



OIOS

Office of Internal Oversight Services

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

AUDIT REPORT

Human resources management for peacekeeping operations: recruitment, placement and retention of staff

**Comprehensive human resources strategy is
needed to meet the increasing staffing
requirements and reduce the high vacancy rates
in peacekeeping missions**

10 June 2009

Assignment No. AP2008/615/02

United Nations  Nations Unies

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

OFFICE OF INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICES · BUREAU DES SERVICES DE CONTRÔLE INTERNE

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION · DIVISION DE L'AUDIT INTERNE

TO: Ms. Susana Malcorra, Under-Secretary-General
A: for Field Support

DATE: 10 June 2009

FROM: Fatoumata Ndiaye, Acting Director
DE: Internal Audit Division, OIOS

REFERENCE: IAD: 09-02552

SUBJECT: **Assignment No. AP2008/615/02 - Human resources management for peacekeeping operations:**
OBJET: **recruitment, placement and retention of staff**

1. I am pleased to present the report on the above-mentioned audit.
2. In order for us to close the recommendations, we request that you provide us with the additional information as discussed in the text of the report and also summarized in Annex 1.
3. Please note that OIOS will report on the progress made to implement its recommendations, particularly those designated as high risk (i.e., recommendations 1, 2, 4 and 5) in its annual report to the General Assembly and semi-annual report to the Secretary-General.

cc: Ms. Donna-Marie Maxfield, Chief of Staff, DPKO
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Mr. Swatantra Goolsarran, Executive Secretary, UN Board of Auditors
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INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

FUNCTION

"The Office shall, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations examine, review and appraise the use of financial resources of the United Nations in order to guarantee the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, ascertain compliance of programme managers with the financial and administrative regulations and rules, as well as with the approved recommendations of external oversight bodies, undertake management audits, reviews and surveys to improve the structure of the Organization and its responsiveness to the requirements of programmes and legislative mandates, and monitor the effectiveness of the systems of internal control of the Organization" (General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Human resources management for peacekeeping operations: recruitment, placement and retention of staff

OIOS conducted an audit of human resources management for peacekeeping operations focusing on the recruitment, placement and retention of staff. The overall objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the Department of Field Support (DFS) resources management function at Headquarters and in field missions in recruiting staff. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

Internal controls in human resources management were generally in place. However, there is a need for DFS to review its recruitment strategy in order to recruit more external candidates to meet the increasing staffing requirements and reduce the high vacancy rates in field missions. The main findings are as follows:

- As of June 2008, vacancies for all categories of staff had exceeded the 20 per cent vacancy rate benchmark established for start-up missions, and the vacancy rates were highest among international professional staff and national professional officers, at approximately 40 per cent for each of these personnel categories due to the low number of external candidates recruited to fill international posts. In 2007/2008, the number of external candidates decreased to 946 or 13 per cent, which was only enough to offset the number of staff separating from field missions (952 staff) in the same period;
- Due to a high attrition rate, about 60 per cent of international staff in the field had less than two years of United Nations work experience;
- No assessment was done to determine the effectiveness of the use of Temporary Duty Assignments in supporting start-up missions;
- About 110 international posts in stable missions remained vacant for more than two years (in some cases, up to five years) with no recruitment action taken;
- Of the over 250,000 applications received in the Galaxy system in 2007/2008, 146,048 or 58 per cent were not reviewed by the Field Personnel Division of DFS; and
- There was a delay in implementing the Human Resources Action Plans (HRAP) launched in July 2008 to monitor the achievement of human resources targets in field missions. Agreements with field missions on HRAP goals and performance indicators were not finalized.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of human resources management for peacekeeping operations focusing on the recruitment, placement and retention of staff. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

2. In 2005, OIOS conducted an audit of human resources management (AP2005/600/18) as part of the comprehensive management audit of DPKO (A/60/717). A number of initiatives have since been undertaken by the Secretary-General, including the harmonization of conditions of service in peacekeeping missions (A/61/861), staffing of field missions (A/61/732), and the human resources management reform (A/62/7/Add.14). Also, at the request of the General Assembly, the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) reviewed the contractual arrangements and conditions of service for staff in field missions.¹ Based on the results of the ICSC review, the General Assembly on 24 December 2008 adopted resolution 63/250 on human resources management with proposals to streamline contractual arrangements of staff in the United Nations, to harmonize conditions of service and to improve recruitment processes.

