

INDEPENDENT PANEL MEMBERS

This paper describes the role and responsibilities of the independent panel members who have been trained by the IMB Secretariat in selection procedures to assist Boards in their role of assessing the suitability of candidates for appointment. The scheme will become operational on 30 April 2004. No interviews should be arranged after that date unless an independent interviewer had been present.

2. In drawing up these procedures for the operation of the scheme the Secretariat has listened carefully to the views expressed by others including the IMB members who had volunteered and been selected to undertake the role. The scheme will assist Boards in carrying out the vital task of identifying the best individuals for appointment and the Minister and the National Council, over the coming months, will be playing close attention to the operation of the scheme. Its success, and the anticipated consequent overall improvement in the quality of the assessments will, it is hoped, enable the Ministers for prisons and immigration to relinquish the task of having to second guess a candidate's suitability for him/ herself.

The role of the independent interviewer

3. The presence of the independent interviewer should be regarded by Boards in a positive light and as a valuable resource provided to each Board to help the interview panel in its role of first identifying those applicants who are suitable for appointment and then selecting the best candidates to

achieve a good balance of members on the Board. The independent interviewer, who will fulfill the role of the third member of the interview panel, will be able to offer guidance to the panel on best practice. He/ she will also help to ensure that the questions posed to all the candidates are both concentrated upon the competencies required, and thus are broadly the same, and that the subsequent recommendation in respect of each candidate is soundly based. Further guidance on the conduct of the interview itself and the subsequent assessment of the candidate is provided at paragraph 6 below and in further comprehensive guidance on the recruitment and selection process which is being issued by the National Council simultaneously.

Obtaining an independent interviewer

4. All requests for the services of an independent interviewer should be made by the Chair of the Board to the Training Section of the Secretariat (on 020 7035 2256 or 2258 respectively). The Board should give a minimum of 10 working days notice before the interview date and it would clearly be helpful if a choice of dates could be given. The Secretariat will also need to know the number of interviews to be held and the start time and estimated finish time. It is anticipated that each interview will take 30 minutes. The independent interviewer will need to bear in mind before accepting a request to assist on a Board that they will be expected to complete the series of interviews even if this takes more than one day since it would disadvantage the candidates for the Board if there was a change of independent interviewer after the interviews had started. Chairs may **not** request a specific interviewer and no

assumption should be made that the same interviewer will be used on subsequent occasions. Independent interviewers must also not agree to attend upon a Board unless he/she has been allocated to the Board by the Secretariat. NB The presumption when considering a request to allocate an independent interviewer will be that the Secretariat had already given permission for the Board's recruitment campaign and therefore that the Board will have followed the available guidance regarding how to carry out a campaign including by targeting the applicants the Board is wishing to recruit (etc). **If the Board has not had a recent recruitment campaign or has not received agreement from the Secretariat to waive that requirement an independent interviewer will not be provided and the interviews should not be held since they will be invalid. Exceptions to the general rule will be e.g. in the case of an agreed singleton candidate or where the candidates have responded to a campaign arranged nationally or by another Board and they are bringing the Board the diversity it needs to achieve a balanced membership.**

Before the interviews

5. The independent interviewer should ensure that he/she receives a copy of the candidates' application forms from the Board Clerk before he/she attends for the interviews. The independent interviewer will also wish to have a tour of the prison before the interviews and it is recommended that, if time permits, that should be the subject of a separate visit, perhaps on the day before, rather than on the day of the actual interview(s). The independent interviewer will also wish to meet the Chair informally to discuss issues such as the gaps

which need to be filled on the board; the wording of the advertisement/advertorial; the present composition of the Board; when the Board meetings are held and when the members do their rota visits so that the independent interviewer can get a full picture of the needs of the Board. The independent interviewer will also need to agree with the two other members of the panel, prior to the interview, who will be asking which questions; how the note-taking of the candidate's responses will be handled; ensure he/she has the feedback from the member who conducted the prison visit and agree how they will be using the matrices (etc). He/she will also wish to ensure that references on the candidates are available for the use of the panel from the Clerk to the Board before the pen pictures are written.

6. As has already been indicated in this paper, the presence of the independent interviewer should be welcomed by the Board; it also follows that any questions raised or guidance given by the independent interviewer should also be received positively. It is, however, important that all parties recognise the special role of the independent interviewer and the goodwill extended to him or her should not go so far as to include the offer of overnight accommodation by members of the Board since this could compromise the perceived independent role of the interviewer.

The interview

7. The independent interviewer should not act as Chair of the interview panel. It is important that all candidates are interviewed for a similar length of time even if it becomes apparent early on in the interview that a particular candidate is unsuitable. All members of the panel will score each candidate using the matrix available at Annex A attached; in addition to the scoring,

each member should briefly write the evidence they have to support the marking. The independent interviewer will wish to be satisfied that all the candidates have been judged on their responses to questions designed to see if they possess the competencies required to be a good IMB member. Some (optional) sample questions for use at the interview are attached at Annex B. It is proposed to issue comprehensive guidance to all Boards on the subject of recruitment and selection shortly now that the independent interviewer scheme and a matrix for use at the interviews have been developed.

After the interview

8. The independent interviewer and other members of the interview panel will discuss their individual scores of each candidate after the interview and will seek to reach an agreed recommendation. The Board Chair will then complete the composite matrix at Annex C which will be signed by the panel members. However, in the event that there is no such agreement and the dissenting voice is that of the independent member it is important that the independent interviewer will feel free to maintain his/her position. In that case he/she will then submit a minority report to the Secretariat on the candidate concerned together with his/her completed matrix report. In such circumstances, both of the recommendations will be reviewed by the HEO of the Appointment Section in the Secretariat. At the end of the interviews the independent interviewer will be expected to certify if they are or are not satisfied with the conduct of the interview(s). A declaration for that purpose is attached at Annex D which should be given to the Board Chair for submission to the Secretariat in the candidate's appointment pack. If the independent interviewer has any concerns these should be passed on to the Secretariat

immediately after the visit. Similarly, if the Chair of the Board has occasion to be concerned at any aspect of the visit from the independent interviewer his/her concerns should be taken up immediately after the visit with the Board's constituency member of the National Council who will ensure that the Secretariat are acquainted with the matter.

9. When submitting the appointment pack to the Secretariat the Chair should copy the panel's recommendations/preferences to the independent interviewer for his/her information so that the independent member can be satisfied that the letter from the Board does reflect the agreed position.

Chairs should then pass the appointment pack to the Clerk to the Board for photocopying before it is sent to the Appointment Section at the Secretariat for consideration and referral to the Minister. The Chair should ensure that the documents are accompanied by a letter from him/her to the Secretariat giving any additional information about the candidates or Board which will assist the selection process. The letter should also list any candidates who have withdrawn their applications and give a summary of the recruitment action taken by the Board. Where there are more recommended candidates than vacancies, the Chair should indicate the Board's preferences in respect of the candidates, paying close attention to the gaps which the Board need to fill.