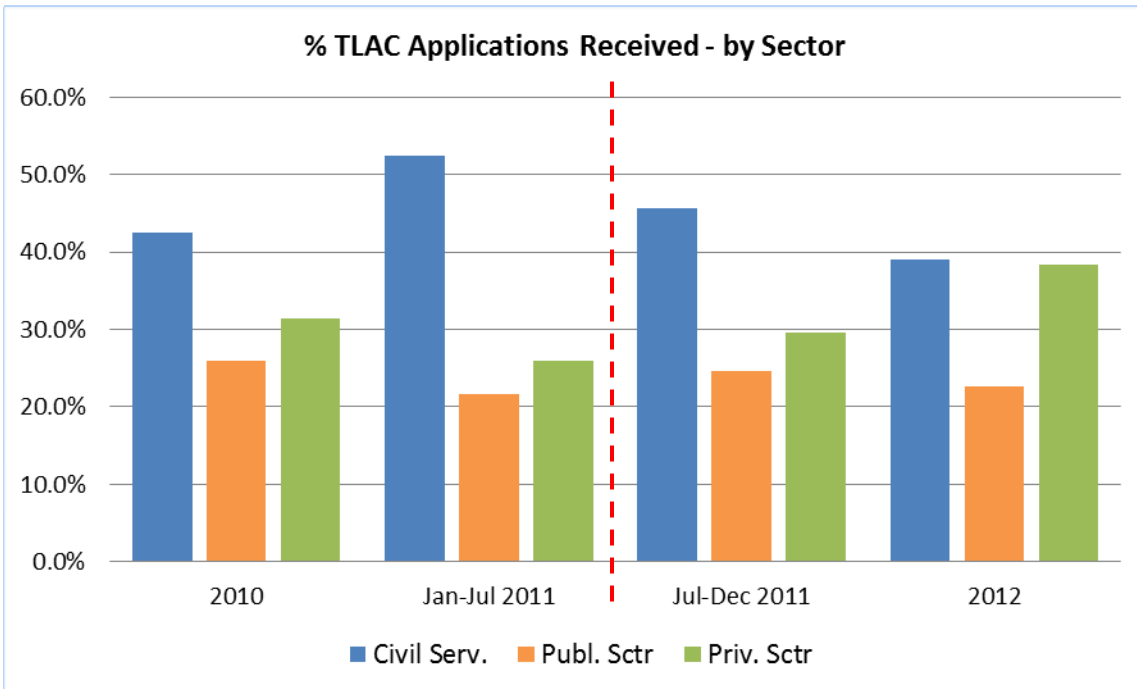
## PART 2: Statistics (Jan-2010 to Dec-2013)

--- Refers to the date of the new TLAC commencing work, i.e. 18<sup>th</sup> July 2011

