


Report to the federal Parliament

HR Audit of the scientific agencies depending upon the Belgian Department of Public Health, i.e. the Scientific Institute of Public Health (ISP-WIV) and the Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Centre (Cerva-Coda)



The Scientific Institute of Public Health (ISP-WIV) and the Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Centre (Cerva-Coda) are both scientific agencies. Each of them is made up of two parts : one is public and depends on the Department of Public Health, while the other has its own legal personality and carries out analyses for third parties. Both identities are intertwined, although each has its own function and abides by specific rules. This situation is reflected in the HR policy. For practical reasons, the rules and regulations happen to be construed broadly or simply ignored. The umbrella scientific agency that is yet to be created will open new opportunities for a better management. Yet, the rightful objective of creating maximum efficiency cannot move the boundaries of the “public service” principles. As a result, the Belgian Court of Audit recommends to set a framework within the future agency, which will be based on principles such as openness, transparency and objectivity related to the administrative decisions about people’s career.

The Court has examined the HR policy and management of the federal scientific agencies ISP-WISP and Cerva-Coda, which both depend on the Department of Public Health.

Although they are public services within the Department of Public Health, they also have their own legal personality and, as such, carry out analyses for third parties. Theoretically, each structure has its own functions but in practice, they are intertwined.

The Court has repeatedly indicated that such a double structure may cause difficulties to the agencies everyday operations. The Court’s latest audit supports this statement. The HR policy is mainly based on practical concerns for the sake of good functioning. With this in mind, the rules and regulations are either construed broadly or simply ignored by the agencies.

For example, the legal personality has recruited staff members in order to remedy or circumvent the budget constraints or organisational boundaries related to recruitment by the public service. Another motivation was to fill permanent statutory jobs of the public service, which normally requires a full statutory recruitment procedure. On the other hand, the agencies have used smart tricks so that the statutory staff members of the public service

can keep the advantages acquired during their previous employment under the legal personality.

The Belgian government is thinking of creating a new scientific agency named *Sciensano*. This unique agency would take over the competences of the ISP-WIV and the Cerva-Coda, both as public services and legal entities, which could resolve part of the problems.

The new agency would exclusively recruit contract staff members and pay them under the current payroll system. The basic principle remains the same: the new agency would use the same wage scales as those applying to civil servants having similar functions.

The audit shows some shortcomings in the recruitment procedure of contract staff members: lack of strict conditions for publishing job vacancies and insufficient focus on the motivation, justification and information obligations. There are no adequate rules for the preselection and the final selection stages either, which violates the equal access principle to the public services. The lack of transparency becomes even more obvious as the selection files are nowhere to find in the records.

It appears, after some verifications, that the legal personalities construe somehow creatively the obligation to apply to their contract staff members the same wage scales as those applying to the civil servants having similar functions. The wage scales used may even be wrong in some cases.

The Court firmly believes that the creation of a new umbrella scientific agency will open new opportunities for a better management. Still, it also points out that the rightful objective of creating maximum efficiency cannot move the boundaries of the “public service” principles. As a result, the Court calls, during the creation of the new agency, for defining an HR policy framework based on openness, transparency and objectivity (selection, recruitment, career evolution, promotion, etc.) in both administrative and monetary matters.

The report *HR Audit of the scientific agencies depending upon the Belgian Department of Public Health, i.e. the Scientific Institute of Public Health (ISP-WIV) and the Veterinary and Agrochemical Research Centre (Cerva-Coda)* is now available (in either French or Dutch) on the Court's website (www.courtfaudit.be).