



7th Report

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON
LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS
AND STATUTORY AUTHORITIES
(INCLUDING THE THA)

on an

Examination of the Institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department

Third Session (2022/2023), 12th Parliament

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Of the

**Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service
Commissions and Statutory Authorities
(including the Tobago House of Assembly-THA)**

On an

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initiatives of the Service Commissions Department.**

Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	ORGANISATION
DPA	Director of Personnel Administration
DMO	District Medical Officer
EDMS	Electronic Document Management System
HoD	Head of Department
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOB	Management of Business
MPA	Ministry of Public Administration
PMCD	Public Management Consulting Division
POA	Principles of Accounts
POB	Principles of Business
PoISC	Police Service Commission
PS	Permanent Secretary
PSC	Public Service Commission
SCD	Service Commissions Department
SRC	Salary Review Commission
TSC	Teaching Service Commission
TTUTA	Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association
USC	University of Southern Caribbean
UTT	University of Trinidad and Tobago
VIP	Virtual Interview Platform
VPN	Virtual Private Network

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 At its 9th meeting held on Wednesday 5th January, 2022, the Committee resolved to examine the Institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department and agreed that the following four (4) objectives would guide the inquiry:

- i. To examine and assess the administrative and operational changes that have been implemented at the Service Commissions Department during the past three (3) years;**
- ii. To evaluate the impact of these administrative and operational changes on the ability of the Service Commissions (with the exception of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission (JLSC) to execute their constitutional responsibilities.**
- iii. To obtain insights into the plans and proposals aimed at further improving the Institutional capacity of the Service Commissions Department.**
- iv. To examine the factors and conditions that are hindering the successful implementation of organisational transformation measures at the Service Commissions Department.**

1.2. The inquiry process involved the collation of relevant oral and written evidence from primary and secondary stakeholders to acquire a holistic perspective on the issues under consideration. To this end, the Committee convened three (3) public hearings with the officials of the following primary stakeholders:

- The Ministry of Public Administration (MPA);
- The Service Commissions Department (SCD);
- The Public Service Commission (PSC);
- The Teaching Service Commission (TSC);
- The Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA);

- The Ministry of Education (MoE);
- Office of the Director of Personnel Administration (DPA); and
- The Police Service Commission (PolSC).

1.3. Some of the issues which were highlighted during the course of the inquiry included:

General Issues

- a. The Service Commissions' productivity levels and service delivery performance during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- b. The measures that were being pursued to enhance the human resource capacity within the PSC, PolSC and TSC;
- c. The recruitment process and hiring practices of the TSC, PolSC, PSC and SCD;
- d. The Institutional strengthening initiatives implemented within the SCD over the past 3 years;
- e. Disciplinary matters within the SCD and the PSC, PolSC and TSC;
- f. The delay in promotions and appointments across the Service Commissions;

Teaching Service Commission

- g. The effect of the COVID -19 pandemic on teacher's performance;
- h. The concerns in relation to the appointment and transfers between the TSC and the THA;

Police Service Commission

- i. The recruitment and performance appraisal process for the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Police;

Public Service Commission

- j. The filling of vacancies within the PSC.

1.4. From observations made during this inquiry, the Committee has proffered recommendations which believes will appropriately address the operational

shortcomings and challenges identified based on the evidence received. A summary of these recommendations follow this Executive Summary.

- 1.5. We anticipate that the Parliament, and the stakeholders of this inquiry will give due consideration to the findings and recommendations contained in this Report with a view to ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the Institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department (SCD) in Trinidad and Tobago. The Committee looks forward to reviewing the line Ministry's response to this Report, which becomes due, sixty (60) days after it is presented to the Houses of Parliament.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations proposed by the Committee are as follows:

OBJECTIVE 1: RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Service Commissions Department

- i. The SCD should employ additional strategies to obtain a greater level of cooperation among PSs and HODs to partner with SCD to fill the vacancies within their establishment.
- ii. The SCD should provide an update on the following:
 - a. its engagement with PSs and HoDs to conduct reconciliations of the job positions within their establishments with a view to identifying vacancies;
 - b. a list of the PSs and HODs that have failed to comply with the recommendation of the SCD and the reason/s for same; and
 - c. The status of the TSC's filling of the 315 positions of Head of Department;

Teaching Service Commission and Ministry of Education

- iii. Statistical data regarding trends in the demand for teachers in the specific subject areas should be openly published for the benefits of persons aspiring to join the teaching service. This information should be published on the website of the Ministry of Education and also the Service Commissions Department.
- iv. That the Ministry of Education in collaboration with SCD and other related stakeholders evaluate the suitability of the maximum age limit of 45 as provided in Section 6(1) of the Education Act.

- v. That the efficient submission of special reports to the TSC factor more prominently in the Performance Appraisal/ Performance assessment of School Principals as a means of engendering a higher level of compliance by Principals.

OBJECTIVE 2: RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Service Commissions Department

- i. The SCD develop a shared database that can be accessed by MDAs to provide updates on the status of vacancies and other related matters.
- ii. The SCD and Ministry of Public Administration should collaborate with Ministries and Departments to encourage better succession planning practices. This proactive approach to human resource management can be advanced through prompting PSs and other heads to work with the SCD to create and or update merit lists for crucial job positions.
- iii. The PSC should collaborate with the MPA to assess and determine whether there are any notable differences between the performance and experiences of persons recruited as Deputy Permanent Secretaries from inside the Public service compared to persons recruited from outside the public service.

OBJECTIVE 3: RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Service Commissions Department

- i. The SCD provide the Committee with the results of the discussions with the IADB regarding the SCD's digital transformation initiatives.
- ii. The SCD provide an update on the status of the filling of top and middle management vacancies within the SCD which was expected to be completed by July 2022.
- iii. The SCD provide a status update on:

- a. The implementation of the Digital Transformation project of the SCD;
- b. The establishment of a Project Management Unit; and

The establishment of an Assessment Centre Unit

OBJECTIVE 4: RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Service Commissions Department

- i. That the SCD provide the Parliament with a status update on the following:
 - a. The percentage of Public Officers files, applicant files and other relevant records of the PSC that have been digitized as at April 2023 and the number that remains to be processed?
 - b. The filling of the positions of Assistant Commissioner and Senior Superintendent of Prisons;
 - c. The implementation of the EDMS project; and
 - d. The development of a business continuity plan for the SCD.

Teaching Service Commission and Ministry of Education

- ii. The MOE provide the Parliament with an update on:
 - a. The findings and recommendations that emerged from the staff audit which was expected to be completed by the end of April 2022; and
 - b. The status of the upgrade of Assistant Teachers (Primary) (ATPs) who were not upgraded.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Service Commissions Department

- 2.1. The Service Commissions Department, as it is known today, is the Secretariat of the four (4) constitutionally entrenched Service Commissions i.e.
 - i. the Public Service Commission;
 - ii. the Police Service Commission;
 - iii. the Judicial and Legal Service Commission; and
 - iv. the Teaching Service Commission.
- 2.2. The Service Commissions Department provides these Commissions with the necessary administrative and advisory services to enable them to effectively carry out their constitutional functions.
- 2.3. The four Service Commissions are constitutionally established and are primarily empowered to appoint, promote, transfer, confirm and exercise disciplinary control as enshrined in the Constitution.

The Public Service Commission¹

Role of the Commission

- 2.4. The Public Service Commission was established by Trinidad and Tobago Order in Council 1950. Section 92 of the 1962 Constitution and Section 121 of the 1976 Constitution confer on the Commission the power to:
 - i. appoint persons to hold or act in offices in the Civil Service, Prison Service and Fire Service;

¹ <https://www.scd.org.tt/index.php/scd/public-service-commission>

- ii. make appointments on promotion and transfers;
- iii. confirm appointments;
- iv. remove and exercise disciplinary control over persons holding or acting in such offices.

Responsibility of the Commission

- i. to fill the man power needs of Ministries and Departments in order to ensure the discharge of various services;
- ii. to assure the public of public service neutrality by exercising their constitutional authority in respect of the control of careers in the service;
- iii. to protect public officers against acts of discrimination by politicians;
- iv. to protect public officers from other public officers;
- v. to prevent nepotism by ensuring fairness and transparency in the appointment and promotion of public officers;
- vi. to ensure the good conduct and efficiency of public officers by exercising their constitutional authority in respect of discipline in the Public Service.

Police Service Commission²

- 2.5. Section 123 (1) of the Constitution gives the Police Service Commission the power to:-
- a) appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;
 - b) make appointments on promotion and to confirm appointments;
 - c) remove from office and exercise disciplinary control over persons holding or acting in the offices specified in paragraph (a);
 - d) monitor the efficiency and effectiveness of the discharge of their functions;

² <https://www.scd.org.tt/index.php/scd/police-service-commission>

- e) prepare an annual performance appraisal report in such form as may be prescribed by the Police Service Commission respecting and for the information of the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police; and
- f) hear and determine appeals from decisions of the Commissioner of Police, or of any person to whom the powers of the Commissioner of Police have been delegated, in relation to appointments on promotions or as a result of disciplinary proceedings brought against a police officer appointed by the Commissioner of Police.

Teaching Service Commission³

- 2.6. The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) was established under the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Section 124) and is charged with the responsibility under Section 125 as follows:

*“Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, **power to appoint persons to hold or act in public offices in the Teaching Service established under the Education Act, including power to make appointments on promotions and transfer and to confirm appointments, and to remove and exercise disciplinary control over persons holding or acting in such offices and to enforce standards of conduct on such officers shall vest in the Teaching Service Commission.**”*

Line Ministry

- 2.7. The Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) is the arm of the Trinidad and Tobago Government charged with the task of partnering with other Government Ministries and Agencies to improve the quality of public service provided to all citizens. To this end, the MPA provides support to the Service Commissions Department (SCD) and the Commissions under its purview.

³ <https://www.scd.org.tt/index.php/scd/teaching-service-commission>

Inquiry Rationale

2.8. The Service Commissions Departments and the Public Service Commission, Teaching Service Commission and Police Service Commission were last examined by this Committee in the 11th Parliament. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the inefficiencies that exist within the public service and has thus demanded innovation in daily operations, work schedules and hiring practices. As such, it was the view of the Committee that the Service Commissions Department should be re-examined with a view to enhancing its operational efficiency and service delivery.

Methodology for Obtaining Evidence

2.9. Three (3) public hearings were held virtually on March 02, 2022, April 13, 2022 and May 04, 2022 respectively via the Zoom Video Conferencing platform. The List of Officials who appeared at the public hearings to provide evidence on issues relevant to the inquiry objectives is provided in **Appendix I**.