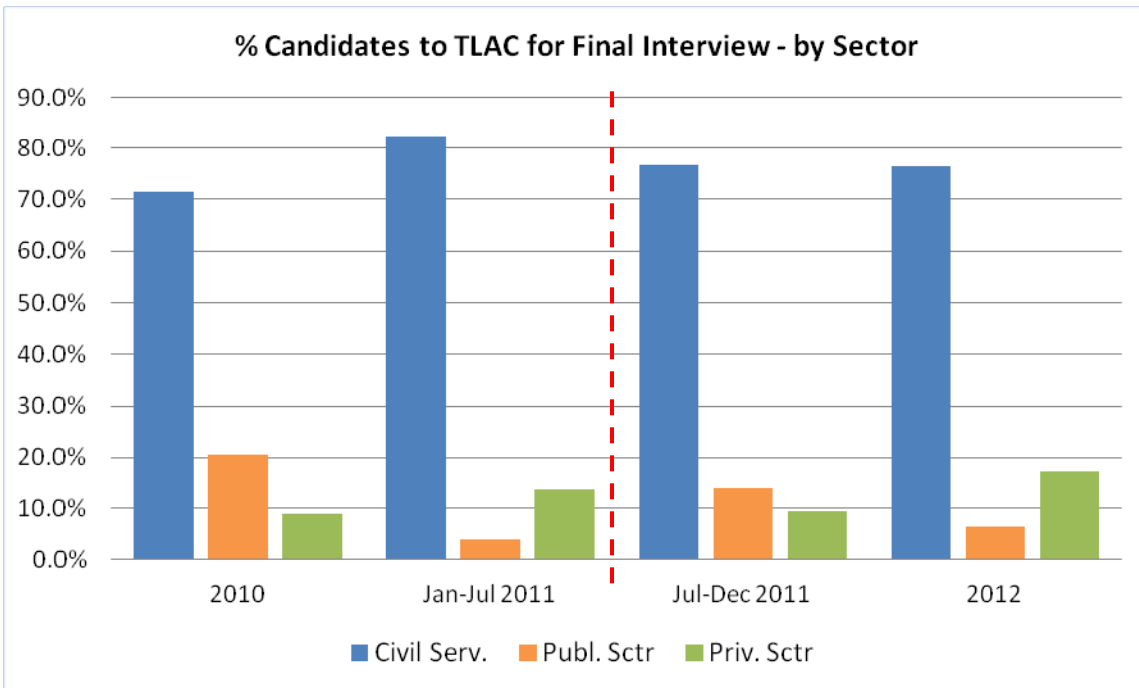
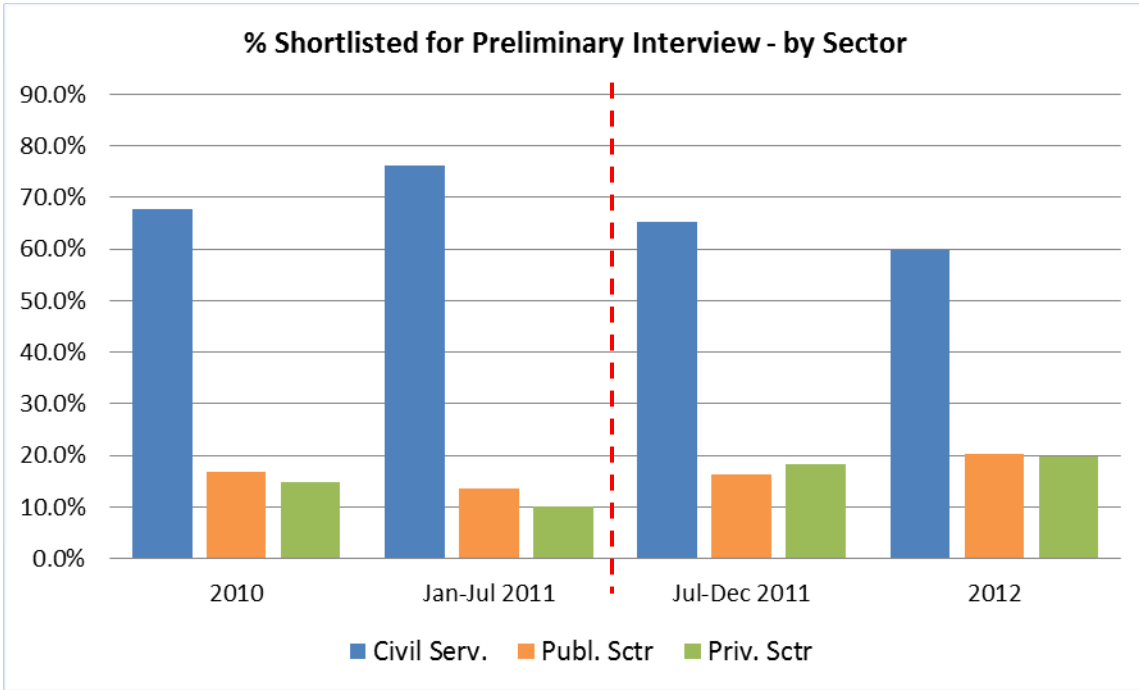
### A. Breakdown of Candidate by Sector per Stage in TLAC Process

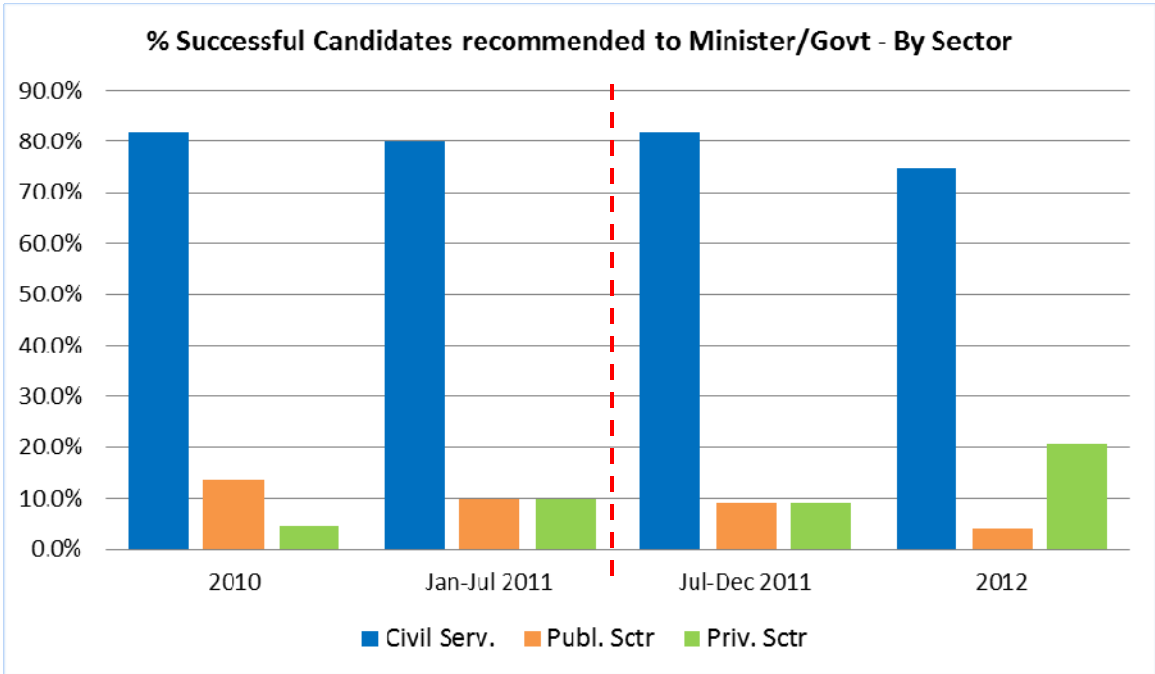
#### ***Trend***

*Open recruitment is resulting in greater access at all stages of the TLAC process increasing to 25% of appointments in 2012, primarily from the private sector. Private Sector candidates appointed to TLAC posts increased from 4.5% in 2010 to 21% in 2012.*