3. The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), Department of Management (DM) is vested with the central authority to establish organization-wide policies and standards governing all human resources matters including the recruitment and placement of staff, staff administration, staff development, performance management, career support and conditions of service for staff. OHRM delegated human resources authority to the Field Personnel Division (FPD) of the Department of Field Support (DFS) for the recruitment and administration of mission staff.

4. As of June 2008, FPD was responsible for the recruitment and administration of staff in 18 peacekeeping missions, 15 political missions and the United Nations Logistics Base. As shown in Figure 1, a total of 30,007 civilian staff posts were authorized in financial year 2007/2008, representing an increase of 10,000 posts in the last three years. In 2007 and 2008, FPD further delegated some human resources management authorities² to field missions to expedite the recruitment of staff.

Figure 1: Annual statistics of authorized posts in peacekeeping missions

International Professional staff	3,313	3,947	4,499
International Field Service staff	3,767	4,369	5,268
National Professional Officers	710	978	1,190
Local general Staff	12,525	16,113	19,050

¹ A/61/30/Add.1

² 2 July 2008 – delegation of technical clearance authority up to the D-1 level; 19 September 2008 – delegation of recruitment authority for National Professional Officers

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5. Comments made by DFS are shown in *italics*.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVES

6. The main objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the DFS human resources management function at Headquarters and in field missions in recruiting mission staff. The audit focused on assessing the:

- (a) Appropriateness of the human resources strategy for recruiting staff in field missions and compliance with existing policies and procedures;
- (b) Adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls on human resources management, including the delegation of authority for certain human resources functions from OHRM to DFS and from DFS to field missions; and
- (c) Effectiveness of action taken to implement OIOS' previous recommendations on human resources management.

III. AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The audit reviewed DFS' human resources activities for the period from 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2008. It included a follow-up of the status of implementation of OIOS' previous recommendations on human resources management. The audit did not cover contractual arrangements and conditions of service for staff in field missions as these were the subject of a review conducted by the ICSC in 2006.

8. The audit methodology comprised reviews of relevant policies, procedures and administrative guidelines for human resources management in peace operations. It also included the assessment of internal controls in DFS and the analysis of supporting human resources data for field missions. Interviews were conducted with responsible personnel in FPD and other departments at Headquarters involved in the recruitment and administration of field personnel.

IV. AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

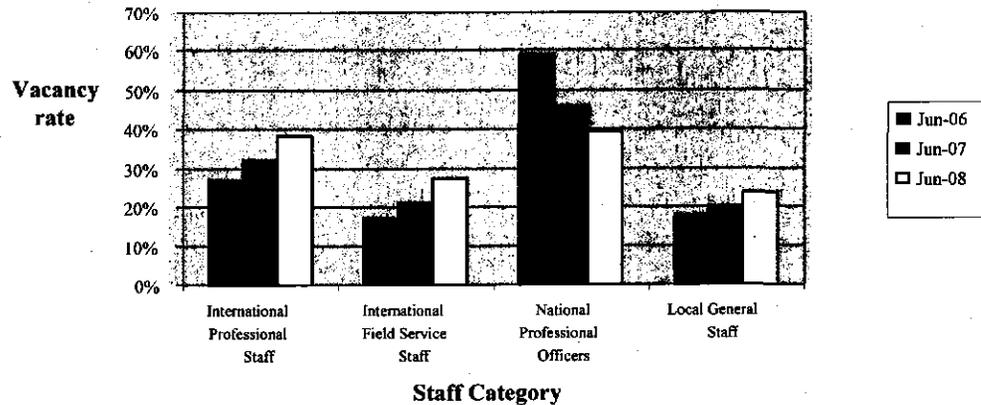
A. Recruitment, placement and retention of staff in field missions