2.10. The Minutes and Verbatim Notes relevant to the Committee's public hearing with officials are attached as **Appendix V** and **Appendix VI** respectively.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE TOGETHER WITH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective 1: To examine and assess the administrative and operational changes that have been implemented at the Service Commissions Department during the past three (3) years

Service Commissions Department

Institutional Strengthening and Organizational Development Measures

3.1.1. The Service Commissions Department (SCD) reported that during the period 2019 to 2021, it undertook a review of all its processes aligned to the continuation of its ongoing Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) project and the enhancement of the Department's digital transformation thrust. As a result, as at January 2022, the Department had completed consultations with the Public Management Consulting Division (PMCD) of the Ministry of Public Administration and was in the process of submitting a Note to the Cabinet.

3.1.2. The SCD has implemented the following initiatives to re-engineer the processes in order to promote the continuation of the EDMS project. (See Appendix II)

- Virtual Meeting;
- Virtual Tribunal/ Court (via MS Teams);
- e-Recruit;
- Virtual Interview Platform;
- Website Redesign;
- Social Intranet- MySCD;
- e-Signatures;

- Data Visualisation; and
- Networking and ICT Support.

Service Delivery Systems

3.1.3. The SCD highlighted the following challenges which impacted on its operations and service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategies to mitigate against these challenges were also discussed. (See Appendix III)

Challenges

- Staff shortages impacted on efficiency the operations of support services such as building maintenance
- Staff absenteeism due to Quarantine
- Hosting of interviews for the recruitment process
- Conduct of disciplinary Tribunal Hearings
- Submission of Applications
- Access to records

Mitigation Strategies

- Remote working and staff rotation initiatives
- Implementation of a virtual interview platform providing an e-recruitment for candidates
- Virtual Tribunal Hearings via MS Teams
- Introduced the utilisation of online scoring and e-signatures
- Access to the SCD's VPN allowed for remote working and access to the Department's records

3.1.4. From April 2020 to present, the SCD has successfully implemented work-from-home arrangements as well as rotation of staff. Due to access to and availability of the Department's VPN, staff can seamlessly operate at home. As at January, 2022, approximately 88% of the SCD's staff had utilized Work-From-Home and other alternative work arrangements. As a result, the Department has been able to effectively sustain its operations during the past 18 months.

Disciplinary Matters related to COVID-19 work arrangements

3.1.5. No disciplinary matters were referred to the Public Service Commission (PSC) in relation to conflicts which arose due to employee-employer interpretation of COVID-19 protocols and practices in the work place.

SCD Applications Process

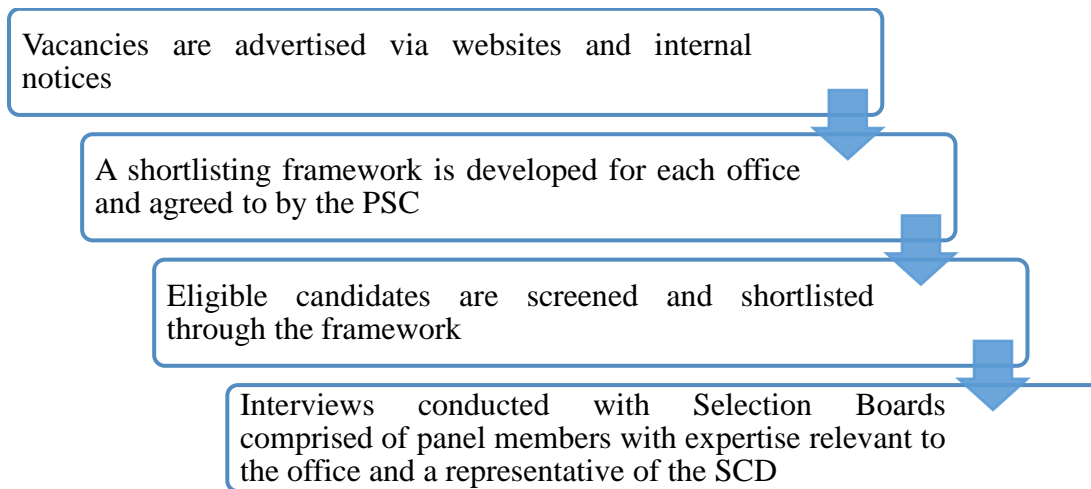
3.1.6. The SCD had initial conversations with the then Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation (MPADT) to leverage technologies developed by that Ministry to assist in the re-engineering of the SCD's application process. These discussions are on-going.

3.1.7. However, in the interim, the SCD was relying on internal resources to develop strategies that would improve the recruitment process in respect of all the Commissions. On July 31, 2020, the SCD implemented an e-recruitment system which was fully launched in March 2021. The statistics related to its implementation are provided hereunder:

- Number of offices advertised: 31
- Total number of applications received: 1802

3.1.8. With the introduction of the online application/e-recruit system, the SCD has been able to reduce the number of complaints of lost/misplaced/not received applications. The system provides immediate feedback on one's application. The monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms in place, allows the SCD to detect issues with applications before the closing date of advertisements.

3.1.10. The SCD's recruitment and selection process is provided below:



SCD Public Feedback Platforms

3.1.11. The following are the noteworthy channels implemented by the SCD to obtain public feedback on their processes:

- i. Surveys were introduced to solicit feedback on the e-Recruit and Virtual Interview Platform in October 2021;
- ii. Sensitisation sessions with Ministries/Departments were held on the systems and ongoing training is conducted with video recordings used to enhance stakeholder reach.

Manpower Audit

3.1.12. The SCD highlighted that the collaboration with the Head of the Public Service (Permanent Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister) and the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) recommended by the Committee to mandate Permanent Secretaries (PSs) and Head of Departments (HoDs) to conduct **regulatory reconciliations of the job positions within their establishments has not materialized**. However, the SCD continues to engage PSs and HoDs to conduct regulatory reconciliations of the job positions within their establishments with a view to identifying vacancies.

3.1.13. PSs and HoDs are required to provide the SCD with updates regarding vacancies as they arise together with recommendations for their filling in keeping with the provisions of Regulation 13 of the Public Service Commission. Further, the SCD has extended its **Vacancy Reduction Project** to include the development and utilization of a Priority Matrix. The Matrix will prioritize the selection of offices for filling of vacancies. The SCD will engage PSs and HoDs in this exercise to ascertain their priorities.

Disciplinary Tribunals

3.1.14. The SCD currently engages, four (4) Standing Disciplinary Tribunals. These Tribunals are appointed by the TSC (and the PSC) to hear the evidence, find the facts and submit reports to the Commissions, in cases where officers are charged with acts of misconduct or indiscipline including matters under the purview of the PSC for officers in the Civil, Prison and Fire Services.

3.1.15. As a result, because of the voluminous number of disciplinary matters there is a lag in terms of how many matters can be expeditiously dealt with by any one Tribunal.

3.1.16. In light of the impact of Covid-19 and subsequent restrictions, the DPA proposed an alternative to “in-person” Disciplinary Tribunal hearings, with the introduction of virtual hearings.

Police Service Commission

Performance Appraisals for Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Police

3.1.17. The PolSC advised that a mixed-methods approach, comprised of results-oriented and competency-based components, was used to assess the performance of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners of Police.

3.1.18. The results-oriented components are linked to the approved Job Descriptions and the Strategic and Operating Plans for the Police Service, whereas the competency-based component is aligned to the same Competency Frameworks used at the Recruitment stage for those offices.

3.1.19. In 2019, the Commission approved a new performance appraisal framework, aligned to the approved Job Descriptions for the offices of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police, the Strategic and Operating Plans, and the approved Competency Frameworks. Prior to 2019, the framework depended almost solely on the Police Service's Operating Plans since the revised job descriptions were not yet available following the 2006 constitutional changes, and the new powers of the Commissioner of Police.

3.1.20. The competencies are measured using 360° rating forms whereby peers, subordinate staff, and external stakeholders rate the officers' competencies as defined in the relevant Competency Frameworks. The current weighting for these components are as follows:

- Duties and Responsibilities (50%) and Organizational Targets (40%)
 - Maintenance of Law and Order
 - Public Trust and Confidence;
 - Human resource Management;

- Financial Management; and
- Strategic (Leadership, Communication and Management)
- Competency Assessment - 10%

Teaching Service Commission

The Recruitment Process

- 3.1.22. The TSC has made strides toward digital transformation through the implementation of a **Virtual Interview Platform (VIP)** in 2021. The secure online platform allowed Interview Panel Members, Interviewees, and SCD's staff to exchange required documents electronically while entering scores in real time, providing immediate, automatic generation of reports. Since its inception in 2021, as at February 2022, 734 candidates were interviewed using the virtual platform.
- 3.1.23. As at April 13, 2022, 577 applicants for the Head of Department position were interviewed with an aim of filling 315 positions of Head of Department. The Commission was also focused on filling the positions of supervisor, principal, vice-principal, dean, guidance officer with priority being placed on the appointment of deans and guidance counsellors.
- 3.1.24. If funding is available, the TSC intends to increase the number of interview panels available to treat with applications for the posts of principal, vice- principal, dean and guidance counsellor. The interview panels are drawn from of a pool of 24 retired education professionals such as former school supervisors and principals. Interviewers are paid \$100 per hour.
- 3.1.25. With regard to Denominational Boards, persons in senior positions such as principals and vice- principals usually belong to the faith of the school. However, other positions are held by persons of varying faiths.

3.1.26. The TSC does not have the authority to change the age limit for new applicants to the Teaching Service. The Education Act has set the limit for new applicants to the Teaching Service at age 45.

3.1.27. TTUTA expressed that there were significant delays in the filling of vacancies within the TSC and highlighted the following complaints received regarding delays in promotions/confirmations:

- Persons applied for the post of Curriculum Officer in 2018 and were interviewed in 2022;
- Persons applied for the post of Vice Principal in 2017, were interviewed in 2019 and then retroactively appointed, September 2020, in 2021.
- The last set of appointments of Heads of Departments (Sec) were in 2013. Despite there being many vacancies, those posts were only advertised in 2019 and the interviews only concluded in 2022.
- There is no order of merit list for Food and Nutrition teachers. Vacancies for such teachers exist but cannot be filled because there has been no advertisements or interviews.