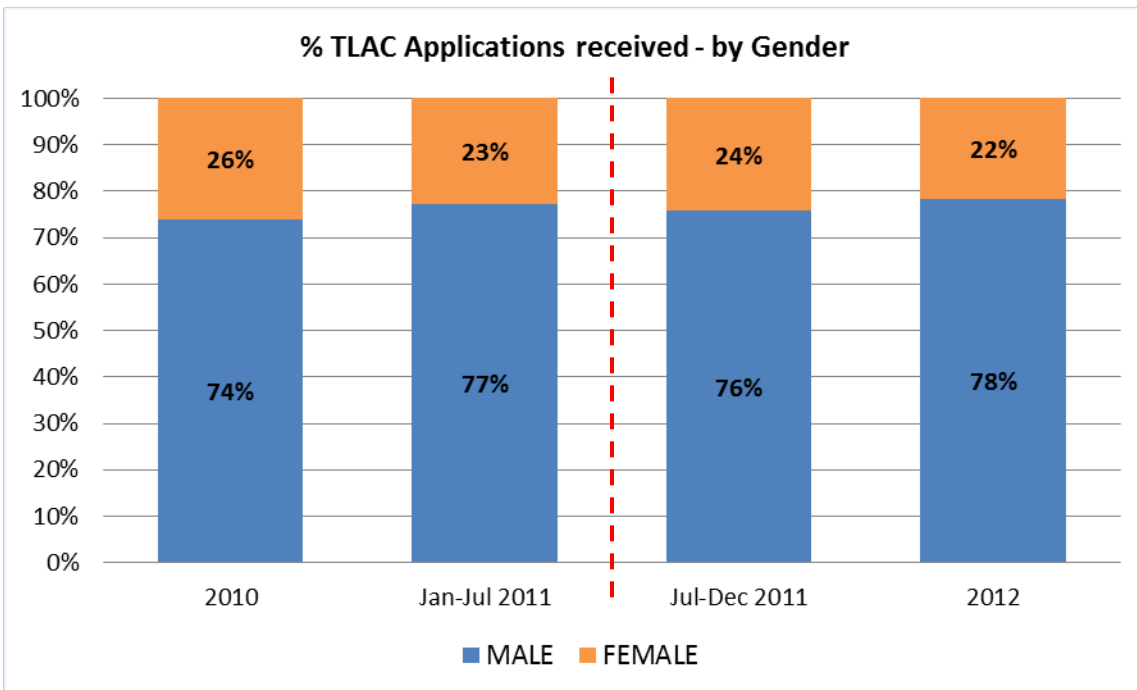


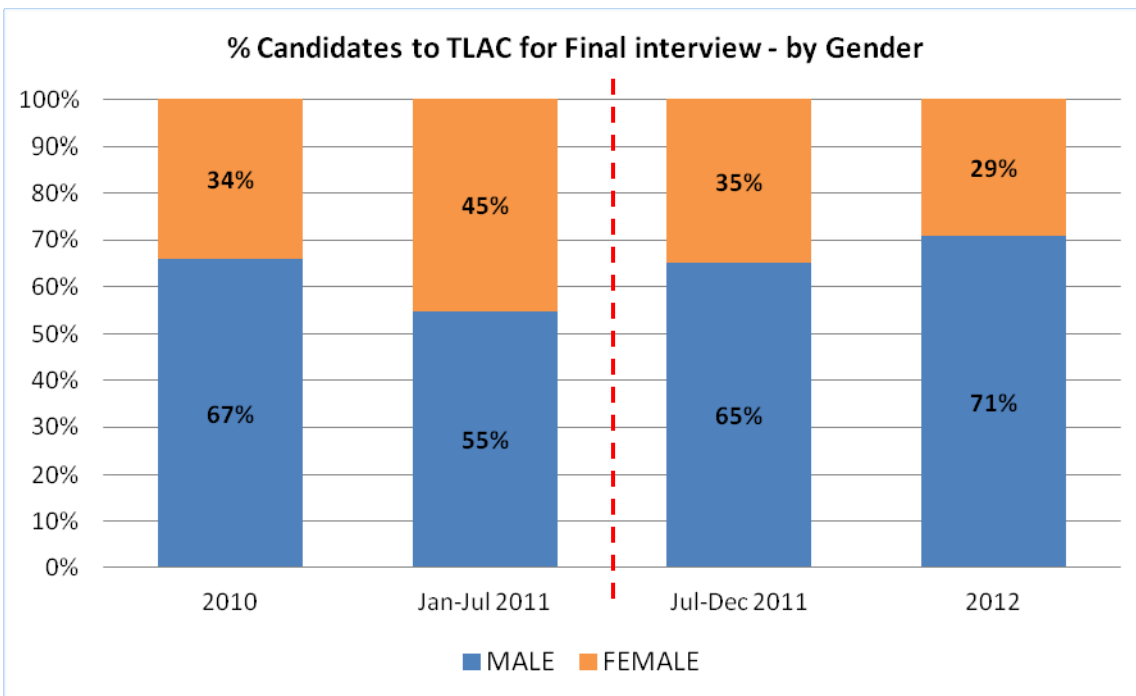
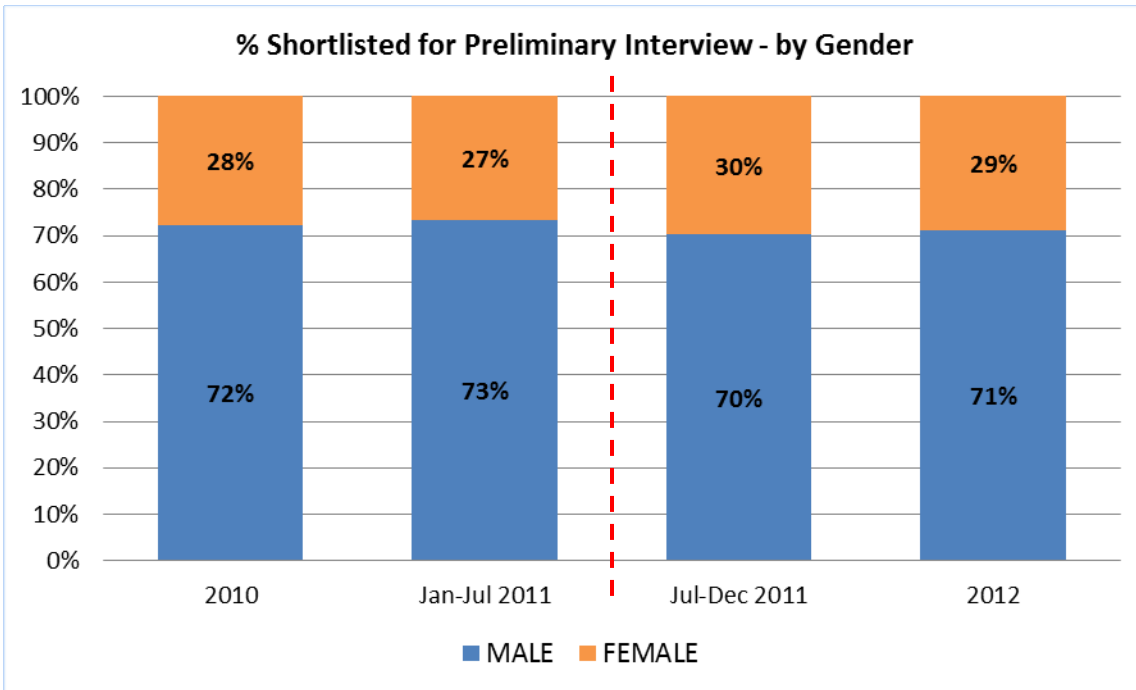