Need for a revised strategy in human resources management to address high vacancy rates in field missions

9. The growth of staffing requirements to address the expanding peace operations and the increasingly difficult conditions in field missions represent a significant challenge to DFS' human resources management function. In the last

three years, overall missions' staff vacancies increased from 4,215 or 21 per cent in 2005/2006 to 8,168 or 27 per cent in 2007/2008. As of June 2008, vacancies for all categories of staff had exceeded the 20 per cent vacancy rate benchmark established for start-up missions. The vacancy rates were highest among international professional staff and national professional officers, at approximately 40 per cent for each of these personnel categories (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Vacancy rates by staff category



10. The high vacancy rates in field missions were due to the low number of external candidates recruited to fill international posts, which declined over the period with most of the posts being filled by internal staff. Of the 2,780 staff recruited in 2006/2007, 1,090 candidates or 40 per cent were external, while in 2007/2008, the number of external candidates decreased to 946 or 13 per cent, which was only enough to offset the number of staff separating from field missions (952 staff) in the same period. As a result, there was no overall reduction in vacancy rates in field missions.

11. To address the high vacancy rates, FPD implemented various initiatives, including the following:

- A further delegation of recruitment authority to field missions in August and September 2008 for the recruitment of international staff up to the D-1 level and national professional staff;
- The Programme for Advanced Compendium of Trainees for training selected external candidates in key administrative functions prior to their deployment to field missions; and
- The use of staff to fill posts in start-up missions on temporary duty assignments.

12. However, these initiatives were not fully effective partly because:

- The measures were reactive and *ad hoc* in nature; and
- There was no systematic analysis of:

– The causes of staff resignation. Although exit interviews are required of every staff leaving the Organization, no information had been compiled on what were the major factors for staff resignation. Exit surveys conducted in the field collected and analyzed only minimal data;

– The real needs and concerns of field staff and the conditions necessary for staff to accept job offers, particularly at extreme hardship duty stations; and

– The effectiveness of the use of staff to fill posts in start-up missions on temporary duty assignments. OIOS audits of the use of Temporary Duty Assignments (TDY) in UNAMID, MINURCAT and UNMIN showed long delays in deployment of staff on TDY. In some instances, TDY was too short for staff to provide required support to start-up missions, and programme managers on TDY left start-up missions before the replacements arrived, therefore, no handover took place.

13. In developing its human resources strategy, DFS may consider adopting the following:

- A policy to retain staff in field missions for a minimum period of one year or longer would: (a) facilitate the hiring of external candidates resulting in the reduction of vacancy rates; (b) reduce costs related to transfers of staff between missions; and (c) enable staff to build up their work experience in missions. About 60 per cent of international staff in the field had less than two years of United Nations work experience; and

- Using the National Competitive Examination (NCE) roster. As of 31 July 2008, the Organization had approximately 400 selected NCE candidates. Out of this number, the geographical representation status of 175 candidates changed to over-represented countries, limiting their opportunity to be selected for NCE posts. Some NCE candidates had expressed interest in taking up appointments in field missions.

14. As regards the NPOs, due to the disruption in educational and living conditions in post-conflict environments, most applicants lacked the required educational requirements and work experience. In addition, field missions could not in most cases verify the candidates' credentials as documents were either lost or destroyed during the conflict periods. Because of this situation the Secretary-General proposed that flexibility be allowed in the application of standards for the recruitment of NPOs based on the unique circumstances in missions.

15. In OIOS' opinion, there is a need for DFS to comprehensively review its human resources strategy to come up with a holistic and well-studied approach to meeting the human resources challenges facing missions.

Recommendation 1

(1) The DFS Administration should, in coordination with DM, develop a comprehensive strategy to meet the increasing staffing requirements and address the high vacancy rates in missions. The following measures, *inter alia*, should be part of the strategy including: (a) recruiting more external candidates; (b) placing interested candidates from the National Competitive Examinations roster to field mission posts; and (c) allowing flexibility in recruiting National Professional Officers with close monitoring of the process.