3.1.28. The submission from the MOE in May 2022 highlighted the factors that significantly delayed the confirmation of appointments in the positions of Heads of Department (Secondary) as follows:-

- Delay of interviews due to the COVID 19 Pandemic;
- Online screening of applications was challenging;
- Interview Panel members had to be trained to conduct the online interviews;
- Special Reports and missing documents had to be obtained and forwarded to the TSC;

- Some Principals experienced difficulties in accessing the online system; and
- Prior to 2019, the Secondary Section was heavily dependent on the requisite manpower to deal with the manual processes involved in advertising the relevant posts.

3.1.29. As at April 2022, there are 1,574 vacant offices within the TSC; with 1291 in Primary Schools and 283 in Secondary Schools. Over the period 2016-2021, 2383 teachers were appointed and 296 teachers retired in the TSC.

Delegation of Powers to the Ministry and School Management

3.1.30. The TSC has delegated the following responsibilities to the Ministry of Education:

- The conduct of interviews for Primary School Teachers; and
- The confirmation of payment of teachers' salaries for the first three months of employment.

3.1.31. TTUTA indicated that it was interested in holding discussions with a view to persuading the MOE to allow teachers to review the special reports used for assessment interviews submitted to the TSC by principals as teachers are not currently privy to the content of these reports. Having access to these reports will help teachers to understand the areas in which they need improvement.

3.1.32. TTUTA would like the MOE to review the assignment of only one clerk per education district to treat with matters such as confidential reports and increments.

3.1.33. At the public hearing of the Committee on April 13, 2022, TUTTA highlighted that teachers must get an extended sick leave countersigned by a government

medical officer, which proved to be challenging during COVID-19, as District Medical Officers (DMO) served on a rotational basis and assigned to different duties.

Collaborations between the TSC and the MOE

3.1.34. The TSC recognizes that collaboration with the key stakeholders in the MOE such as the Permanent Secretary, Chief Education Officer, Director of School Supervision, Director and Curriculum is critical for the effective coordination of the education system of the nation and has been meeting with the key stakeholders in the Ministry of Education since 2015.

3.1.35. Prior to COVID-19, senior staff of the TSC Secretariat had weekly visits to the MOE to discuss matters of common interest and to clarify matters. During the COVID-19 work arrangements, the TSC used online platforms, email and phone calls to continue to collaborate in order to meet its objectives.

Disciplinary Matters Involving Teachers

3.1.36. At a public hearing held on April 13, 2022, the SCD stated that it was aware that there were instances of inappropriate contact between teachers and students and the Commission was in the process of investigating these matters. However, they were unable to provide the number of cases reported.

3.1.37. There are currently 46 tribunal matters relevant to the TSC.

3.1.38. TTUTA expressed the need for more frequent meetings with the TSC to address issues and concerns as, at times, the progressive discipline procedure for teachers was not being consistently followed by the School-based management team.

Findings and Recommendations

Based on the evidence set out in this section, the Committee concluded as follows:

Service Commission Department

- i. The SCD has embarked upon digitization initiatives that have demonstratively improved certain aspects of its recruitment and selection processes. The Committee commends these measures and anticipates additional process reengineering measures in the short to medium term which are aimed at improving the Department's operations in other critical areas.
- ii. The Committee noted that the reconciliations of the job positions on the establishment of Ministries are still an area that require a higher level of compliance and or prioritization by Permanent Secretaries and other Heads of Departments.
- iii. The Committee acknowledged and commended the SCD on its Vacancy Reduction Project which included the development and utilization of a Priority Matrix to prioritize the selection of offices for the filling of vacancies.

Teaching Service Commission

- iv. The Committee noted that there is a significant lead time between the submission of applications for teaching positions and the processing of said applications. Most notable was the existing delay in the processing of applications for subjects such as; Biology, Chemistry, English, Social Studies/ Sociology, P.O.B / P.O.A / M.O.B / Accounting, and Economics.
- v. While it is understandable that the COVID-19 pandemic further delayed the rate of the filling of vacancies, the confirmation of appointments and the effecting of promotions of teachers, the TSC and MOE are now expected to work collaboratively, to prioritize these deliverables and develop an appropriate

strategy to achieve them.

- vi. Additionally, delays in the assessment of applicants for promotions for teachers were at times due to principals not submitting “special reports” on the performance of teachers to the TSC in a timely manner.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence received and further to the foregoing findings, the Committee respectfully recommends as follows:

Service Commissions Department

- i. **The SCD should employ additional strategies to obtain a greater level of cooperation among PSs and HODs to partner with SCD to fill the vacancies within their establishment.**
- ii. **The SCD provide an update on the following:**
 - a. **its engagement with PSs and HoDs to conduct reconciliations of the job positions within their establishments with a view to identifying vacancies;**
 - b. **a list of the PSs and HODs that have failed to comply with the recommendation of the SCD and the reason/s for same; and**
 - c. **The status of the TSC’s filling of the 315 positions of Head of Department;**

Teaching Service Commission and Ministry of Education

- iii. **Statistical data regarding trends in the demand for teachers in the specific subject areas should be openly published for the benefits of persons aspiring to join the teaching service. This information should be published on the**

website of the Ministry of Education and also the Service Commissions Department.

- iv. That the Ministry of Education in collaboration with SCD and other related stakeholders evaluate the suitability of the maximum age limit of 45 as provided in Section 6(1) of the Education Act.**

- v. That the efficient submission of special reports to the TSC factor more prominently in the Performance Appraisal/ Performance assessment of School Principals as a means of engendering a higher level of compliance by Principals.**

Objective 2: To evaluate the impact of these administrative and operational changes on the ability of the service commissions (with the exception of the JLSC) to execute their constitutional responsibilities.

Service Commissions Department

Impact of the Institutional Strengthening and Organisational Development Measures

3.2.1. The SCD's Strategic Planning Framework 2020 -2025 is being used to measure its operational efficiency and its improvement.

3.2.2. In the area of digital transformation, the SCD introduced monitoring and evaluation mechanisms such as **Productivity Dashboards** to track outputs/performance as well as to monitor the levels of accountability that had been now assigned to officers in the SCD.

3.2.3. On an operational level, the SCD sought to **fill its middle management vacancies**. These incumbents would be necessary to drive the strategic and operational direction of the SCD.

Hiring "Freeze"

3.2.4. The PSC held fast to the view that the decision to freeze hiring disrupted the execution of its constitutional mandate to appoint and promote public officers. However, the Commissions continued to fill offices in the Public Service once the availability of funds had been identified and once recommendations were received from PSs/HoDs in respect of eligible officers and also in keeping with Order-of-Merit List established for the various offices.

3.2.5. Selected Operational Statistics for the SCD for the period 2019 to 2021 in the Table below demonstrate that there was a decline in operations of the service commissions for the 2019 to 2020. However in 2021, the operation statistics in several areas increased when compared to 2019 and 2020.

**TABLE 1: SCD SELECTED OPERATIONAL STATISTICS OF THE
PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION 2019-2020**

Operational Statistics of the Public Service Commission	2019		2020	2021 ⁴
Total Permanent Appointments and Promotions	1700		1430	1050
Total Temporary Appointments	13490		12001	14352
Total Acting Appointments	22861		20477	23579
No. of Disciplinary Tribunals appointed by the Public Service Commission to hear matters.	48		17	14
No. of matters referred to three-man tribunals	33		17	13
No. of Disciplinary Tribunals completed.	14		12	9
Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests Received	527		596	522
FOI Requests Finalized	424		376	499
Number of Offices for which Examination were held	8		4	2

SCD Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

3.2.6. The SCD has identified the strategic focus areas to guide the SCD in achieving its strategic objectives. To ensure that these objectives are accomplished, the performance of the SCD will be monitored and measured using the following KPIs highlighted in the Table below:

⁴ Information Sourced from Public Service Commission Annual Report 2021 page 16.

TABLE 2: STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND KPIS OF THE SCD

Strategic Objectives	KPIs
Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improvement in the quality of hires ▪ Decrease in recruitment costs ▪ Decrease in time per hire ▪ Cycle times ▪ Customer satisfaction
Organisation/People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved culture aligned with strategy ▪ Customer Satisfaction KPIs ▪ Employee Performance KPIs ▪ Productivity KPIs
Client/Key Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transparency Indices ▪ Improvement in responses to queries from Ministries and /Departments ▪ Improved communication and awareness of the work and successes of the Commissions ▪ Improved decision making at the level of the Ministries and Departments ▪ Decrease in FOI/Complaints/Litigation against the Commissions ▪ Improvement in compliance rates at Ministries and Departments in respect of the requirements outlined in the Commission’s Regulations
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial KPIs ▪ Improved overall effectiveness of the Department’s processes

Virtual Disciplinary Tribunals during COVID- 19 restrictions

3.2.7. The SCD highlighted some of the noticeable advantages of virtual hearings conducted by the members of the Disciplinary Tribunals:-

- Increased inclusivity as persons are able to attend their hearings in their personal space;
- Faster information sharing and distribution via MS Teams;
- Increased accountability as Tribunal Clerks are able to provide a more accurate account of proceedings from anywhere;

- Decreased travel inconvenience and expenses for parties involved in proceedings; and
- Greater accessibility to services (efficient conduct of hearings, immediate notification of hearings).

3.2.8. Notwithstanding the advantages outlined above, some issues experienced by parties to the proceedings include:-

- Members of the Disciplinary Tribunals have indicated that the inability to have in-person hearings where testimony/evidence is being given through the virtual medium, makes it difficult for the Disciplinary Tribunal to observe persons' demeanor and body language, or also to hear their tone of voice directly; and
- While some attendees are able to be present for a virtual hearing without any hindrance, there are others who reside in areas that may not have stable internet connections and have no other option but to commute to another location where they can be accommodated. In some cases, this has resulted in adjournments and undue delays where the attendee may have to find alternative arrangements that is appropriate before the Tribunal can proceed.

Public Service Commission

Filling of Vacant Positions

3.2.9. The DPA meets on occasions with PSs/HoDs to discuss the status of offices. The outcome of these matters is reported to the PSC. More recently, the PSC addressed the Board of Permanent Secretaries on this matter.

