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Working Paper

WORKING PAPER NO. 8.A REPORT ON HUMAN RESOURCES

(Paper presented by the Secretariat)

Paper summary

1. This paper presents an update of key initiatives being undertaken by the Secretariat's Human Resources (HR) department.
2. To ensure a fit-for-purpose HR function focused on effective operational and strategic delivery, the HR department work programme is currently aligned to the Operations Management Directorate Business Plan, key focus area (KFA) 7 and the Pacific Community (SPC) Strategic Plan 2022–2031.

Key points

3. Progress in HR initiatives
 - i. Significant advancements made in implementing the HR work programme and key initiatives.
 - ii. Alignment with KFA 7 and priority setting of the revised business plan.
4. Health and safety investment
 - i. Ongoing commitment to investment in health and safety initiatives, including psychological support and well-being programmes during crisis.
 - ii. Successful implementation of well-being events and enhanced occupational health and safety protocols.
5. High-performing workforce development
 - i. Continuous efforts to cultivate a high-performing, engaged and diverse workforce.
 - ii. This commitment supports the broader vision of One SPC and enhances service delivery to member countries.

Recommendations

6. CRGA is requested to:
 - i. consider the context and submission of this paper;
 - ii. provide additional insights to enhance the proposed strategies; and
 - iii. endorse the proposals and strategies outlined by the Secretariat.

Background

7. SPC's Strategic Plan 2022–2031 and KFA 7 guide HR's operations with a divisional objective 'to provide HR interventions that contribute to attracting, retaining and developing a diverse and engaged workforce'. These interventions include a focus on effective recruitment, representative equality (Pacific and gender at all levels), fit-for-purpose remuneration and talent management.
8. We recognise that a commitment to international health and safety standards not only safeguards our workforce, but also enhances our reputation and credibility on the global stage.
9. The following sections of this paper highlight HR initiatives undertaken in 2024 to achieve this objective.

Staff well-being

10. Well-being Day was celebrated at SPC for the first time on 26 April 2024. With a focus on the One SPC approach, all SPC staff, including those in regional offices, were involved in the event, which lasted an entire week. The purpose of the event, which was organised by the Health and Safety team in collaboration with the Public Health Division and the Social Environment Responsibility team, was to create a platform for staff engagement with the aim of creating a safe space for SPC staff.
11. The event offered a range of health, safety and well-being workshops, including guided relaxation sessions, quizzes and an opportunity for staff to engage directly with the HR team. Efforts were put in place to provide SPC staff with a safe, supportive and encouraging environment. By working together, sharing our knowledge and our experiences, we will be able to build a solid base and a lasting culture in terms of health and safety. The event was highly successful, as indicated in feedback from staff surveys, reflecting a positive reception to the programme.

Occupational health and safety

12. Here is a brief description of the completed deliverables and ongoing initiatives within SPC's Health and Safety (H&S) framework to ensure the continued safety and well-being of all staff members.
13. HR has made significant progress in strengthening our occupational health and safety (OHS) initiatives. Key achievements include the establishment of a comprehensive OHS Strategy and Documentation Framework, the implementation of the Isolated Worker Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), OHS-SOP-10, and the continued provision of psychological support during the New Caledonia crisis. Additionally, the staff training plan has been updated, the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)/Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) risk analysis for OHS-SOP-05 completed, and regular maintenance and OHS routines established. The intranet has also been updated with the latest safety protocols, ensuring easy access to essential resources. The OHS committee convened in August 2024 to review progress and plan upcoming actions.

14. Looking ahead, HR is finalising the Health and Safety induction video and preparing for the next Health and Safety committee meeting in December 2024. Ongoing initiatives include isolated worker training, role and responsibility training, and validation of the OHS-GUI-08 document management system.
15. HR is adjusting its focus to prioritise the safety and well-being of staff during the ongoing civil unrest in New Caledonia. In response to a request for SPC wardens supporting staff during and after the civil unrest to further strengthen their capacity, a pilot warden training session was held for Noumea-based wardens on 17–18 September 2024. The two-day training aimed to equip wardens with essential knowledge to enhance their roles, instilling confidence in their interactions with staff. It emphasised psychological support, active listening, basic first aid, crisis management and communication skills.

Human Resources' psychological support and well-being initiatives amidst civil unrest in New Caledonia launched May 2024

16. Since 13 May 2024, civil unrest in New Caledonia has posed significant challenges to staff safety and well-being, with curfews, roadblocks, violent protests and mobility restrictions disrupting daily operations. In response, the HR team has implemented a robust psychological support programme aimed at addressing the mental health needs of staff working remotely due to the civil unrest. Recognising the potential for heightened stress, anxiety, trauma and isolation, HR has focused on ensuring that staff are well-equipped to cope with the ongoing crisis.
17. A key component of this initiative has been the rollout of 48 webinars, delivered in both English and French, with over 1000 participants to date. These include a webinar on *Recognising Mental Health Issues During Civil Unrest*, which helped staff identify behavioural changes, emotional distress and physical symptoms linked to mental health struggles. The webinars also covered cultural sensitivity, acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of staff in Noumea, Fiji and other Pacific Island countries and territories. In addition, the sessions highlighted the importance of active listening, providing support and normalising discussions around mental health. Follow-up counselling services were made available through partnerships with external providers like Allianz, ensuring ongoing support. HR also supported staff by providing guidance on the French government's employee insurance scheme (CAFAT), highlighting the differences with Allianz.
18. HR has also taken a proactive role in implementing safety measures as part of the Crisis Management Team, including activating emergency protocols, setting up temporary remote work arrangements and conducting daily check-ins with wardens. These efforts, coupled with mental health resources such as psychological first aid training, stress management workshops and hypnosis sessions, have ensured that staff are supported holistically during this difficult period. HR's commitment to staff well-being is evident in the broad range of services offered, helping staff remain resilient in the face of uncertainty and ongoing challenges.