16. The DFS Administration accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the Department was taking several initiatives with the intention of reducing vacancy rates and improving applications and roster management. The establishment of "Tiger Teams" and movement to an established practice coupled with outreach activities and improved conditions of service would also address high vacancy rates. Recommendation 1 remains open pending specific measures taken to recruit more external candidates, use NCE candidates and allow flexibility in the recruitment of NPO staff.

Need to abolish long outstanding vacancies

17. There is a need to monitor vacant posts in field missions on a continuous basis to ensure that appropriate action is taken to fill vacancies. OIOS' review of vacancies in peacekeeping missions as at 31 August 2008 showed that some of the posts had not been filled for up to five years, and no recruitment action had been started for some posts. In stable missions, 327 posts were vacant for one to five years and, in start-up missions, 760 posts were vacant for one to two years (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Aging analysis of vacancies in field missions

Stable missions	743	190	217	71	35	4	1,260
Start-up missions	151	240	760	-	-	-	1,151

18. As regards the 110 posts for which no recruitment action had been taken for more than two years, as shown in table 3 above, OIOS is of the opinion that DFS should assess whether there is a real need for these posts.

19. Paragraph 2.7.1 of the standard operating procedures on staffing tables and post management states that DFS is responsible for the proper utilization of its approved staffing resources. Programme managers in field missions failed to initiate timely recruitment actions to fill authorized posts. DFS did not monitor the process to ensure that missions utilized the resources in a timely manner or that the necessary recruitment action had been taken.

Recommendations 2 and 3

The DFS Administration should:

(2) In coordination with field missions, assess whether there is a need for the 110 posts for which no recruitment action had been taken for two to five years and consider abolishing unneeded posts; and

(3) Monitor, on a regular basis, the age of vacancies and establish a requirement to abolish posts for which no recruitment action is taken within two years from the date of the approval of the posts.

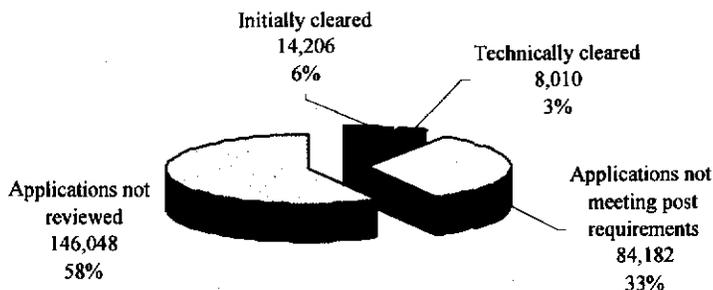
20. *The DFS Administration accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the Department would review with missions posts which had been vacant for a prolonged period and propose their abolition during presentation of draft budgets. Recommendation 2 remains open pending the completion of the review of the 110 posts vacant for a period from two to five years and action taken to abolish or redeploy these posts.*

21. *The DFS Administration accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the Department will review the staffing tables to monitor identification of the aging of vacancies and their abolition if necessary. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt by OIOS of DFS' instructions to field missions to review vacancies older than two years from the date of their approval for which no recruitment took place.*

Need to expedite the processing of applications

22. The existing system for the recruitment of staff in both headquarters and field missions, Galaxy, lacked automated tools to process the high volume of applications received by the United Nations. Galaxy does not have the sorting and filtering capabilities to automatically process applications. As a result, the initial processing of applications is done manually by FPD's Recruitment and Outreach Unit (ROU), consisting of ten staff members. As shown in Figure 4, in 2007/2008, a total of 252,446 applications were received, of which 146,048 or 58 per cent were not reviewed.

Figure 4: Proportion of Galaxy applications processed in 2007/2008



23. At the time of the audit, DFS, in conjunction with OHRM, had completed the procurement of a new talent management system to replace Galaxy. The new system to be implemented in July 2009 is expected to automate the review of applications against the minimum requirements. Until the new system is implemented, OIOS is of the view that the ROU should be strengthened as a temporary measure to increase the level of application processing.