- 3.2.10. The DPA plans to develop and implement a communication and collaborative platform that would facilitate continued execution of stakeholder engagements. It is anticipated that this initiative will see a 20% improvement in responses to Ministries and Departments.
- 3.2.11. In the current system, the position of Deputy Permanent Secretary is the entry point for eligibility to be recruited for the position of Permanent Secretary, no other channel currently exists for recruiting Permanent Secretaries.
- 3.2.12. Candidates from outside of the Public Service are eligible to apply for the post of Deputy Permanent Secretary as the PSC advertises positions both inside and outside of the Public Service.
- 3.2.13. According to additional evidence submitted to the Committee, during the period January 2018 to January 2023, one hundred and thirteen persons were assessed for the Office of Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Public Service, however thirty-six (36) persons were promoted/ appointed.
- 3.2.14. Similarly, there were twenty-two (22) persons who were promoted to the Office of the Permanent Secretary in the Public Service.
- 3.2.15. As part of the stakeholder engagement/communication plan, the PSC and the DPA held discussions with PSs and HoDs on the importance of timely submission of Performance Appraisals Reports. Additionally, the Commission took the opportunity at the meetings of the Board of Permanent Secretaries to discuss this issue with PSs/HoDs. The DPA, on behalf of the Commission, issues Circular Memoranda to PSs with respect to the timely submission of these Reports.

Teaching Service Commission

Employment status of the Commissioners of the TSC

3.2.16. The Chairman of the TSC is operating on a full-time basis while the other members are part-time.

3.2.17. The current terms and conditions of members of the Teaching Service Commission as well as the other Commissions are determined by the Salaries Review Commission (SRC). As part of the job evaluation of the offices under the purview of the SRC, the Office of the Chief Personnel Officer engaged members of the TSC between 2017 and 2019, in-person through meetings as well as follow-up interviews, emails and phone calls.

Disciplinary Matters Involving Teachers

3.2.18. The TTUTA in their submission to the Committee, highlighted that the disciplinary matters are not treated with high efficiency and reliability due to the Commission not being a full-time entity.

Findings and Recommendations

Based on the evidence set out in this section, the Committee concluded the following:

Service Commissions Department

- i. While the SCD does not need recommendations from Permanent Secretaries to fill generic vacancies, Permanent Secretaries are involved in the process of making recommendations for filling ministry-specific vacancies. The Committee was concerned by the apparent lack of cooperation on the part of the PSs to accede to the request of the SCD for information on vacant positions in the establishment.
- ii. The Committee acknowledged and commends the SCD's efforts to enhance client

relations e.g. the acknowledgement of applications for positions and interview feedback.

- iii. The Committee learned that in some instances, the delay in filling vacancies in Ministries is attributed to delay in the communication of information from Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department on the availability of funds to facilitate the filling of vacancies. Such scenarios signal the need to further develop the communication channels between MDAs and the SCD.
- iv. It was interesting to note that a major realignment of Ministries, following a change in government, occurred in 2015 and subsequently in 2020 and to date the SCD is still processing requests for necessary approvals in relation to the re-alignment of Ministries.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence received and further to the foregoing findings, the Committee recommends that:

Service Commissions Department

- i. **The SCD develop a shared database that can be accessed by MDAs to provide updates on the status of vacancies and other related matters.**
- ii. **The SCD and Ministry of Public Administration should collaborate with Ministries and Departments to encourage better succession planning practices. This proactive approach to human resource management can be advanced through prompting PSs and other heads to work with the SCD to create and or update merit lists for crucial job positions.**
- iii. **The PSC should collaborate with the MPA to assess and determine whether**

there are any notable differences between the performance and experiences of persons recruited as Deputy Permanent Secretaries from inside the Public service compared to persons recruited from outside the public service.

Objective 3: To obtain insights into the plans and proposals aimed at further improving the institutional capacity of the Service Commissions Department.

Service Commission Department

SCD Strategic Objectives and Projects

3.3.1. The SCD in their written submission to the Committee highlighted the short and medium term objectives and the priority projects for the SCD in the Tables below:

TABLE 3: STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE SCD FOR THE PERIOD 2020 - 2025

Strategic Objectives	Short and Medium Term Objectives
Service Delivery	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To move away from manual processes to an electronic system that is accessible, efficient, reliable and accurate by 2023. 2. To deploy merit based staffing practices by 2023.
Organisation & People	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. To continue to develop highly motivated competent and dedicated professionals that thrive in the ever-changing environment by 2025. 4. To create an environment to attract and retain high quality professionals by 2022 by among other things, strengthening career paths for staff and realigning the organizational structure with a focus on permanent positions and organizational agility.
Client/Key Stakeholders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To provide more technical support to MDAs and Commissions, increasing awareness with respect to policies, regulations and decisions continually.

Strategic Objectives	Short and Medium Term Objectives
	6. To be the premiere, high quality advisory body to HR Units and MDAs providing ongoing, accurate and timely communication to all stakeholders.
Support	7. To have annual resources sufficient to support all departments for the duration of the transition. 8. To ensure facilities can accommodate all resources. 9. To prepare and execute a thorough change management and transformation plan.

TABLE 4: PRIORITY PROJECTS OF THE SCD FOR THE PERIOD 2020-2025

Projects for Implementation	Strategic Objectives
Establishment of a Project Management Unit	Service Delivery; Organisation & People; Support
Establishment of an Assessment Centre Unit	Service Delivery; Organisation & People
Further Delegation and Enhanced Monitoring	Service Delivery; Organisation & People; Client/Key Stakeholders
ICT-Digital Transformation	Service Delivery; Organisation & People; Client/Key Stakeholders; Support

SCD Consultations

3.3.2. The SCD indicated that there were no specific discussions with the Public Service Association (PSA) regarding any COVID-related issues but have been engaged mainly to discuss issues related to the core functions of the Public Service Commission (appointments, promotions, acting, transfers and confirmations).

3.3.3. The SCD has held consultations with the respective staff associations representing Fire Officers and Prison Officers regarding the recruitment and selection methodologies for several offices within the Fire and Prison Services. Additionally, the Commission has conducted recruitment and selection exercises for both services and has made the necessary promotions in these offices. The Consultants engaged by SCD for the period 2018 to 2022 are provided in **Appendix IV**.

3.3.4. In 2021, the SCD held discussions with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) on the SCD's digital transformation initiatives regarding the Commissions' recruitment and selection practices and work processes. These discussions are still ongoing.

Training and Development

3.3.5. The SCS has been conducting an on-going in-house leadership development programme which targets middle management staff in supervisory positions and focuses on self-development, communication, coaching and leadership in order to build internal capacity.

3.3.6. Approximately 40 staff members have benefitted from this programme since its inception.

Police Service Commission

Resource Challenges

3.3.7. The PoISC in their submission to the Committee stated that the Human Resources of the PoISC Secretariat requires review. As such in 2015, the DPA proposed a new structure for the Secretariat to ensure it is staffed with the required personnel to provide the necessary support to the Commission. Ongoing reviews have taken

place over the years and in 2020, the PMCD conducted an overall review of the SCD. The DPA is awaiting the final decision of Cabinet with respect to the changes recommended.

3.3.8. The SCD and by extension the PolSC have been hindered by lack of sufficient financial resources. The lack of funds has hindered on the Commission's ability to conduct the Recruitment and Selection process for Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Police and other areas of the SCD that related to the PolSC Secretariat such as:

- the progress of the development of the Performance Management Information System for the monitoring and evaluation function of the Secretariat;
- The level and quality of assistance employees can receive via Employee Assistance Programme;
- The payment of outstanding fees for services received from external counsel; and
- The unavailability of funds to maintain or replace equipment.

Accommodation

3.3.9. The PolSC highlighted that Secretariats of the other Service Commissions, are accommodated at the Department's Head Office, while the PolSC Secretariat is accommodated in Tunapuna. As such, the following issues have arisen: -

- Employee engagement can be difficult as there is not a common area where staff can be seen together as one organization;
- Culture differences - separate buildings do not foster one culture for the Service Commissions Department; and
- Team building - inability to foster Team spirit, and oneness as a Department.

3.3.10. The PolSC in their submission to the Committee indicated that the DPA has approached the Property and Real Estate Services Division (PRESD) to secure new accommodations for the SCD inclusive of the PolSC Secretariat.

Teaching Service Commission

Training and Development

3.3.11. Graduates from UTT and USC have been told that programmes that were previously approved are no longer suitable. As a consequence, they are required to undertake a bridging programme to satisfy the entry requirements.

3.3.12. TTUTA submitted that it provides training for all its members. Some of the training provided prepares members for promotion to the positions of Head of Department, Dean, Vice-Principal and Principal including professional development training.

Findings and Recommendations

Based on the evidence set out in this section the Committee concluded as follows:

Service Commissions Department

- i. The Committee was pleased to learn that the SCD was in negotiations with the IADB on the digital transformation initiatives regarding the recruitment and selection practices and work processes of the Service Commissions. The Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Administration should include an update on the outcome of these discussions.
- ii. The Committee commended the attempt being made by the Public Service Commission/SCD to improve and develop the curricula of the Public Service Academy to take into account the need for leadership development training.

- iii. The Committee was pleased with the SCD's leadership development programme which focuses on self-development, communication, coaching and leadership in order to build internal capacity.
- iv. The Committee commends the SCD on its efforts to fill its middle management and top management vacancies by July 2022 which would be necessary to drive the strategic and operational direction of the SCD.
- v. The Committee acknowledged the efforts of the SCD to provide more technical support to MDAs and Commissions, increasing awareness with respect to policies, regulations and decisions.
- vi. The Committee trusts that in the process of developing the internal capacity of the SCD, there can be a commensurate decrease in the need to outsource services via consultancies.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence received and further to the foregoing findings, the Committee respectfully recommends the following:

Service Commissions Department

- i. **The SCD provide the Committee with the results of the discussions with the IADB regarding the SCD's digital transformation initiatives.**
- ii. **The SCD provide an update on the status of the filling of top and middle management vacancies within the SCD which was expected to be completed by July 2022.**
- iii. **The SCD provide a status update on:**

- a. The implementation of the Digital Transformation project of the SCD;
- b. The establishment of a Project Management Unit; and
- c. The establishment of an Assessment Centre Unit.

Objective 4: To examine the factors and conditions that are hindering the successful implementation of organisational transformation measures at the Service Commissions Department.

Service Commission Department

EDMS Project

3.4.1. The SCD indicated that the EDMS project received no allocations for fiscal 2020/2021 which resulted in the inactivity of the project for that period. For fiscal 2021/2022, a budget of \$5,000,000 was allocated and the project will commence within the first quarter of 2022⁵. The SCD is confident that the expectations of the project which includes the undermentioned, will be improved:

- Service Delivery: provision of a more effective service delivery to our internal and external customers;
- Data Integrity: by ensuring the availability and security of sensitive documents; and
- Data Management Infrastructure: by the development of an infrastructure for information management that supports current and future government-wide information systems.