## B. Breakdown of Candidates by Gender per stage in TLAC Process

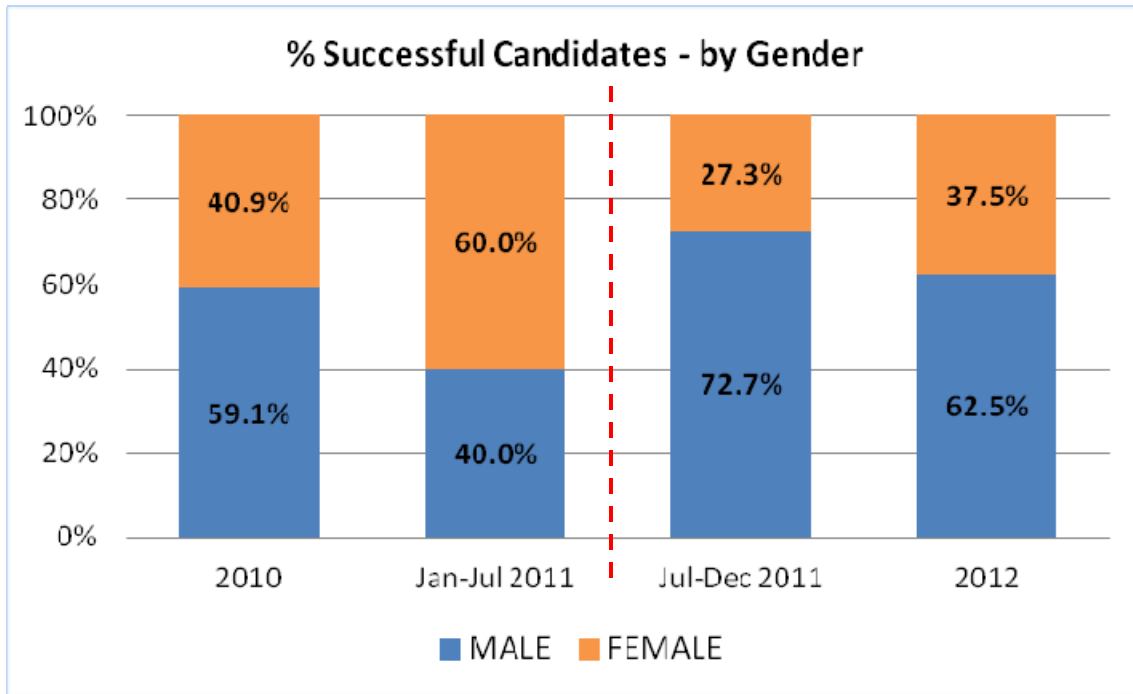
### *Trend*

*An ongoing trend is that female applicants consistently outperform their male counterparts at each stage of the TLAC process.*





*Note: for all of 2011, women comprised 40% of candidates referred to TLAC for final interviews.*

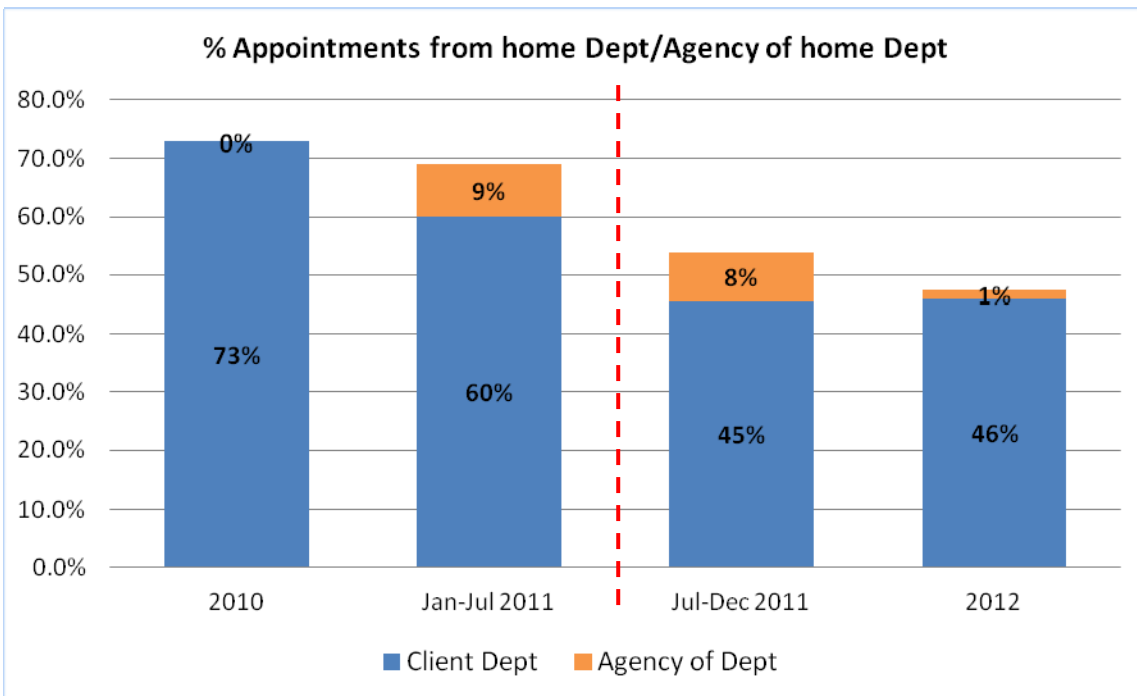


*Note: for all of 2011, women comprised 43% of all successful candidates.*

### C. Mobility: Percentage of TLAC appointments from Home Department or Agency

#### ***Trend***

*The traditional pattern of appointments from within home Departments is changing. Mobility between Government Departments and Agencies is increasing; in 2010 73% of appointments were candidates from home departments while in 2012 this fell to 50%.*



## Trends

*Note: These are indicative trends in the first 18 months of the new TLAC; a more definitive picture will emerge in 2013.*

### **A. Impact of Open Recruitment:**

*Open recruitment is Government policy and the numbers of applicants and successful candidates from outside the Civil Service is gradually increasing with greater access at all stages of the TLAC process, primarily from the private sector; there is limited engagement however from the wider public and semi-state sectors.*

- The number of appointments to TLAC level posts from outside of the Civil Service, i.e. public and private sector appointees, continues to increase to 25% in 2012, compared with 19% in 2011 and 18% in 2010.
- Since the new TLAC began its work in July 2011, Private Sector applications represent 35% of all applicants and 21% of all appointments. In the comparable period prior to the establishment of the new TLAC, Private Sector applications made up 29% of all applicants and 6% of all appointments
- Since July 2011, 42% of applicants and 77% of appointments have come from the Civil Service; this is a small decrease from 47% of applicants and 81% of appointments in the comparable period prior to July 2011.
- Since July 2011, the number of Public Sector applicants has remained largely unchanged at 23% while the number of appointments is just under 6%; this compares with public sector comprising 24% of applicants and 13% of appointments in the comparable period prior to July 2011.