Recommendation 4

(4) The DFS Administration should consider strengthening the Recruitment and Outreach Unit of the Field Personnel Division as a temporary measure until the implementation of the new talent management system.

24. *The DFS Administration accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the profile of the Recruitment and Outreach Unit has been reconfigured and that the Department has requested to establish twelve general temporary assistance positions at the P-3 level for Occupational Group Managers. These new staff will develop and manage the occupational groups and liaise with programme managers in the field to facilitate the placement of candidates. Recommendation 4 remains open pending confirmation that the ROU has been strengthened.*

B. Internal controls in human resources management

Human Resources Action Plans

25. In order to meet the goals and targets mandated in General Assembly resolutions and respond to previous recommendations of oversight bodies on the lack of a human resources monitoring mechanism for peacekeeping operations, FPD developed the Human Resources Action Plan (HRAP) framework, comprising an HRAP portal and a template with a set of performance targets in the Nucleus system, to be implemented by field missions. The HRAP portal is a web-based application in Nucleus designed to assist missions in filling human resources management information in order to facilitate the preparation, performance monitoring and reporting of established human resources goals.

26. The HRAP framework was piloted in five missions on 15 October 2007 and rolled out in all other missions on 28 July 2008. Since the HRAP cycle runs concurrently with the budget cycle, the initial period of implementation was scheduled from July 2008 to June 2009 for missions funded from the peacekeeping budget and from January to December 2009 for missions funded from the regular budget. For HRAP to be implemented, a consensus must be reached with each field mission on specific performance targets based on a formalized agreement. It is the responsibility of FPD to ensure that the agreements are finalized with the field missions and to conduct periodic reviews of the status of the HRAP implementation. Although the mid-term review was due in December 2008, no formal agreements had been signed with field missions as of January 2009 and therefore, the HRAP as a tool for performance monitoring and measurement was not yet operational. FPD explained that field missions were still compiling the required baseline data as of December 2008, but no timelines had been established for its completion.

Recommendation 5

(5) The DFS Administration should ensure that agreements on the human resources action plans are finalized with all field missions to enable their implementation and provide a basis for performance measurement against established human resources management targets.

27. *The DFS Administration accepted recommendation 5 stating that the Department was working towards its full implementation. Issues such as data gathering which had prevented HRAP roll-out had been resolved and Heads of Missions were being instructed about HRAP agreements. Implementation was said to be taking place in time for the 2009/2010 cycle. Recommendation 5 remains open pending the roll-out of the 2009/2010 cycle HRAP agreements and DFS' confirmation of its implementation.*

Non-implementation of automated selection process in field missions

28. The HRAP vacancy management goals and targets involve the reduction of both high vacancy rates and selection timelines (the average number of days between the identification of a vacancy and the reporting date of the selected candidate). In anticipation of the implementation of the HRAP, FPD delegated the authority and responsibility to field missions effective 1 March 2008 to initiate the automated selection of candidates in the vacancy management module in the Nucleus system in order to identify delays and bottlenecks in the recruitment process.

29. However, as shown in Figure 5, the field missions did not use Nucleus to record recruitment actions during the selection process and entered data in the system on a post facto basis. As a result, FPD could not monitor the selection timelines in missions.

Figure 5: Examples of post facto recording of recruitment data in Nucleus

15980	MONUC	11.06.08	28.05.08
15832	UNAMI	26.05.08	22.05.08
15592	UNAMID	09.05.08	07.05.08
15817	MINUSTAH	23.06.08	25.04.08
17022	MINURCAT	03.10.08	24.09.08
16960	UNMIL	23.09.08	11.09.08
17254	UNMIS	19.10.08	30.10.08

30. In OIOS' opinion, DFS should enforce the timely posting of data in the Nucleus system by activating its automated controls at the initial stage of the selection process, thereby not allowing further recruitment steps until the vacancy tracks in the system are created. In addition, the implementation of the automated selection process will provide a management trail for monitoring the recruitment process and serve as a tool to alert recruitment officers whenever candidates are under consideration by other missions to avoid duplication of recruitment efforts.