3.4.2. Additionally, 20,000 pieces of correspondence have already been digitized in anticipation of the EDMS being implemented.

⁵ Draft Estimates of Development Programme 2023, Head 06 Service Commissions. Page 11. <https://www.finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Draft-Estimates-of-Development-Programme-for-the-Financial-Year-2023.pdf>

Criteria for Promotions in the Public Service

- 3.4.3. In the Public Service, promotions are guided by the existing Regulations. Similarly, in the Civil and Teaching Service the principles of the Public Service Commission Regulations apply. However, there has been a focus to introduce more robust mechanisms to assess the suitability of candidates for promotion.
- 3.4.4. As such, the SCD has introduced an Assessment Centre Methodology which will be implemented and utilised to assess all candidates eligible for promotion in offices assigned to salary range (60) and above.
- 3.4.5. Additionally, the SCD has introduced a merit-based system of promotion in the Prisons and Fire Offices and is in the process of proposing to the Public Service Commission a methodology for a merit-based approach for appointments and promotions in respect of generic civil offices.
- 3.4.6. SCD started assessments for the positions of Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent of Prisons and Senior Superintendent of Prisons. An injunction was applied by the court in September 2021 on the position of Senior Superintendent. The injunction was lifted in October 2021 and the position will be filled once successful candidates have been assessed.

Audited Financial Statements

- 3.4.7. The appropriation for the year 1st October 2020 to 30th September 2021 was audited on 04.01.22, and the Statement of Receipts and Disbursements for the year 1st October 2020 to 30th September 2021 was audited on 07.01.22.

3.4.8. International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) statement for the month of January 2022 and the Annual IPSAS for the period 1st October 2020 to 30th September 2021 was audited on 02.02.22.

SCD Hiring Practices and Response Time to Applications

3.4.9. The SCD highlighted following factors that contribute to the Department's inability to provide timely responses to applicants:

- the high level of staff turnover;
- limited financial, physical and human resources;
- heavy work load; and
- large volume of applications received for an office advertised e.g. 3000 per office in some case.

3.4.10. The PSC applicants are shortlisted based on the shortlisting frameworks, developed in keeping with the job specification for the relevant office. The framework ensures that all applicants are shortlisted against the same criteria. The frameworks are considered and agreed upon by the PSC before being applied.

3.4.11. In terms of the assessment phase of candidates, instruments are designed including:

- The relevant job specification for the office is examined to extract the specific competencies required for the office and which should be tested;
- A job profile and a competency framework is also developed to provide a more robust appreciation of the specific office in order to design an effective assessment; and

- The instrument is then developed and designed according to the specific office or in some cases where the office is more generic, it is developed by the class of office.

Police Service Commission

Recruitment of the Commissioner of Police

3.4.12. The recruitment and selection process for the Commissioner of Police includes the following:

- i. Advertising, Screening and Short-listing;
- ii. Assessment;
- iii. Medical Examination; and
- iv. Professional and Security Vetting.

3.4.13. According to the submission from the Police Service Commission (PolSC), during the 2021 recruitment and selection process for the Commissioner of Police, the following challenges were encountered:

- i. Staffing - In the amendments in legislation in Legal Notice 183 (now revoked), 277 and 278, the PSC was given the additional functions of recruitment and selection however, provision was not made for the function in the structure of the PSC and competencies in the area had to be sourced from SCD and externally;
- ii. Financial - Insufficient funding at the PolSC resulted in the late processing of payments to service providers who assisted in the recruitment and selection process;
- iii. Legal - Uncertainty with the implementation of the new legislation in the following areas:
 - the application of the Legal Notices;
 - the vagueness of the minimum requirements; and

- The absence of an up-to-date job specification.

3.4.14. The premature dissolution of the previous Police Service Commission impacted the continuity of the following plans and objectives:

- Appeals which the previous Commission began hearing but did not finalize, are now to be restarted resulting in longer waiting periods for appellants;
- Discussions on the PolSC Regulations have to be restarted in light of the new law and new members and a review to the Commission's existing Regulations would have to be undertaken;
- Requests for information under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act were received but responses could not be issued in the stipulated timeframe as for a period there was no constituted Commission;
- The new Commission's progress with its actual work was delayed as matters initiated against the Commission had to be addressed before the court. These actions also generated a financial cost for an external Senior Counsel;
- The general business of the Commission came to a halt as decisions could not be obtained in the absence of a quorum.

Teaching Service Commission

Unsolicited Applications

3.4.15. The time and resources consumed by reviewing unsolicited applications to the TSC had a negative impact on the efficiency of the assessment process. As such as, at September 30, 2021, the TSC ceased accepting unsolicited applications for positions in the Teaching Service but will continue to treat with and arrange interview for application received prior to September 30, 2021.

3.4.16. The TSC is in the process of collaborating with the MOE to rectify the issue of Assistant Teachers (Primary) (ATPs) who have not yet been upgraded.

Vacancies and Upgrades

3.4.17. Once the Ministry received approvals from the TSC to upgrade teachers, the approval is forwarded to the Director of Finance and Accounts. However, the MOE has experienced challenges with obtaining financial releases which has contributed to delays in the filling of vacancies.

3.4.18. At the Committee's public hearing held on April 13, 2022, the Ministry of Education stated that substitute teacher system is currently managed by the Ministry. Additionally, a staff audit was ongoing to assist the Ministry to determine how best to reallocate resources to help with the distribution of teachers. The MOE intends to complete its staff audit by the end of April 2022.

3.4.19. As at April 30, 2022, there were 50 persons approved to serve as substitute teachers in the Secondary School system, with another 66 persons to be interviewed to add to the pool and 156 approved for the Primary system.

Effects of the Pandemic on Teachers

3.4.20. At the Committee's public hearing held on April 13, 2022, TTUTA highlighted that, there were several complaints from teachers who experienced burnout during the pandemic.

3.4.21. Additionally, some teachers experienced difficulties adapting to the technology needed to conduct online classes. Other teachers experienced challenges with work-life balance while working from home, particularly those with school-aged children at home. As a result, there were teachers who resigned or retired due to challenges associated with the pandemic.

Concerns specific to Tobago

3.4.22. The TSC held two meetings in Tobago in January 2022. The main issues discussed in Tobago were:

- The need for improvement in communication between the TSC and the Tobago House of Assembly (THA);
- The backlog of appointments and appointments in leadership positions;
- Appointments and transfers; and
- Regularising the employee establishment of the nine secondary schools in Tobago.

3.4.23. Stakeholders were given six months to address the issues. However, the majority of the issues discussed were addressed within a two-month period.

Findings and Recommendations

Based on the evidence set out in this section the Committee concluded as follows:

Service Commission Department

- i. The Committee acknowledged that the DPA has proposed a new structure for the PolSC Secretariat and submitted a commensurate proposal to PMCD. Achieving this objective has the potential of enhancing the human resource capacity of the PolSC to better execute its core functions vis-à-vis the executive leadership of the police service.
- ii. The Committee commends the digitization efforts of the SCD in anticipation of the commencement of the implementation of the EDMS in April, 2022.

Teaching Service Commission

- iii. There was a significant surplus of applicants for teaching positions and substitute teaching positions at the Secondary school level in the subjects of; Biology, Chemistry, English, Social Studies/ Sociology, P.O.B / P.O.A / M.O.B / Accounting and Economics. Conversely, it was observed that the Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) areas: - Air Conditioning and Refrigeration, Auto and Diesel, Carpentry, Masonry, Plumbing and Welding are under-subscribed in terms of the number of applicants for teaching positions.
- iv. The Committee was pleased that the issues identified by the TSC in Tobago were addressed within a two-month period.
- v. The Committee noted that, in order to circumvent the reduced efficiency in the assessment process, the TSC ceased accepting unsolicited applications for positions in the Teaching Service.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence received and further to the foregoing findings, the Committee respectfully recommends the following:

Service Commissions Department

- i. **That the SCD provide the Parliament with a status update on the following:**
 - a. **The percentage of Public Officers files, applicant files and other relevant records of the PSC that have been digitized as at April 2023 and the number that remains to be processed?**
 - b. **The filling of the positions of Assistant Commissioner and Senior Superintendent of Prisons;**
 - c. **The implementation of the EDMS project; and**
 - d. **The development of a business continuity plan for the SCD.**

Teaching Service Commission and Ministry of Education

- ii. The MOE provide the Parliament with an update on:**
 - a. The findings and recommendations that emerged from the staff audit which was expected to be completed by the end of April 2022; and**
 - b. The status of the upgrade of Assistant Teachers (Primary) (ATPs) who were not upgraded.**

The Committee respectfully submits the foregoing for the consideration of the Parliament.

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh
Chairman

Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
Vice-Chairman

Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julien, MP
Member

Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy, MP
Member

Mr. Laurence Hislop
Member

Ms. Khadijah Ameen
Member

Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal
Member

Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial
Member

Dated June 07, 2023

Appendices

Appendix I

List of Officials who appeared Before the Committee

Name	Position	Ministry/ Organisation
Public Hearing March 02, 2022		
Mr. Claudelle Mc Kellar	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)	Ministry of Public Administration
Ms. Candice Mohan	Director, Public Management Consulting Division	
Ms. Marsha Samaroo-Calcut	Senior Public Management Consultant (Ag.)	
Mr. Winston R. Rudder	Chairman, Public Service Commission	Public Service Commission
Mr. Courtenay B. Williams	Commissioner	
Ms. Jennifer Sampson-Farrell	Commissioner	
Mr. Corey Harrison	Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)	Service Commissions Department
Mr. Martel Waldron	Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)	
Ms. Helen Warner	Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)	
Ms. Tavita Ramcharan	Executive Director Ag. ICT Unit	
Public Hearing April 13, 2022		
Mrs. Sharon Ashman-John	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)	Ministry of Education
Ms. Donnis Bourne	Director of Human Resource Primary and Contracts (Non-Teaching)	
Ms. Hardai Seepersada	Director Human Resource Secondary and Delinked	
Mr. Darren Lee Him	3rd Vice President	Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA)
Mr. Kerry Broomes	Industrial Relations Officer	