***B. Gender Makeup:***

*Female applicants consistently out-perform their male counter-parts at each stage of the TLAC process.*

- A steady trend is that while women represent 24% of applicants they succeed at higher proportions in all stages, including appointment at 41% cumulatively since 2010. Five years ago female appointees were at 12.5%.
- Females as a proportion of applications has remained consistent at one-in-three for males. This rises to two-in-five of female candidates going forward in the TLAC process being appointed.

***C. Mobility:***

*Mobility between Government Departments is increasing.*

- The traditional pattern of appointments from within home departments is steadily declining, having fallen by nearly a quarter since the beginning of 2010.
- In 2010, 73% of appointments were candidates from the home department or an agency of that department. This fell to 67% 2011 and further still to 50% in the twelve months to December 2012.



## Considerations

*Announcing the reformed TLAC structure, Minister Brendan Howlin stressed the importance of having the right people in place who are capable of taking on the complex challenges facing the country. With this in mind an emphasis was placed on the need to explore new approaches to attract the widest pool of qualified candidates to the most senior posts in the Civil Service. Accordingly the Government's policy of open recruitment and accessibility has considerable implications for the design and operation of a process of senior appointments.*

1. The selection and appointment process must accommodate and attract candidates from across all sectors, and focus on identifying and removing barriers that may block or deter suitable persons from applying for TLAC positions.

The several factors applying to each sector are outlined below:

- In relation to **Private Sector** applicants, there are mixed views and feedback about senior civil service posts. These include perceived concerns that the Civil Service is a 'closed shop' where an external candidate would find it difficult to succeed, and about the exposure to public scrutiny acting as a deterrent. The issue of salary has been perceived as a barrier in some instances but is not a universal view; indeed there is also an interest from private sector candidates to make their contribution to the public service for a period of time.
- The reasons behind consistent low levels of applications from the wider **Public Sector** need to be examined. Such an examination is also merited in terms of the developmental and skills transfer benefits of increased mobility and redeployment between the civil, public and semi-state sectors.

In this regard, TLAC notes and welcomes the *Senior Public Service* (SPS) initiative as a very positive development. The SPS encourages and supports senior Civil Servants to engage in mentoring, coaching, management development and succession planning, and provides opportunities for mobility between Government Departments. It is TLAC's view that wider movement should be considered by the SPS as part of an overall talent management strategy.

- While the levels of **Civil Service** participation in the TLAC process remains high, in some instances highly qualified civil servant candidates did not put themselves

forward and concerns about public criticism of senior Civil Servants have been cited.

2. TLAC's experience is that some perceptions and stereo-types applying to the Civil Service do not hold up in reality. In this regard Civil Service candidates who progress to TLAC consideration are found to be of a comparable high calibre to that of senior managers in other sectors, and are often the "best candidate for the job". Communicating this to the wider public and the value to the State of a committed Civil Service is of significant importance.
3. It is the view of TLAC, based on our 18 months experience to date, that a more detailed assessment of potential barriers to applying for TLAC posts should now take place. This will be followed by an active programme of communications about TLAC's role, its revised procedures and trends to date, and crucially its objective of open recruitment to attract the most suitable candidates from all sectors. Such a communications programme will extend to members of the Government and the political system, the public and media, and appropriate experts and organisations.

# TOP LEVEL APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

## ~ ROLE & PROCEDURES ~



*Effective: 01-Jan-2013*

# 1 | Role of TLAC

The Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) was established in 1984. The Committee's function is to recommend candidates to Ministers and Government for the most senior positions in the Civil Service – at Assistant Secretary level and upwards. By carrying out this function in an independent manner and by making its decisions strictly on the basis of the relative merit of the candidates for the positions concerned, TLAC aims to strengthen the management structure of the Civil Service, and to provide a means by which the best candidates can aspire to fulfilling their potential.

Subject to certain exceptions, the TLAC interview process operates under the Code of Practice of the Commission for Public Sector Appointments in accordance with the principles of merit, consistency, accountability, probity, best practice and professional confidentiality. Recruitment to TLAC positions is done under the recruitment license of the Public Appointments Service.

- *Government has a policy of open recruitment*
- *The role of TLAC is to support that and ensure that the recruitment and selection process for the most senior Civil Service posts is accessible to the widest pool of qualified candidates from all sectors.*
- *TLAC is to identify the best candidate(s) for each position and to make recommendations to the relevant Minister or Government as appropriate*
- *Subject to certain exceptions, TLAC deals with all posts at and above Assistant Secretary level or equivalent in the Civil Service.*
- *TLAC operates to highest standards of probity and professional confidentiality.*

In virtually every competition there are a number of very good candidates in addition to the successful candidate. Candidates should be aware that each person is judged on her/his suitability in the context of the particular post being filled and against the particular set of candidates who compete for that post.

TLAC also advises the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) on the effectiveness of appointments to senior positions in the Civil Service. DPER has policy responsibility for recruitment, promotion and human resources management and planning across the Civil Service. In conjunction

with the relevant Department, DPER is responsible for approving which vacant or new positions are to be filled and the relevant job specification.

