

**AUDITOR GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT
SPECIAL AUDIT REPORT
PASSPORT, IMMIGRATION & CITIZENSHIP AGENCY – HR PRACTICES**

The Auditor General is appointed by the Governor General and is required by the Constitution, Financial Administration and Audit Act, other sundry acts and letters of engagement, to conduct audits at least once per year of the accounts, financial transactions, operations and financial statements of central government ministries and departments, local government agencies, statutory bodies and government companies.

The Department is headed by the Auditor General, Pamela Monroe Ellis, who submits her reports to the Speaker of the House of Representatives in accordance with Section 122 of the Constitution of Jamaica and Section 29 of the Financial Administration and Audit Act.

This report was prepared by the Auditor General's Department of Jamaica for presentation to the House of Representatives.

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Document No.:	Date Submitted
AuGD 124 – 1601.52.2	June 12, 2023



AUDITOR GENERAL'S
DEPARTMENT OF JAMAICA

'A better Country through effective audit scrutiny'



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Auditor General’s Overview

The Passport Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA) is integral to the nation's border security system. The Agency, which manages Jamaica’s immigration process and matters related to application for and renunciation of Jamaican citizenship, must have in place proper systems that enable lawful travel and trade essential to economic prosperity, and national sovereignty. Accordingly, PICA is required to achieve certain performance indicators as a measure of its efficiency and success for example, targets relating to processing passport applications, requests for citizenships and passengers arriving and departing Jamaican ports. PICA is also tasked to carry out the investigation of offenses committed in any of the areas regulated by PICA.

Based on allegations related to the process of recruiting, hiring, promoting or and selection for professional training courses, we undertook a review to ascertain the credibility of the assertions. While we identified areas that needed strengthening, overall, we found no evidence to substantiate the aforementioned allegations. Nonetheless, I urge PICA to continue to reinforce its standards.

I take this opportunity to thank the management of PICA for the courtesies extended to my team during the execution of our preliminary assessment.



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Pamela Monroe Ellis, FCCA, FCA
Auditor General



Executive Summary

The Auditor General's Department (AuGD) conducted a preliminary assessment of the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA) in response to allegations that the basis on which employees are hired, appointed, promoted and selected for professional courses, is not fair and transparent. We sought to assess whether there were breaches of PICA's HR&A policies and procedure or the GOJ's guideline in this regard. We also sought to assess PICA's staff perception of transparency in relation to the process of selecting members to participate in professional training courses.

Finding

We saw no evidence which suggested that the process of recruiting, hiring, promoting or selecting members for participating in professional training courses was unfair. On the other hand, we saw evidence that the PICA's staff believed there was transparency in the training selection process.

Recommendation

Based on the findings during this preliminary assessment of the entity, it is hereby recommended that an audit should not be commissioned at this time.

PART ONE

Introduction

1.1 *The Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA)* was established on June 1, 2007, as a self-financing, performance-based and service-oriented Executive Agency. The Agency evolved from the former Immigration, Citizenship and Passport Services Division of the Ministry of National Security following a modernization programme which began in 2005. Since then, PICA indicated it has been taking steps to transform itself into a world-class organisation. PICA's aim is to provide efficient, quality service to its clients through a well-motivated and knowledgeable staff.

The laws that govern the operations of the Agency are as follows:

- The Jamaican Constitution
- The Immigration Restriction (Commonwealth Citizen) Act
- The Jamaica Nationality Act
- The Alien's Act
- The Passport Act and Regulations
- The Foreign Nationals and Commonwealth Citizens (Employment) Act
- The Caribbean community (Free Movement) of Skilled Persons Act
- The Executive Agencies Act 2002
- The Financial Administration and Audit Act

Rationale

1.2 The AuGD undertook this preliminary assessment in response to stakeholder allegations that the basis on which employees were being hired, appointed, promoted, and selected for professional courses was not transparent. The audit sought to assess whether there were breaches of the GOJ guidelines as well as the HR&A policies and procedures of the Agency. We also sought to assess the transparency of the process by which staff is selected to participate in professional training courses.

