C/16/2025

Anonymous complaint regarding recruitment practices at the Mauritius Qualifications Authority

On 15 January 2025, an anonymous complaint was received alleging possible malpractices and political interference in the recruitment exercise for the post of Manager at the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA). The complainant raised the following concerns:

a) Cancellation of the 'Notice of Vacancies' dated 22 September 2023 and re-advertisement on 01 March 2024.

b) Changes made to the Scheme of Service (SoS) which the complainant believed were a deliberate attempt to fit the profile of a predetermined candidate.

c) The timing of the interview, which was held close to the dissolution of the National Assembly, thus could be a politically motivated process.

d) The duration of the interview, where he claimed to have been tirelessly questioned for 45 minutes, allegedly longer, compared to other candidates.

Upon being queried, the Ministry of Education and Human Resource reported that the MQA reported the following:

i. the grade of Manager is polyvalent and the incumbent is liable to be posted to any other Division of the Authority. The SoS specifies the duties of all the four Divisions. There were queries from applicants regarding the SoS as to whether the incumbent would be responsible for all the four Divisions;

ii. the post was advertised on 22 September 2023 and applications were submitted via the Authority's online portal;

iii. the recruitment exercise was cancelled in December 2023, due to technical problems being encountered with the online portal. The post of Manager was re-advertised with an amended SoS in March 2024;

iv. after a screening exercise, candidates were called for interview from 05 September to 12 September 2024;

v. the recommendations of the Human Resource Committee were submitted to the Board on 18 September 2024, following which, the candidate who ranked first in the list was offered employment in a temporary capacity;

After assessing the reply received, this Office sought further clarifications from the Ministry, and it was revealed that the online application process was cancelled due to a critical technical limitation with the HR Recruitment Portal, on the Oracle Database Express Edition (XE) – a free and significantly limited version of Oracle DBMS with a storage capacity limit. The storage capacity was exceeded due to the volume of applications made on the portal and documents uploaded. In addition, the system lacked adequate error-handling mechanisms, resulting in false notifications of successful submission of applications while documents uploads had failed. The issue was identified as an architectural flaw not detected during user testing. Consequently, the recruitment exercise was cancelled and re-advertised in March 2024 with a paper-based application process.

Furthermore, the revised advertisement dated 01 March 2024 introduced an "either/or" clause to reflect the polyvalent nature of the post and to address queries raised by applicants.

This Office also observed that, although the interviews were held after the dissolution of the National Assembly, there is no evidence to substantiate claims of political interference or fast-tracking of the process for any predetermined candidate. As such, the concern remains perceptional. Moreover, the duration of the interview cannot be taken as indicative of preferential treatment.

Accordingly, no hint of any maladministration by the MQA in the recruitment process for the post of Manager has been found following the re-advertisement dated 01 March 2024.