*Since July 2011 TLAC comprises four Secretaries General and five external members appointed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform of which one is Chairperson.*

*The current members are: Mr Clive Brownlee; Mr Kevin Empey; Ms Josephine Feehily; Mr Martin Fraser; Ms Maureen Lynott (Chair); Mr Tom Moran; Mr Martin Murphy; Ms Dorothy Scally; Mr Robert Watt.*

While this document is intended to give an overview of the TLAC process, TLAC is responsible for determining its own procedures and remit, subject to Government decisions as appropriate. The information in this document is therefore subject to change either generally or in relation to specific circumstances identified by TLAC as requiring adjustments in the usual procedures.

## 2 | Job Specification

Job specifications and person specifications setting out the requirements for the post are the responsibility of the hiring department and DPER, with observations provided by TLAC members. At the commencement of the recruitment campaign, these are provided to the Public Appointments Service (PAS) which manages the advertisement and preliminary recruitment process for TLAC. In advance of advertising the job, PAS engages with the Secretary General of the parent Department in an effort to ascertain the key skills required for the role and to identify the current and critical issues within the organisation that would be of particular interest to potential candidates. These are summarised in a job specification that reflects the seniority and responsibility of the post and that it is open to applicants from all sectors.

## 3 | Competencies

The key competencies below have been developed for use by TLAC and are clustered into four main dimensions associated with effective performance at the most senior level of the civil service. These competencies form the basis of interviews and TLAC’s assessment.

For Assistant Secretary General posts, it should be borne in mind that, while candidates are selected for particular positions, from time to time reorganisation may occur **within** Departments; therefore the competencies below are considered necessary for all Assistant Secretary General positions on offer.

<i>For Assistant Secretary level posts</i>	
<b>Leadership</b>	Leads on the Management of Change   Focus on Human Resources   Corporate Contribution
<b>Judgement</b>	Analysis & Thinking Skills   Strategic Contribution
<b>Managing Relationships</b>	Managing Critical Relationships   Communication
<b>Personal Drive for Results</b>	Organisational Skills   Results Orientated Approach   Performance Focus   Professional Integrity

<i>For Secretary General level posts</i>	
<b>Leadership</b>	Establishing Vision and Purpose   Providing Developmental Leadership
<b>Judgement</b>	Judgement and Systemic Perspective   Steering through the Political Environment   Environmental Awareness
<b>Managing Relationships</b>	Managing Critical Relationships   Communication
<b>Personal Drive for Results</b>	Managing for Results   Personal Drive and Accountability   Performance Focus   Professional Integrity

## 4 | Information Booklet & Application

*Presentation*

Candidate information booklets are prepared by the PAS in conjunction with DPER and the hiring Department, with the objective of providing easily understandable details for potential applicants from all sectors. Potential applicants can access the PAS website, [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie), for details of the job vacancy, the job title, the location, closing date for applications and a description of the purpose of the post. The Information Booklet provides further details such as the principal duties of the post, the key competencies for effective performance, eligibility requirements and the principal conditions of service. It also gives information on the selection process and attaches guidance notes on preparing a CV for the post.

### *Application*

The application for TLAC posts includes: a comprehensive CV detailing posts held, salary, number of staff, organisation chart, etc; a statement of the applicants' track record of achievement and delivery; and how they meet the requirements of the post; and a statement of how an applicant will meet the standard of the competencies for the post under consideration.

## 5 | Advertising

The advertising of all posts is organised by the PAS. The job is generally advertised by placing notices in selected national newspapers, issuing job alerts by email and text message to those who have registered their interest in positions at this level on the PAS website, and directly notifying appropriate grades across Civil Service Departments as well as other Public Service Bodies and Associations.

In addition, having analysed the job and person requirements for the role, PAS seek out potential sources of candidates to create awareness of the job opportunity and what the role entails. Relevant opportunities via social media, professional bodies and associations are used by PAS to widen the applicant pool by circulating job information and creating awareness of each campaign as appropriate.

A specialised unit within PAS supplements the advertising of positions with more targeted approaches to generate awareness and interest in TLAC level positions. Contact with potential candidates focuses on raising awareness of the campaign and the

opportunity to participate in the process, along with all other candidates. It does not provide a commitment to an interview or any other guarantees to a candidate.

## **6 | Executive Search for Candidates**

**I**n order to ensure that the widest senior level candidate pool is available for consideration, PAS in conjunction with TLAC<sup>7</sup>, may arrange the support of retained Executive Search for all Secretary General positions, and by exception for specific Assistant Secretary General posts.

## **7 | Short-listing**

**T**he short listing process is carried out by a selection Board convened by PAS under an independent chair; it also includes a retired Secretary General, an independent person who is a subject matter expert for the post in hand, and a TLAC representative. This process is supported by a PAS representative who oversees the process and records the deliberations of the Board. The Secretary General of the hiring Department is in attendance in an observer role to provide a briefing and clarity on the specific post and the Department. The Board agrees proposed short listing criteria consistent with the scale, skills, track record and experience required for the post. These criteria are used to assess the candidates in a consistent manner based on the information contained in the application forms, CVs and covering letter/personal statement. Based on the information provided by the candidate the Board assesses candidates' suitability and provides a short comment to support the assessment. The Board then compiles a report of the shortlisted candidates going forward to the preliminary interview stage of the process. All candidates are notified accordingly.