Recommendation 6

(6) The DFS Administration should ensure that the Field Personnel Division activates automated controls in the Nucleus system at the beginning of the selection process to enable field missions to record recruitment actions for monitoring and control purposes.

31. *The DFS Administration accepted recommendation 6 and stated that as a control measure FPD would limit access to the roster search functionality that will ensure that further recruitment steps do not proceed until all steps of the automated selection process at the mission level have been completed. Recommendation 6 remains open pending DFS' confirmation that limited access to the roster search functionality has been implemented in the field missions thus allowing all steps of the selection process in Nucleus.*

C. Implementation of previous audit recommendations

32. In 2005, OIOS audited the human resources management function at Headquarters (AP2005/600/18) as part of the comprehensive management audit of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (A/60/717), where the following weaknesses were identified: (a) insufficient monitoring of the delegated human resources management authority from OHRM/DM to DPKO; (b) the need for further delegation of authority to field missions; (c) the absence of human resources performance targets and a mechanism to monitor vacancies in field missions; (d) inadequate succession plans; (e) lack of segregation of duties between recruitment and roster management; and (f) inadequate administration of training plans and maintenance of training records. OIOS issued 17

recommendations aimed at addressing these deficiencies and improving human resources management in field missions.

33. As of 1 January 2009, 14 recommendations have been implemented and three were in progress: (a) expanding the generic job profiles for field service staff to cover all functional areas in field missions; (b) developing comprehensive training packages for human resources officers in field missions; and (c) the need for DM to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the delegation of certain human resources authority to DFS and the effectiveness of DFS in exercising these delegated authorities.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

34. We wish to express our appreciation to the Management and staff of DFS for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS
Assignment No. AP2008/615/02 – Audit of human resources management for peacekeeping operations

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/O ¹	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ²
1	The DFS Administration, in coordination with DM, should develop a comprehensive strategy to meet the increasing staffing requirements and address the high vacancy rates in missions. The following measures, <i>inter alia</i> , should be part of the strategy including: (a) recruiting more external candidates; (b) placing interested candidates from the National Competitive Examinations roster to field mission posts; and (c) allowing flexibility in recruiting National Professional Officers with close monitoring of the process.	Strategy	High	O	Pending specific measures taken to recruit more external clients, use NCE candidates and allow flexibility in the recruitment of NPO staff.	Not provided
2	The DFS Administration should, in coordination with field missions, assess whether there is a need for the 110 posts for which no recruitment action had been taken for two to five years and consider abolishing unneeded posts.	Human Resources	High	O	The completion of the review of the 110 vacant posts vacant for a period from two to five years and action taken to abolish or redeploy these posts.	Not provided
3	The DFS Administration should monitor, on a regular basis, the age of vacancies and establish a requirement to abolish posts for which no recruitment action is taken within two years from the date of the approval of the posts.	Operational	Medium	O	Receipt of DFS' instructions to field missions to review post vacancies older than two years from the date of their approval for which no recruitment took place.	Not provided
4	The DFS Administration should consider strengthening the Recruitment and Outreach Unit of the Field Personnel Division as a temporary measure until the implementation of the new talent management system.	Human Resources	High	O	Confirmation that positions to strengthen the Recruitment and Outreach Unit of FPD were established.	Not provided

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/O ¹	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ²
5	The DFS Administration should ensure that agreements on the human resources action plans are finalized with all field missions to enable their implementation and provide a basis for performance measurement against established human resources management targets.	Operational	High	O	Confirmation of the roll-out of the 2009/2010 cycle HRAP agreements and DFS' confirmation of its implementation.	3 rd Qtr 2009
6	The DFS Administration should ensure that the Field Personnel Division activate automated controls in the Nucleus system at the beginning of the selection process to enable field missions to record recruitment actions for monitoring and control purposes.	Operational	Medium	O	Confirmation that limited access to the roster search functionality has been implemented in the field missions thus allowing all steps of the selection process in Nucleus.	Not provided

1. C = closed, O = open

2. Date provided by DFS in response to recommendations.