Mr. Corey Harrison	Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)	Service Commissions Department
Mr. Martel Waldron	Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)	
Mrs. Farya Mohammed-Basdaye	Executive Director, HRM (Ag.)	
Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch	Chairman	Teaching Service Commissions Department
Mr. Ishan Mohamed	Member	
Mrs. Claire Braithwaite-Alexander	Member	
Public Hearing May 04, 2022		
Mr. Corey Harrison	Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)	Service Commissions Department
Ms. Helen Warner	Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)	
Ms. Tavita Ramcharan	Executive Director (Ag.), ICT Unit	
Justice Judith Jones (Ret'd)	Chairman	Police Service Commissions Department
Ms. Maxine Attong	Member	
Mr. Ian Ramdhanie	Member	
Ms. Kavita Bassarath	Assistant Director Research & Evaluation	

Appendix II

Process Re-engineering Initiatives of the Service Commissions Department

Initiative	Process re-engineering	ICT into Daily Operations	Infrastructural Development	Staffing and Human Resource Development
Virtual Meeting	Commission Meetings, Stakeholder Consultation Meeting and Internal Meetings conducted via MS Teams.	Daily		ICT Training Sessions and Handholding Sessions Conducted
Virtual Tribunal/Court	To preserve business continuity during the Covid-19 pandemic, the SCD worked towards the implementation of virtual hearings to allow all stakeholders, including tribunal members, Attorneys-at-Law and officers charged, to be physically located in different areas, but virtually present within the same room via a common online platform (MS Teams)	As scheduled		ICT Training Sessions and Handholding Sessions Conducted
e-Recruit	Accessibility to an online application form by applicants, anywhere, anytime, on any device, allowing real time retrieval of applicants' data to be further interrogated for screening, shortlisting, reporting and decision-making by SCD's internal stakeholders.	Daily	Re-used an older server for the project	Presentations, ICT Training Sessions and Handholding Sessions Conducted
Virtual Interview Platform	A paperless, contactless, secure online platform allowing Interview Panel Members, Interviewees, and SCD's staff to exchange required documents electronically while entering scores in real time, providing immediate, automatic generation of reports.			Presentations, ICT Training Sessions and Handholding Sessions Conducted

Initiative	Process re-engineering	ICT into Daily Operations	Infrastructural Development	Staffing and Human Resource Development
Website Redesign	<p>In 2019/2020, the SCD's website was redesigned with emphasis being placed on designing a more client centric solution. This redesign was to provide a friendlier enhanced user experience with no more than three clicks to navigate to the main areas visited, namely Employment Opportunities and Examination. The content from the old website was reproduced to complement the design, layout and navigation of the new website template. Additionally, the Annual Reports and other publications have been converted to a flip-page format for easy viewing and to bring relevant SCD documents to life. Further, new refreshed images were published on the website to revitalise the website.</p>			
Social Intranet-MySCD	<p>From e-Bulletin Board to Social Intranet, this project aimed to enhance the communication and collaboration within the SCD. In 2020, the E-Bulletin Board was expanded to another platform to: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encompass two-way communication to the SCD i.e. the Public Relations Unit's personnel continuing to post vital and 			<p>Presentations, ICT Training Sessions and Handholding Sessions Conducted</p>

Initiative	Process re-engineering	ICT into Daily Operations	Infrastructural Development	Staffing and Human Resource Development
	<p>motivational information;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enable Business Units to communicate within the respective business unit's team members; and • allow personnel to chat amongst peers and with other Business Units. 			
e-Signatures	<p>As the Covid-19 pandemic endures, the electronic document authentication for remote working has been raised as employees are not always equipped with printers and scanners to facilitate traditional pen to paper signing. The option of digital and electronic signatures (e-Signature) therefore, provides a solution to the Department's needs in an evolving world.</p>			
Data Visualisation	<p>Strategic Dashboard</p> <p>The SCD sought a solution for a user interface that organizes, integrates, and presents mission critical information, pulled from multiple sources, to users in a way that is easily read and understood.</p> <p>Operational Dashboard</p> <p>Similar to the Strategic Dashboard, the ICT Unit has developed the following</p>			

Initiative	Process re-engineering	ICT into Daily Operations	Infrastructural Development	Staffing and Human Resource Development
	<p>Operational Dashboards specific to Units and their functions and emphasize monitoring at a more granular level: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attendance Register ▪ Discipline Tracking System ▪ FOI/ Complaints ▪ High Court ▪ Correspondence Register 			
Networking and ICT Support	<p>To enable ICT to end users, the following activities were completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Windows 10 Upgrade • Upgrade of MS Office Suite • Upgrade of VPN Access to larger pool of authorised users • Acquisition and roll out of Laptops, Desktops and Printers 			

Appendix III

Challenges to the Operations of the SCD during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Challenges	Impact on Operations	Mitigation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff absence from duty due to COVID 19 Quarantine • Sanitization of Units on confirmation of a COVID 19 case. • Contracted support services rendered by the various entities inclusive of (building maintenances) were not always prompt in addressing issues due to short staff as employees working on rotation or were affected by the COVID virus. • Conducting interviews of eligible candidates as part of the recruitment process. • The pandemic also had a detrimental impact on the Examination Unit of the SCD due to the restrictions placed on public gathering by the Public Health Ordinance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These challenges hindered the efficient operations of the SCD. Many core units were affected resulting in low turnout and productivity rates. In some instances, impromptu requests for thorough sanitization, following cases of COVID positive staff members created a drain on financial and human resources. • This process was significantly impacted by the Covid -19 pandemic since candidates are required to present themselves to be interviewed in person. • The Examination Unit was unable to conduct examinations in 2020 and 2021. This resulted the delays in the selection and recruitment process for several offices. • Additionally, due to the fact that applicants prior to July 2020 submitted physical applications, officers were unable to access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote working; staff rotation; the observance of COVID 19 protocols as disseminated by the GORTT; frequent inspection of facilities; communications with lessors and service providers; as well as the implementation of additional sanitization measures as a planned daily routine to maintain a sterile working environment. • The Department implemented as part of its e-recruitment solution, a virtual interview platform for interviews in 2021. To date seven hundred and thirty-four (734) candidates were interviewed using the virtual platform. • During the work from home period certain officers were given access

Challenges	Impact on Operations	Mitigation Strategies
	the applications from home and this contributed to delays in the selection and recruitment process for some offices.	to SCD's VPN and as a result were able to conduct their duties remotely.
Conduct of Disciplinary Tribunal Hearings	The SCD's ability to conduct Disciplinary Tribunal hearings in the traditional way was negatively impacted.	Leveraged Microsoft Enterprise Agreement to facilitate transition to MS Teams in 2020
Submission of Applications	Applicants were able to submit applications online	Introduced online applications
Hosting of Interviews	The SCD's ability to host interviews in the traditional way was negatively impacted.	Leveraged Microsoft Enterprise Agreement to facilitate Transition to MS Teams in 2020. Introduced the utilisation of online scoring and e-signatures
Access to records	In the absence of access to records, the work of the SCD is slowed considerably	Access to the SCD VPN allowed for remote working and access to the Department's records.

Appendix IV

Consultants engaged SCD 2018 to 2022

SCD Consultancies for the period 2018 to 2022

Terms of Reference	Period of Consultancy	Cost of Consultancy
<p>EDMS Project Manager</p> <p>To manage EDMS design, testing, implementation and roll-out of the application across the SCD, ensuring that relevant supporting documentation is produced. To manage and direct the work and resources required for successful technical implementation of an Electronic Document Management System in the Service Commissions Department (SCD) within specified timescales.</p>	1/1/18-31/12/18	\$300,000
	1/1/19 - 31/12/19	\$300,000
	1/1/20-30/09/20	\$225,000
		TOTAL: \$825,000
<p><u>Pension and Leave Officer</u></p> <p>To manage the preparation of approximately three hundred and sixty (360) Pension and Leave Records for members of staff, and attend to numerous requests from Ministries and Departments for the preparation and updating of Pension and Leave Records and information pertaining to the former/retired public officers and contract employees.</p>	1/1/18-16/5/18	\$41,774.19
<p><u>Website Developer</u></p> <p>To re-style, re-work and replace the current website, landing pages, interior pages, content formats and site features. The primary objective of this contract was to provide the Service Commissions Department (SCD) with a revamped online presence which will be more appealing, informative and user friendly to end users.</p>	1/9/18-31/12/18	\$48,400.00
<p><u>Project Coordinator</u></p> <p>The primary objective of this service was to provide Project Coordinating services for the Assessment Centre for the offices of Deputy Permanent Secretary, Deputy Director of Personnel Administration and Deputy Chief Personnel Officer.</p>	1/1/18-31/12/18	\$181,800.00
	1/1/19- 31/12/19	\$189,300.00
	1/1/20-30/09/20	\$199,800.00
	1/1/21-31/12/21	\$199,800.00
		TOTAL \$770,700.00
<p><u>Odyssey Consulting Ltd.</u></p> <p>Recruitment and Selection of Deputy Commissioner of Police</p>	24/7/2020	\$648,801.58
<p><u>The Governance Network Ltd.</u></p> <p>Recruitment and Selection of Deputy Permanent Secretary</p>	06/05/2021	\$101,844.00
<p><u>Price Waterhouse Coopers Advisory Services Ltd</u></p> <p>Consultancy service re: Selection of Deputy Director of Personnel Administration, SCD and Deputy Chief Personnel Officer, PD</p>	20/07/18	\$572,310.00

Appendix V

Minutes

EXCERPT OF THE MINUTES OF THE 10TH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS, STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA)
HELD ON WEDNESDAY MARCH 02, 2022

This meeting was held virtually via Zoom

PRESENT

Members

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh	Chairman
Mr. Esmond Forde, MP	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Lisa Morris – Julian, MP	Member
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Ms. Khadijah Ameen, MP	Member
Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal	Member
Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial	Member

Secretariat

Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Terriann Baker	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Sherlana Ramdeen	Procedural Officer Intern

Absent

Mrs. Ayanna Webster – Roy, MP	Member
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PUBLIC HEARING

- 7.1 The Chairman reconvened the meeting at 10:22 a.m. and welcomed both the listening and viewing audience.
- 7.2 The Chairman highlighted the objectives of the inquiry and introductions were made.
- 7.3 The Chairman then invited the lead official of each delegation to make a brief opening statement.

Key Issues Discussed

7.4 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Ministry of Public Administration (MPA)**

Role of the MPA

- i. The role of the MPA includes the following:
 - To support the modernisation of the SCD
 - To develop the Human Resource Management Structure, Skills and Facilities
 - To support and facilitate work related to ICT, which was undertaken by iGovTT while that entity was under the purview of the MPA
- ii. The MPA recognises the importance of modernising the Human Resource Management Architecture of the Public Service towards the overall modernising of the Public Service. This will in turn improve overall service delivery.
- iii. The MPA supports any effort to strengthen the institutional capacity of the SCD.

