

Summary of Discussion from WFA Committee Meeting - June 22, 2012

In attendance:

VAC: Don Love - Chair, Keith Hillier, Charlotte Bastien, Terry Wiseman

UVAE: Yvan Thauvette, Kim Coles

PIPSC: Doreen Weatherbie

Discussion Items	OPI for action items
<p><u>Minutes from Previous Meeting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UVAE expressed concern with the use of a Record of Decision to track items discussed at the WFA Committee meetings. Kim Coles mentioned that the format makes it look like the union is agreeing with management approaches, when in most cases the items are only discussion, with no agreement. <u>Action item:</u> Management agreed to return to a Summary of Discussion as the documentation method. • Kim Coles noted that a management commitment was made at a previous meeting to provide the life span of the pool for SERLO for CSAs, and management has yet to do so. <u>Action item:</u> Management commits to providing UVAE with the anticipated life span of the SERLO pool for CSAs. • Yvan Thauvette and Keith Hillier confirmed that the issue surrounding a CSA letter to the Deputy Minister has been resolved. 	<p>Don Love Completed</p> <p>Keith Hillier</p>
<p><u>Alternation/Policy Grievance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don Love addressed the two main issues of a policy grievance received by Treasury Board and cited in an article by the Ottawa Citizen that day. PIPSC and PSAC both filed a grievance to address the management of alternations under the WFA Directive. • Don Love mentioned that VAC will implement a departmental alternation program once approved by SMC. Launch of the program is expected in the next two weeks, barring any unforeseen issues. • Don Love confirmed that the program is specifically designed to place VAC opting employees—both CSAs and for any future reductions. He also confirmed the program will be in place before SERLO results are issued in July. • Charlotte Bastien mentioned that Ontario Federal Council is establishing a mechanism to place surplus employees in that Region. <u>Action item:</u> HR to provide advance copy of departmental program to UVAE, PIPSC before release. 	<p>Don Love Completed</p>

Selection for Employee Retention or Lay-off (SERLO) Process

- Charlotte Bastien provided an update on the SERLO process:
 - Oral assessments are being completed, with the last ones taking place in Ottawa, Winnipeg, St. John's and Kingston. The latter takes place on June 28 in Kingston.
 - Interviews were taking an average of 45 minutes of the one hour allotted.
 - Written exams were held June 6 and June 19. Scoring of the first set of exams is complete.
 - An alternate method for assessment will be finalized shortly and applied to 13 employees unable to be assessed through the methods above. This paper process will consist of performance appraisals, reference checks and obtaining information from the employees' individual managers.
 - Board members opinions were that although the CSAs found the assessment stressful but that things were going well and employees were relieved to be done.

- Keith Hillier asked UVAE if they were comfortable with the above alternate method, i.e., if an employee assessed through that method is declared surplus. Kim Coles responded that they have advised their members that they can choose this approach, rather than volunteer to retire, if they were not confident to go through the full assessment. Members were also advised that to go through the full assessment is controlling their own destiny, but it is an individual choice and employees need to be able to make an informed decision.

- Charlotte Bastien confirmed that the alternate assessment method will be used for the majority of the employees on long-term leave.
Action Item: Management will confirm for the next Committee meeting how many of that number were employees who had refused assessment.

- Charlotte Bastien mentioned that there were 44 total accommodation cases, in addition to the long-term leave cases. She confirmed that the majority were for ergonomic issues, such as alternate keyboard for the written exam.

- Charlotte Bastien continued her update by stating that:
 - Reference checks have been completed
 - A process is being developed for notification of results
 - Managers will take current and future needs into consideration for selection decisions.

This will be based on specific characteristics and client demographics for an area or region.

- Kim Coles requested a date when criteria for Selection for Retention would be finalized and those results shown to UVAE. Charlotte Bastien advised that a document would be available the first week of July.

Action Item: Don Love allowed that management would provide the methodology used for selection decisions, but not the specific results before employees are notified.

