



Public Sector Reform Column



MAKING BARBADOS WORK BETTER

Role and Function of the Ministry of the Civil Service

Unlike most other Ministries and Departments whose names give some indication as to their specific roles and functions, the role of the Ministry of the Civil Service as a central agency in the public service is unknown to many. However, it plays a pivotal role throughout the civil service, covering human resource management, and conditions of service, including industrial relations matters. This central agency ensures that the public service has the human resource capacity and appropriate organisational structure to facilitate the efficient and effective attainment of Government's national goals. To this end, it has the overall responsibility for human resource policy including staffing levels, salary administration, job evaluation, setting qualifications standards and determining other conditions of service of government workers including negotiations with trade unions and staff associations.

Staffing Levels

For any organisation, human resource and personnel issues can present many challenges. These issues include a variety of activities and key among them is deciding on appropriate staffing levels. Staffing your business may be straightforward if your envisioned team is 5 or 10 people, but in the case of the Ministry of the Civil Service, managing staffing needs is a major process that takes place in a public service comprising seventeen Ministries and approximately sixty Departments with a total work force of 26,000 employees.

The Minister with responsibility for the Civil Service has the authority to determine the numbers and levels of posts needed to ensure that the Ministries and Departments are adequately staffed to carry out their mandates. The Ministry is

responsible for examining staff proposals from other agencies and advising the Minister on the feasibility and acceptance of the requests.

When analysing staff requests, the Ministry assesses the stated need in relation to the standards of output to determine the inability of an agency to get the job done. This is to ensure that the apparent need for staff is not resulting from poor organisation of work, non-simplification of job methods and systems or obstructions to proper flow of work.

Statistical data on the workload - past, present and proposed, - including new subjects or services to be added or offered by the particular agency is required by the ministry to assist in analysing staff requests.

During the past financial year over two hundred and ninety-five (295) temporary posts were created, while the Civil Establishment (General) Order 2001 made provision for five hundred and eighty (580) additional permanent posts.

Qualifications Standards

A comprehensive, revised Qualifications Order came into effect from 13th December, 2001, and covers nearly every post in the civil service, except those in the Fire Service, Prison Department and the Royal Barbados Police Force. The reviewing and amending of qualifications attached to posts is an ongoing exercise.

Wages Negotiation

On behalf of Government, the Ministry of the Civil Service negotiates with trade unions and staff associations salary agreements in the public service. When negotiating, some of the factors taken into account are:

- Level of inflation;
- Growth in the economy;
- Government's ability to sustain increases without resorting to borrowing, reducing staff or increasing taxation; and
- Levels of other non-salary allowances.

Recent Human Resource Initiatives

Some recent initiatives in the area of human resource development and management include the conversion of casual workers to public officers, the development of a new Public Service Act, and a comprehensive evaluation of jobs in the Public Service.

Conversion of Casual Workers to Public Officers

One of the most significant staffing improvements in recent times has been the conversion of more than four thousand (4000) Casual Workers to Public Officers, which has given them security of tenure and significantly enhanced their retiring benefits.

Public Service Act

The management of the civil service is another major focus, where the development of a legal framework, management systems and techniques are vital to its success. For this reason, a committee was set up by Cabinet to advise on a policy framework for a Public Service Act. This policy advice has been laid in Parliament and debate has started. The proposed legislation will focus on issues relating to the management of discipline, conditions of service and the functions of various Service Commissions. The Ministry will collaborate with the Chief Parliamentary Counsel's Office on the drafting of the new Public Service Act once parliamentary debate has concluded and Cabinet has given permission to prepare the necessary legislation.

Job Evaluation Exercise

The Ministry also has a duty to introduce a fair and transparent classification system in the public service that reflects the relative worth of all jobs within the Service. To this end, it is currently conducting a Job Evaluation Exercise with the major aims being:

- To provide a rational basis for the design and maintenance of an equitable pay structure;

- To enable consistent decisions to be made on grading and rates of pay; and
- To establish the extent to which there is comparable worth between jobs so that equal pay can be provided for work of equal value.

Conclusion

Staff morale and productivity are important issues managed through the maintenance and enhancement of harmonious industrial relations. By endeavouring to fulfill its mandate and pursuing and implementing public sector reform initiatives in human resource matters, the Ministry of the Civil Service has and will continue to influence productivity and harmonious industrial relations in the public service.

The Ministry of the Civil Service adopts a best practice approach to all its activities and initiatives, regularly benchmarking and testing management tools and methods for their application to the wider public service. This is critical to the management and development of people in the public service in the context of a dynamic operating environment.

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