7.5 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Public Service Commission:**

Overview

- i. The PSC supports all activities related to the institutional strengthening of the SCD.
- ii. The PSC's Strategic Framework and Roadmap establishes the rationale for forging alliances with Ministries, Departments and Agencies, all of which engage in the delivery of Human Resource Management across the Public Service.
- iii. The PSC currently meets once per week.

Recruitment Process for Permanent Secretaries

- i. In the current system, the position of Deputy Permanent Secretary is the entry point for eligibility to be recruited for the position of Permanent Secretary.
- ii. No other channel currently exists for recruiting Permanent Secretaries.
- iii. Administrators in the various Divisions in the Tobago House of Assembly are considered at the level of Chief Technical Officers. The Chief Administrator is at the level of a Permanent Secretary.

- iv. The Public Service Commission advertises positions both inside and outside of the Public Service. Therefore, candidates from outside of the Public Service are eligible to apply for the post of Deputy Permanent Secretary.

Training and Development

- i. Attempts are being made to improve and develop the curricula of the Public Service Academy to take into account the need for leadership development training.

7.6 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Service Commission Department (SCD)**:

Overview

- i. The SCD is the Administrative Secretariat for the Service Commissions.
- ii. The Covid-19 pandemic created opportunities for improvement in the operations of the Service Commissions. However, further resources are needed to make other critical changes.
- iii. One of the major challenges faced by the SCD is financial constraints.

Training and Development

- i. The SCS has been conducting an on-going in-house leadership development programme with a view to improving internal human resource capacity among the managerial and supervisory staff.
- ii. The programme targets middle management staff in supervisory positions and focuses on self-development, communication, coaching and leadership in order to build internal capacity.
- iii. Approximately 40 staff members have benefitted from this programme since its inception.

Filling of Vacancies

- i. The SCD is hoping to fill its vacant middle-management positions by the end of June/July, 2022.
- ii. The holistic approach to filling vacancies within the SCD involves a restructuring of the Service Commissions Department via the Public Management Consulting Division (PMCD).

- iii. The freeze on hiring in the public service affected the SCD's ability to fill vacancies. However, the freeze was in effect for only one year. As such, the SCD, as of 2021 continued to ensure that entry level positions with funds available were filled.
- iv. The SCD must consult with the relevant public body to confirm that funds are available before vacancies can be filled.
- v. Since 2017, the SCD has been committed to filling the senior executive positions in both the prisons and fire services.
- vi. The SCD was able to fill 4 vacancies in the fire service, leaving one position to be filled.
- vii. SCD started assessments for the positions of Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent of Prisons and Senior Superintendent of Prisons.
- viii. An injunction was applied by the court on the position of Senior Superintendent. The injunction was lifted and the position will be filled once successful candidates have been assessed.
- ix. There are two types of offices in the public service- specific offices that occur within a particular ministry (such as Immigration Officers) and generic offices that occur throughout the Public Service (such as clerks and accountants).
- x. The SCD does not need recommendations from Permanent Secretaries to fill generic vacancies. However, the Permanent Secretary is involved in the process of making recommendations for filling ministry-specific vacancies.
- xi. A Permanent Secretary is able to recommend officers in acting positions to be promoted to those positions. This recommendation is made to the Service Commissions Department.
- xii. It is important to note that even when there is a recommendation made by a Permanent Secretary, the SCD is still responsible for ensuring that the candidate is eligible for the position.

Role of ICTs

- xiii. The SCD has embarked upon digitisation initiatives that will monitor the number of vacancies electronically.
- xiv. Digitisation initiatives will also assist in streamlining HR processes within the Public Service. This will include online applications and virtual interviews.
- xv. The Electronic Document Management System (EDMS) is a priority in 2022 and should commence in April, 2022. The system will enable the SCD to move towards a paperless environment.
- xvi. 20,000 pieces of correspondence have already been digitized in anticipation of the EDMS being implemented
- xvii. The SCD is also working on digitising Confidential Personal Files (CPFs)

ADJOURNMENT

8.1 The Chairman thanked Members and adjourned the meeting.

8.2 The meeting was adjourned at 12:52 p.m.

I certify that the Minutes are true and correct.

Chairman

Secretary

April 08, 2022

EXCERPT OF THE MINUTES OF THE 11TH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS, STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA)
HELD ON WEDNESDAY APRIL 13, 2022

This meeting was held virtually via Zoom

PRESENT

Members

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh	Chairman
Mrs. Lisa Morris – Julian, MP	Member
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Ms. Khadijah Ameen, MP	Member
Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal	Member
Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial	Member

Secretariat

Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Sherlana Ramdeen	Procedural Officer Intern
Ms. Terriann Baker	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Nicole Brown	Graduate Research Assistant

Absent

Mr. Esmond Forde, MP	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Ayanna Webster – Roy, MP	Member

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

6.1 The Chairman reconvened the meeting at 10:24 a.m. and welcomed both the listening and viewing audience.

6.2 The Chairman highlighted the objectives of the inquiry and introductions were made.

6.3 The Chairman then invited the lead official of each delegation to make a brief opening statement.

Witnesses Who Appeared

7.1 The following officials appeared before the Committee:

Service Commissions Department

- Mr. Corey Harrison Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
- Mr. Martel Waldron Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
- Mrs. Farya Mohammed-Basdaye Executive Director, HRM (Ag.)

Teaching Service Commissions Department

- Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch Chairman
- Mr. Ishan Mohamed Member
- Mrs. Claire Braithwaite-Alexander Member

Ministry of Education

- Mrs. Sharon Ashman-John Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Donnis Bourne Director of Human Resource Primary and Contracts Non- Teaching)
- Ms. Hardai Seepersada Director Human Resource Secondary and Delinked

Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association

- Mr. Darren Lee Him 3rd Vice President
- Mr. Kerry Broomes Industrial Relations Officer

Key Issues Discussed

7.2 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the
Teaching Service Commission (TSC)

Filling of Vacancies

- i. The Teaching Service Commission has made strides toward digital transformation through the implementation of a Virtual Interview Platform (VIP).
- ii. Through this Virtual Interview Platform, the Commission was able to successfully interview 557 applicants for the Position of Head of Department.
- iii. The Commission is currently in the process of filling 315 positions of Head of Department to address issues surrounding learning loss during the pandemic.
- iv. The Commission is also focused on filling the positions of supervisor, principal, vice principal, dean, guidance officer with critical importance placed on the appointment of deans and guidance counsellors.
- v. The TSC's priority for April 2022 has been to fill the Head of Department positions at the 135 Secondary School across Trinidad and Tobago.
- vi. The technical vocational subjects are under-subscribed in terms of the number of applicants for teaching positions.
- vii. Changes in the curriculum will require additional teachers in subjects such as ICT.
- viii. If funding is available, the TSC would like to increase the number of interview panels available to treat with applications for the posts of principals, vice principals, deans and guidance counsellors.
- ix. The interview panels are drawn from of a pool of 24 retired education professionals such as former school supervisors and principals.
- x. Interviewers are paid \$100 per hour. Payment of these individuals is often delayed by months.
- xi. Delays in the assessment of applicants are sometimes due to principals not submitting special reports in a timely manner.
- xii. With regard to Denominational Boards, persons in senior positions such as principals and vice principals usually belong to the faith of the school. However, other positions are held by persons of varying faiths.

- xiii. The TSC does not have the authority to change the age limit for new applicants to the Teaching Service. The Education Act has set the limit at age 45.

Appointment of Chief Education Officer

- xiv. The TSC announced that Dr. Peter Smith was appointed as Chief Education Officer on Monday, April 11, 2022.

Tobago-Specific Concerns

- xv. The TSC held two meetings in Tobago in January 2022.
- xvi. The main issues discussed in Tobago were:
- The need for improvement in communication between the TSC and the Tobago House of Assembly (THA)
 - The backlog of appointments and appointments in leadership positions
 - Appointments and transfers
 - Regularising the employee establishment of the nine secondary schools in Tobago
- xvii. Stakeholders were given six months to address the issues. However, the majority of the issues discussed were addressed within a two-month period.

Unsolicited Applications

- xviii. The TSC is no longer accepting unsolicited applications.
- xix. The time and resources consumed by reviewing unsolicited applications had a negative impact on the efficiency of the assessment process.
- xx. The TSC is in the process of collaborating with the MOE to rectify the issue of Assistant Teachers (Primary) (ATPs) who have not yet been upgraded.

7.3 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the Service Commissions Department (SCD)

Overview

- iv. The role of the SCD is to provide administrative and technical advice to the TSC and to ensure that the TSC carries out its constitutional mandate.

Tribunals and Disciplinary Action

- v. The SCD utilised virtual tribunals as a means of adhering to the COVID-19 restrictions.
- vi. Virtual tribunals are still being utilised. However, the SCD intends to return to in-person tribunals by the end of 2022.
- vii. There are currently 46 tribunal matters relevant to the Teaching Service Commission.
- viii. The SCD is aware that there have been instances of inappropriate contact between teachers and students. However, they were unable to provide the number of cases reported.

7.4 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Ministry of Education (MOE)**

Vacancies and Upgrades

- i. Once the Ministry received approvals from the TSC to upgrade teachers, the approval is forwarded to the Director of Finance and Accounts. However, the MOE has experienced challenges with obtaining releases.
- ii. The substitute teacher system is currently managed by the Ministry of Education.
- iii. The MOE intends to complete its staff audit by the end of April 2022.
- iv. The staff audit will assist the Ministry to determine how best to reallocate resources to help with the distribution of teachers.

7.5 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA)**

Effects of the Pandemic on Teachers

- i. Teachers have experienced burnout during the pandemic.
- ii. There were teachers who resigned or retired due to challenges associated with the pandemic.
- iii. Some teachers experienced difficulties adapting to the technology needed to conduct online classes.

- iv. Other teachers experienced challenges with work-life balance while working from home, particularly those with school-aged children at home.