## 8 | Preliminary Interviews

### *Attendance*

**P**reliminary interviews are usually conducted by the same selection Board that undertook the short listing process with the exception of the hiring Secretary General. A TLAC member participates for Secretary General Posts and by exception for specified Assistant Secretary General posts. The PAS prepares an interview guide for the role which is referenced by the selection board in conducting the preliminary interviews. A PAS representative is also in attendance for the purpose of ensuring that the interviews are conducted in a fair and consistent manner in accordance with PAS recruitment license and the Commission for Public Service Appointments code. The PAS representative also provides assistance and guidance to the Board and takes the official record of the process. The interview will explore each candidate's CV, track record, competencies and probity in regard to the post under consideration. Based on the interview and documentation, the Preliminary Interview Board identifies those candidates who in the Board's judgement are suitable for appointment to the post under consideration, generally to a maximum of 5 candidates.

### *Notification of candidates*

**T**he Preliminary Interview Board is asked for feedback comments for each candidate and these comments are recorded by the PAS representative. An outcome letter issues, from PAS to candidates by email following each stage of the campaign, i.e. short listing and preliminary interviews. These include some feedback, i.e. comments and assessment from the board in relation to suitability for the role.

## 9 | Information flow from Preliminary Interview to TLAC

- For each candidate being sent forward for final interview, the Preliminary Interview Board are asked to summarise the reason the candidate is being sent forward as suitable for appointment to the post, areas of strengths or challenges, and if there are areas in which the Board feel the candidate should be subject to further probing.

- Candidates are also required to undertake psychometric testing, the results of which are shared with each candidate on request and the TLAC panel.
- The PAS application documentation for each candidate is provided to TLAC. At times, Chairpersons of preliminary interview Boards may be asked to brief TLAC prior to final interviews.
- The PAS will supply three referees per candidate to the TLAC panel in order to confirm the candidate's track record of achievement, delivery and probity.

## 10 | TLAC Interviews

### *Attendance*

- All TLAC interviews are conducted by sub-panels of the Top Level Appointments Committee each comprising two Secretaries General, two external members and chaired by the TLAC Chairperson. The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform gave an undertaking to ensure that there is adequate rotation among the members in the composition of boards.

### *Secretary General Role*

- The retired or retiring Secretary General does not attend at the interviews for his or her successor; he/she briefs the TLAC panel in advance of the interviews and attends the conclusion of TLAC deliberations.
- For Assistant Secretary General posts, the Secretary General of the Department for where the post exists will have the option to participate in the TLAC interview and the later deliberations. The final recommendation remains the responsibility of TLAC.
- In the case of specialist posts, the TLAC may make special arrangements in conjunction with the PAS, by delegating the final interview to a specialist Board with TLAC participation or by adding a member from outside of TLAC to a final TLAC panel.

### *Format of Interviews*

- The TLAC task is to judge who best out of the number of appointable candidates before them should be recommended to the Minister/Government for a particular top level post.
- For each interview panel the candidate will be met by the Chair and introduced to members. Questions and exploration with each candidate relate to criteria and competencies for this particular post; how the existing and emerging challenges for the Department in question can be addressed and key priorities delivered, as well as the candidate's approach to issues such as strategic leadership, change and performance management. As the interview concludes, candidates will be asked if there is anything further they wish to say to the panel.
- Each panel determines the nature of the questioning and whether 3, 4 or all 5 panel members should participate in questioning candidates.

#### *Length of Interviews:*

- Typically, TLAC interviews are 45 minutes in length; in some instances, if the complexity of the post requires, this may be up to 60 minutes.

#### *Number of candidates recommended*

- TLAC will recommend one candidate for appointment to the relevant Minister in the case of posts below Secretary General Level; for Secretary General posts TLAC will recommend up to three names, in alphabetical order to the Government, of those candidates considered to be of the standard required for the post.

#### *Notification of Candidates and Feedback*

- All candidates are contacted by either a Secretary General member of TLAC or the TLAC Secretary with news of the outcome of their interview. Following the final TLAC interview, candidates who request feedback are provided with a written summary of their performance at interview based on the notes taken during the process.
- TLAC also encourages unsuccessful candidates to seek verbal feedback from the Secretary General of the Department or the TLAC Chairperson. Such feedback can be helpful to candidates in understanding issues that arose at interview or suggested

areas for improvements in presentation, and also highlight the person's potential for future TLAC level competitions.

## **11** | **Support & Development of the Senior Public Service**

**T**he Department of Public Expenditure and Reform with the Senior Public Service carry out programmes of development for existing and newly appointed senior Civil Servants. These include: formal induction, coaching / mentoring support, management development, succession planning, and opportunities for mobility between Government Departments, etc. Such programmes and supports are of great benefit to new and serving senior Civil Servants in carrying out the standard of achievement needed in their roles.