1.3 We planned and conducted our preliminary assessment in accordance with the ISSAIs (International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions) issued by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), which supports our Special Audit manual, along with data interrogation techniques. We gained knowledge of the operations of the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency by reviewing internal and external information, interviews with management, staff and other stakeholders, observations, walkthroughs, and analytical reviews. We conducted fieldwork between February 2023 and March 2023 to gather sufficient and appropriate audit evidence on which we based our conclusion.



PART TWO

Allegations and Findings

Allegation:

Information received from a confidential source outlined concerns that certain officers (the CEO and the HR&A Director) at PICA were engaging in unethical practices (nepotism/favouritism) regarding the hiring, appointing, and promoting of staff contrary to the HR&A policy. It was also alleged that the process by which employees are selected to participate in professional training courses, was unfair and lacked transparency.

- 2.1 Whereas we saw that the appointment of three senior staff (Senior Director, Projects and Enterprise Risk Management, Director of Passport Services and Director Customer Service) were made without competition, this accorded with the **Accountability Agreement between the CEO and the Public Service Commission and Public Service Regulation (1961) Guidelines (3.1.16)** which states,

“In exceptional circumstances...may make a case for a promotion without competition...In such cases, the appointment decision should be posted, so that anyone who have had an interest may exercise the right to appeal”

We saw also evidence that notice was given to staff of the Agency’s intention to appoint the officers and the right of staff to appeal. We saw no evidence of any objection to the public notice and as such, the members were appointed.

- 2.2 The personnel files for all senior managers were assessed to determine if these individuals met the minimum requirements (education and experience) for the post. Based on our review, all senior management staff met or exceeded the required minimum qualification for the respective posts at the time they were appointed.
- 2.3 The interview process for senior managers was also assessed to determine fairness and transparency. From the sample of senior managers selected for this process, we found no anomalies in the interview process and the officers appointed, scored the highest amongst the persons interviewed for the positions. Based on our assessment, the interview process appeared to be thorough and complete.
- 2.4 Based on the proportion of staff employed as immigration officers (approximately 70%), we determined that this was also a high-risk area and as such, an assessment (similar to that carried out for senior management staff) was carried out for this group. A sample of immigration officers was selected to determine if they met the minimum qualification of the post. An assessment of the immigration officers’ personnel files revealed no notable discrepancies.

Selection of Staff to Participate in Professional Training Courses

2.5 A review of the report of a recently concluded audit conducted by the Office of the Services Commission (OSC), revealed that the training selection process was fair and transparent. Additionally, a survey was conducted by the OSC to gauge staff opinion regarding the training selection process; and the vast majority of the staff indicated that they were of the view that the process was fair and transparent. Our assessment was consistent with the findings of the OSC.

Part Three CONCLUSION

1.1. Based on the evidence obtained during this preliminary assessment, the allegations regarding the absence of transparency in hiring, appointing, promoting and selection for training courses were not supported. Although three senior managers were appointed without competition, the process was in keeping with the Public Service Regulation (1961) which permits such appointments in exceptional circumstances. All three appointments occurred in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the Public Service Regulation (1961) makes provision for objection from staff to the notice of intent to make appointments without competition. The fact that there was no evidence of objection to the appointments and the officers in question all met (or surpassed) the minimum requirement for the posts, alleviated our concerns.

1.2. Similarly, the evidence presented did not substantiate the allegation regarding the lack of transparency in the selection process for professional training courses. Discussions with the training coordinator revealed that selection for participation in training courses was based on the availability of space and the training needs of the officers (based on their function). Our assessment of the fairness and transparency of the process was corroborated with the recently completed OSC audit report resulting from an audit of PICA's HR function. During the OSC audit, surveys and interviews were conducted with PICA staff members to determine their perception of the training participation selection process. The audit conclusion was as follows:

"Based on the feedback from discussions with selected managers and focus group participants, the Agency managed well the training and development functions."