Recruitment

19. The HR recruitment team (8 FTEs) continues to deliver high-quality services to the Secretariat in a streamlined and efficient process designed to provide excellent candidates.

Recruitment activity	2024 (Aug)	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Applications received & screened	8075	11,000	7700	8800	6700	6300	6600
New positions opened	170	348	247	209	157	147	149
Positions hired	206	279	186	212	146	143	138
Interviews conducted	750	1000	800	850	520	550	550
Time to hire (days)	99	102	81	80	79	75	81

20. The recruitment team captures data on applications from Pacific Islander candidates, women candidates and their appointment. This data enables measurement of performance and assessment of the effectiveness of recruitment initiatives to:

- i. ensure gender parity;
- ii. continue to attract applications from qualified women and Pacific Islander nationals; and
- iii. ensure that SPC recruits' staff with the skills and values required to deliver high-quality services.

Population	2024 (Aug)	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Women applicants	46%	46%	48%	47%	44%	47%	42%
Women appointed	57%	61%	59%	52%	51%	59%	43%
Pacific Islander applicants	53%	50%	58%	53%	44%	45%	41%
Pacific Islander appointments	73%	75%	75%	72%	61%	72%	70%

21. These data illustrate that Pacific Islander nationals and women are well represented on SPC's staff and demonstrate the Secretariat's commitment to recruiting and developing a skilled and diverse workforce.

22. In addition to sourcing high-quality candidates, the recruitment team is also committed to enhancing systems, processes and technology to strengthen SPC's visibility, attract top talent, and support retention and development. Key initiatives include:

- Defining and implementing a new full cost recovery (FCR) methodology, effective from 1 September 2024, with support from SPC Finance.
- Enhancing the recruitment system (TurboRecruit) to ensure candidates review SPC policies on self-declaration, conflict of interest and additional activities. Candidates must now select mandatory checkboxes for each section before submitting their application.
- Developing a SharePoint tool, in collaboration with SPC Legal & ICT, to capture self-declaration and potential conflict of interest declarations from panel members prior to interviews (currently managed manually and not yet automated).

- Finalising the streamlining of our recruitment processes, enabling each team member to support recruitment from any location with the same quality of service delivery for all hiring managers across the organisation.

Operational improvements

23. In 2023 an internal audit was conducted by the Internal Audit and Risk unit. One key objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and management of HR processes throughout the staff employment cycle. Based on the audit's recommendations, the HR team has implemented the following actions to enhance operational efficiency:
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs):** A series of webinar training sessions has been organised to improve staff understanding of SPC's Manual of Staff Policies (MoSP) and key HR procedures. These sessions align with the organisation's commitment to achieving KFA 7 (transforming institutional effectiveness) by promoting consistency and transparency across HR processes. The training aims to provide staff with a clear understanding of essential HR procedures, fostering a culture of accountability and compliance. Webinar topics planned for 2024 include:
 - Recruitment process
 - Performance Development System (PDS) – overview and eligibility criteria
 - Onboarding process
 - Contract management / Contract Committees
 - Probation process
 - Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)
 - SPC-wide induction/onboarding programme:** A comprehensive SPC-wide orientation programme for new hires is being developed to support the integration of new employees into SPC. The programme is structured around four key pillars – compliance, clarification, connection and culture – to ensure new staff align with SPC's values, goals and work environment. This initiative is designed to foster early engagement, build connections and improve retention by providing a structured introduction to the organisation.
 - Review of the Manual of Staff Policies (MoSP):** Implemented on 1 July 2020, MoSP is a critical component of SPC's HR framework, governing the recruitment, management and treatment of staff. Four years after its introduction, a need for updates has been identified. An issues register has been developed by HR to document areas for improvement. HR will collaborate with the Legal Division in 2025 to update MoSP, ensuring it reflects current best practices and organisational needs.
 - Review and enhancement of the Performance Management System:** HR is leading the review and enhancement of our Performance Development System (PDS) to support SPC's commitment to fostering a culture of continuous improvement, professional growth and alignment with organisational values.

24. In light of the audit findings, the HR team continues to focus on strengthening internal capabilities to improve operational workflows, streamline processes and enhance the employee experience. These efforts are aligned with the HR Strategic Work Plan for 2024–2025, with a focus on improving turnaround times and delivering high-quality services to staff.

Conclusion

25. The initiatives outlined in this report demonstrate HR's alignment with KFA 7 and SPC's Strategic Plan 2022–2031, focusing on creating a dynamic and diverse workforce. The emphasis on recruitment, equality and well-being reflects the Secretariat's dedication to fostering a supportive and safe environment. Notable achievements in staff well-being, occupational health and safety, recruitment and operational improvements underscore HR's ongoing commitment to building a resilient workforce. These efforts will ensure that SPC remains equipped to navigate challenges while maintaining high standards of service delivery across the Pacific.

Recommendations

26. CRGA is requested to:

- i. consider the context and submission of this paper;
 - ii. provide additional insights to enhance the proposed strategies; and
 - iii. endorse the proposals and strategies outlined by the Secretariat.
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