



GUIDANCE ON THE CONTENT OF CANDIDATE SUMMARIES

Introduction

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Scotland (OCPAS) has dealt with a number of enquiries from sponsor teams unsure about appropriate content for candidate summaries. This paper has been produced to assist sponsor teams to comply with the [Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland](#) (the Code) as it applies to the content of candidate summaries.

What the Code says about candidate summaries

The Code says that the candidate summary, “will provide the Minister with an objective analysis of each candidate’s suitability for appointment based on the information provided by each candidate during the appointment round and the selection panel’s decision about each candidate” (see paragraph 24.2).

The term is also defined in the Code’s glossary (page 31) as:

“A written summary of the performance of each candidate interviewed which describes the selection panel’s combined view on how each candidate meets the criteria noted in the person specification.”

How this is to be understood

The Code is silent about the format for the candidate summary. However:

- the Code is explicit that the candidate summary must set out how each candidate met, or otherwise, each of the publicised criteria for the role. The candidate summary must also contain assessments of candidates not considered appointable.
- the candidate summary’s purpose is to give the appointing Minister sufficient information on which to base an appointment decision.
- the content of the candidate summary must be agreed by the selection panel and should contain information from each stage of the application process (that is, from both the application form and from the interview).

The candidate summary does not have to contain the same level of detail for candidates that the panel did not consider appointable. A brief summary of their performance is sufficient. Therefore:

- the candidate summary is not usually the document that the sponsor team will refer to when providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates.
- the sponsor team will refer usually to the collective shortlisting and, as appropriate, interview evaluation forms when providing feedback.

If a candidate is considered appointable and not appointed by the Minister, the sponsor team must then refer additionally to the reasons for the Minister's decision (paragraph 24.5 of the Code) to let the candidate know why they were not chosen. Please note that:

- the candidate summary can be used for the dual purpose of advising the Minister on the suitability of candidates as well as providing feedback to unsuccessful candidates. For it to achieve this latter purpose it has to be considerably more detailed on the performance of unsuccessful candidates than is the norm.

Other information that can be included in the candidate summary

- A list of all other public appointments held can be included in the information provided to the Minister.

This information is in the public domain and so can come from a range of sources including:

- the first part of the application form
 - gained at interview and / or from part two of the form
 - the sponsor team's knowledge.
- Information on the candidates that, if they were to be appointed, has the potential to affect the credibility of the body concerned or that more generally calls their probity into question can also be included in the summary.

Such information must be handled in accordance with the Code (see paragraphs 21.1 to 21.8 and 22.7).

Sponsor teams may wish to consider taking legal advice when planning to follow these paragraphs of the Code.

If such information comes to light after the candidate summary has already been signed off, the Commissioner advises that it should still be subject to these provisions of the Code. It would not, for example, be appropriate for an official to include information of this nature in the final submission to the Minister without having had it checked and approved by the selection panel. The panel may be reconvened, if necessary, to consider such information. The same applies to information on conflicts of interest.

Other information that cannot be included in the candidate summary

- The political activity of candidates must not be included in the summary unless there is a clear conflict of interest that has been identified by the panel relating to that political activity.
- The content of references cannot be included in the submission to the Minister. References are collected in accordance with paragraphs 11.1 to 11.3 of the Code and are used only to verify the accuracy of the information supplied by applicants. If a concern subsequently arises about the accuracy of the information supplied by an applicant it can, as with other concerns, be considered by the panel.

Definitions

Sponsor teams should be aware that the Code draws a distinction between applicants and candidates (see the Code's glossary on pages 30 and 31):

- An applicant is an individual who has completed and submitted an application form.
- A candidate is an applicant who has progressed to interview.

Status of this guidance

The Commissioner has the power, under the Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. (Scotland) Act 2003, to issue guidance to the Scottish Ministers as to compliance with the [Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland](#) (the Code). Sponsor teams should note that failure to comply with such guidance will represent non-compliance with the Code. If sponsor teams are in any doubt as to whether this guidance applies to a round that they are administering, they should contact the Resourcing Centre of Expertise within Scottish Government for advice.