Charlotte Bastien

Don Love

Notification

- Keith Hillier addressed the approach to take for issuing notification letters to those retained and to those being notified of lay-off. He asked for UVAE's thoughts on whether employees should be advised in writing at their home address or informed at work.
- Kim Coles responded that this was the most stressful part of the process for employees and they would need privacy when being informed. With the need for support and to have questions answered, employees should be informed individually at work. She stressed the need for this to be timely and done in concert, to avoid employees being informed by their colleagues.
- Kim Coles suggested that employees being retained could be informed by email. Keith Hillier confirmed that all employees would be informed in writing.
- Charlotte Bastien clarified that notifications:
 - Would go out the week of July 16
 - Would be issued by the Area Director or Regional Director General, with HR and a union representative present
 - Would inform those not being retained first
 - Would include information on counselling, EAP
- Kim Coles asked if the notifications would likely have a Guarantee of a Reasonable Job Offer (GRJO). Charlotte Bastien responded that each situation would require workforce analysis and those considerations would be validated by the Public Service Commission. Keith Hillier confirmed that every surplus decision on GRJO would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as Charlotte described, but the expectation today is that most employees not selected for retention would not get a GRJO, based on the fact that all other departments are downsizing.
- Keith Hillier added that this is why alternations will be very important. Some employees will say "great" and leave, others will be actively seeking alternations and other ways to stay in the Public Service. Don Love explained that once surplus employees have been identified, VAC will kick into the next phase of finding employment (for those not selected). One approach is the Virtual Job Fair, coming in September 2012. Another is to look for jobs within VAC and employees willing to exchange positions and leave. There will be no stone left unturned in finding opportunities for employees.
- Kim Coles asked if a breakdown of positions to be deleted would be available by office. Charlotte Bastien said she was hesitant to provide this information, as there are offices scheduled for closure which could impact those numbers. The targets are per area, but VAC needs some flexibility within each region. For example, Thunder Bay is planned to close and employees would have to be relocated.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kim Coles asked for an update on negotiations with Medavie-BlueCross. Keith Hillier responded that discussions were ongoing but that he could not provide a date that they would be concluded. • Charlotte Bastien explained that recourse options will be in the letters for employees being advised they are not being retained and that there will be post-SERLO support for staff, including “survivor guilt support”. <u>Action item:</u> Charlotte Bastien offered to have an overview of the post-SERLO support for the next meeting. • Yvan Thauvette asked if the names of these support persons would be provided. Charlotte Bastien responded that employees would receive more access to individual options, such as EAP information. Regional support will be available from local EAP contacts. Don Love confirmed that there will be a case management approach for each surplus employee, with an HR advisor available. • Kim Coles expressed concern at the timing of the review of SERLO decisions and announcements. Mid-July is a big time for annual leave and summer vacation. Charlotte Bastien confirmed that they are aware of this and they are trying to get the information out as quickly as possible. Some impacts were the need to conduct a quality control exercise to avoid any mistakes and the size of the exercise—much larger than a staffing process for one office. <u>Action Item:</u> Management will canvass regional staff involved in support to ensure availability over the summer. • Keith Hillier asked if UVAE would support having notification go out first to offices where no cuts would occur. Yvan Thauvette felt that was not necessary, as those offices were pretty much already aware of their situation. Kim Coles felt advising those who were safe first would put more stress on employees in the other offices, as they would know they were getting bad news. Keith Hillier withdrew the proposal. <u>Action item:</u> Keith Hillier confirmed that dates for the issuing of results letters will be shared at the next Committee meeting. 	<p>Charlotte Bastien</p> <p>Charlotte Bastien</p> <p>Keith Hillier</p>
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Issues Related to SERLO Process

- Charlotte Bastien identified that board members were tracking any glitches that occurred during the assessment.
- Kim Coles identified some issues with the SERLO process:
 - There were some glitches in scheduling
 - Not enough prep time was allowed for some, compared to other employees
 - One CSA was blind copied on the interview times for other employees, which is a potential breach of confidentiality
- Charlotte Bastien confirmed that the above issues were identified and responded to quickly. Apologies were issued for the lack of notice before a scheduled interview.
- Kim Coles asked for clarification on the number of positions remaining to be reduced. Was it still 38? Charlotte Bastien confirmed that—despite her dreaming the number had gone down—it remains at 38, as 37 CSA positions have been reduced through retirements, other departures, ending acting and not renewing terms.
- Kim Coles questioned the need for putting all CSAs through the SERLO process when, for example, Atlantic region only needs to reduce by 1 more. She stated that management could have planned better, used volunteers to take TSM, rather than go through the large amount of time, resources and disruptions to client services that this process has caused. Don Love responded that a large process was necessary, and after thorough analysis was determined as the best way to reduce by 75 for CSAs in different areas of the country. He added that careful analysis was done before the decision not to consider accepting volunteers for departure. He cited that PSAC had in fact grieved another department's decision to request volunteers before identifying impacted or surplus employees. Kim Coles responded that asking for volunteers for departure worked well at Health Canada.
- Don Love explained that it was important for VAC to stay the course, even once numbers of reductions began to drop, rather than be reactive and change approach in the middle of the process. However, he admitted that VAC could learn from this and consider a different approach for smaller scale reductions.
- Kim Coles mentioned a concern that the time frames were established very quickly, there was no consultation with unions and the WFA Committee was not even established yet. She stated that addressing these issues better could have helped bring the number of positions to reduce down. Management noted her concerns.

Round Table Items

- Kim Coles asked whether Public Works and Government Services Canada was no longer conducting annual reviews. Keith Hillier responded that bulk printing that was being done by PWGSC would have to be done by an alternate supplier in the near future. As a result of a budget decision, PWGSC is getting out of the printing business. VAC is seeking an alternate solution. Keith Hillier confirmed that PWGSC has not done annual reviews.
- Kim Coles asked if inputting of client information and client follow-up would be affected, as those are one of the 4 main ingredients identified by Keith Hillier. Keith Hillier responded that he didn't have that level of detail with him to be able to respond today. Kim Coles identified that UVAE will want to discuss workload, effects on the work description and what work will be going to the contractor, to get a grip on the impacts of work changes to CSAs. Keith Hillier agreed.
- Doreen Weatherbie thanked Don Love and the other participants for including her in the call. Although PIPSC is relatively safe, they will need to address similar issues down the road. She asked if something was in place in terms of exit interviews, to give closure to departing employees and to suggest possible changes in the work and the process. Charlotte Bastien confirmed that exit questionnaires and exit interviews are used and will be used for this process. She clarified that if employees are declared Opting, they are not necessarily out the next day. The date they are no longer required may not be known on that day. These will be managed on a case-by-case basis.
- Kim Coles asked if HRT would result in job losses and whether employees involved would be protected from fraud. Keith Hillier confirmed there would be no indeterminate job losses. He added that employees are not accountable for client claims that may be fraudulent. Don Love confirmed that this is standard for employees who handle client claims—the claimant (client) is accountable.
- Kim Coles thanked management for allowing local meetings to be held during work hours, with HR present.

Date for Next Meeting

- Don Love proposed the first week of July but most participants were not available. Keith Hillier recommended the following week, to allow time to finalize SERLO results.

Action item: DGHR's office will issue an invitation for the next meeting for July 9 or 10

- Participants confirmed their availability over the summer. Individuals will be unavailable:
 - Kim Coles is away July 27-August 5
 - Don Love is away July 2-July 13 and again for 3 weeks in August
 - Yvan Thauvette is away from July 24-August 6

Don Love