Areas for Discussion with the MOE and TSC

- v. TTUTA would like to have discussions with the MOE to allow teachers to review the special reports used for assessment interviews submitted to the TSC by principals as teachers are not currently privy to the content of these reports.
- vi. Having access to these reports will help teachers to understand the areas in which they need improvement.
- vii. TTUTA would like the MOE to review the assignment of only one clerk per education district to treat with matters such as confidential reports and increments. They would also like to review the issue of classification of leave and extended sick leave.
- viii. The progressive discipline procedure is not being consistently followed by the School-based management team.
- ix. TTUTA expressed the need for more frequent meetings with the TSC to address issues and concerns.

Training and Development

- x. There is a disconnect between the tertiary programmes geared toward teacher education and the job requirements for vacant positions.
- xi. Graduates from UTT and USC have been told that programmes that were previously approved are no longer suitable. As a consequence, they are required to undertake a bridging programme to satisfy the entry requirements.
- xii. TTUTA provides training for all its members.
- xiii. Some of the training provided prepares members for promotion to the positions of Head of Department, Dean, vice principal and principal.
- xiv. They also conduct professional development training.

ADJOURNMENT

- 8.1 The Chairman thanked Members and adjourned the meeting.

8.2 The meeting was adjourned at 12:47 p.m.

I certify that the Minutes are true and correct.

Chairman

Secretary

April 29, 2022

EXCERPT OF THE MINUTES OF THE 12TH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS, STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA)
HELD ON WEDNESDAY MAY 04, 2022

This meeting was held virtually via Zoom

PRESENT

Members

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh	Chairman
Mrs. Lisa Morris – Julian, MP	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster – Roy, MP	Member
Mr. Nigel De Freitas	Member
Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial	Member

Secretariat

Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Terriann Baker	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Nicole Brown	Graduate Research Assistant

Absent/ Excused

Mr. Esmond Forde, MP	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal	Member
Ms. Khadijah Ameen, MP	Member

INTRODUCTION

1.2 The Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:42 a.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

6.4 The Chairman reconvened the meeting at 10:15 a.m. and advised that the meeting will be recorded for subsequent broadcast.

6.5 The Chairman highlighted the objectives of the inquiry and introductions were made.

6.6 The Chairman then invited the lead official of each delegation to make a brief opening statement.

Witnesses Who Appeared

7.1 The following officials appeared before the Committee:

Service Commissions Department

- Mr. Corey Harrison Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
- Ms. Helen Warner Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)

Police Service Commissions Department

- Justice Judith Jones (Ret'd) Chairman
- Ms. Maxine Attong Member
- Mr. Ian Ramdhanie Member
- Ms. Kavita Bassarath Assistant Director Research & Evaluation

KEY ISSUES DISCUSSED

8.1 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Police Service Commission (PSC)**.

Staffing

- i. The Police Service Commission (PolSC) is administratively supported by the Police Service Secretariat.
- ii. Further technical support is rendered to the PolSC through the Legal Unit, Appeals Unit, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit and Public Education Unit of the SCD.
- iii. The PolSC has petitioned the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA) to adapt its current short term contracts in order to regularise and retain staff at the PolSC Secretariat.
- iv. Feedback from the MPA has determined that the regularisation of staff should be concluded by June 2022.
- v. The institutional restructure as it pertains to the PolSC has not commenced.

Appeals

- i. There is a significant backlog of cases within the Appeals Unit due to insufficient staff.
- ii. The staff required to address this challenge are case management officers and transcriptionists.

Legal Matters

- i. The PolSC has undertaken to address its legal proceedings arising out of appeals submitted. It seeks to address De novo matters⁶ in the first instance.

Recruitment of the CoP and DCoP

- i. The PolSC is still reviewing its recruitment approach and envisages that advertisements should be published by the second quarter of this year.
- ii. A final date has not been set for the finalisation of the recruitment process.
- iii. While Legal Notice 183 has removed the mandatory use of an external recruitment firm, the PolSC may seek to utilise the internal expertise available within the Public Service.
- iv. Where external competency is necessary, provisions have been made to render assistance through external consultancies.
- v. Background vetting is conducted with support of the SSA, consultation with the Police Complaints Authority (PCA) and information submitted by the FIU.

Financial Loss

- i. The premature dissolution of the former PolSC resulted in a financial loss of \$124,725 to the Commission due to monies paid to consultants.

Challenges in Legislation

- i. The PolSC lamented the lack of involvement and consultation with the Commissioners prior to the drafting of the Legal Notices.
- ii. The lack of specified terms, vagueness of minimum requirements and the absence of up-to-date job specifications within the Legal Notices have impacted on the efficiency of the recruitment process.

⁶ https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/de_novo

- iii. To treat with this, the PolSC has developed a relevancy policy which will be made available on the PolSC website prior to the advertisement of the posts.
- iv. A specific term which has presented a challenge to the PolSC is the interpretation of “the increasing responsibility in law enforcement” which is a requirement for the post.
- v. The respective Legal Notices were amended over the years, however, the job description was last updated in 2015.

Parliamentary Approval for Acting Appointments

- i. The current process for establishing Acting appointments requires parliamentary approval.
- ii. The PolSC has not proposed an alternative process to accelerate the establishment of Acting Positions.

Performance Appraisals

- i. The performance appraisal methods utilised by the PolSC is adequate to assess the competencies of the CoP and DCoP.
- ii. However, a subcommittee has been established to assess and determine whether the current system requires improvement.

Confidentiality

- i. The members of the PolSC have not been given formal training in confidentiality, as such there is a dedicated email address to ensure there are no breaches in communication.

8.2 The following are the main issues highlighted during discussions with the **Service Commissions Department (SCD)**

Online Applications

- i. The Service Commissions Department commenced the preliminary use of online applications in 2020, with the pandemic augmenting its use.
- ii. The current Police Service Commission is yet to utilise any online methods in its current recruitment process.

- iii. Furthermore, the Police Service Commission seeks to underscore the need for the establishment of clear guidelines for the submission of online applications.

Support for the PolSC

- i. The SCD is of the view that the PolSC requires additional funding whereas the completion of the restructuring exercise by the SCD will finalise the organisational structure of the PolSC which will ultimately provide the necessary staffing within the Appeals Unit.

Confidentiality

- i. A vote of secrecy is conducted with all members of the PolSC to ensure confidentiality.

ADJOURNMENT

- 9.1 The Chairman thanked Members and adjourned the meeting.
- 9.2 The meeting was adjourned at 12:03 p.m.

I certify that the Minutes are true and correct.

Chairman

Secretary

May 23, 2022

Appendix VI

Verbatim Notes

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TENTH VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS AND STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA), HELD (IN PUBLIC) ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 02, 2022, AT 10.22 A.M.

PRESENT

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh Chairman
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian Member
Mr. Nigel de Freitas Member
Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial Member
Ms. Khadijah Ameen Member
Mr. Esmond Forde Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin Assistant Secretary
Ms. Sherlane Ramdeen Procedural Officer - Intern
Ms. Terri Ann Baker Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal Member
Mrs. Ayana Webster-Roy Member

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Claudelle Mc Kellar Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Candice Mohan Director, Public Management Consulting Division
Ms. Marsha Samaroo-Calcut Senior Public Management Consultant (Ag.)

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Mr. Winston R. Rudder Chairman, Public Service Commission
Mr. Courtenay B. Williams Commissioner
Ms. Jennifer Sampson-Farrell Commissioner

SERVICE COMMISSIONS DEPARTMENT

Mr. Corey Harrison Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
Mr. Martel Waldron Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
Ms. Helen Warner Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
Ms. Tavita Ramcharan Executive Director Ag. ICT Unit

Mr. Chairman: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to welcome you to the Tenth Meeting of Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (Including the THA) of the Twelfth Parliament. Members of the listening and viewing audience are invited to post or send their comments via the Parliament's various social media platforms, Facebook page, *ParlView*, the Parliament's YouTube Channel and Twitter.

I am honoured this morning to have the members of the Ministry of Public Administration, Public Service Commission, and Service Commissions Department present at this stage. And I would like at this stage to invite the Ministry of Public Administration to please introduce your members that are present for us in this meeting this morning.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you and welcome. I would like the members of the Public Service Commission, could you please introduce yourselves to this meeting?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: That is it? Okay. At this stage I would like the members of the Service Commissions Department to please introduce yourselves.

[Introduction made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you all for being here this morning. And at this session of our Committee's hearing, we hope to have a public enquiry into the objectives to:

1. To examine and assess the administrative and operational changes that have been implemented at the Service Commissions Department during past three years;

As you know there was a previous report in with recommendations.

2. To evaluate the impact these administrative and operational changes on the ability of the Service Commissions with the exception of the JLSC to execute their constitutional responsibilities;
3. To obtain insights into the plans and proposals aimed at further improving the institutional capacity of the Service Commissions Department; and
4. To examine the factors and conditions that are hindering the successful implementation of the organizational transformation measures at the Service Commissions Department.

So, I am Chair of this Committee. I am Independent Senator, Dr. Varma Deyalsingh, and I would like members of my Committee to please introduce yourselves.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: So, thank you members for being here. At this stage I would like the members of the—Permanent Secretary actually, Mr. Mc Kellar, to please give us some brief opening remarks on this hearing that we are going to have today.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Thank you, Chair. The Ministry of Public Administration welcomes and appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Committee’s follow-up to the 2017 enquiry into the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Service Commissions, which among other things address the institutional strengthening of the secretariat to the Public Service Commission.

Our written submission to the Committee highlighted the work undertaken by the Ministry during the period under review to support modernization of the Service Commissions Department, human resource management structure, skills and facilities. We also included work-related to ICT which was undertaken by iGovTT while that entity was under the purview of the Ministry of Public Administration. Given that there have been leadership changes at all of the agencies identified in the Seventh Report of the JSC, this intervention is welcome as it serves to return us all to the objectives of the initial enquiry and allows us to take stock of what has actually transpired and provide direction as to the way forward.

The Ministry of Public Administration recognizes the importance of modernizing the Public Services human resource management architecture to the overall modernization of the public service and the contribution that this will have towards improving the service’s effectiveness and overall quality of the service delivery. The Ministry also recognizes too, that the Service Commissions Department plays a significant role within the HR architecture and, therefore, supports every effort to strengthen its institutional capacity and effectiveness.

Chair, in closing, I wish to assure you that my team and I undertake to support the Committee’s enquiry by responding as best as we can to your questions and providing subsequently any additional information that maybe required. We also welcome any recommendations that this Committee may proffer towards improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Service Commission and the Service Commissions Department. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Mc Kellar. And again, we would definitely be seeking to give that recommendation, and part of the discussions would be among the three entities and our body to see what we can probably carry forward to get any sort of improvement or further improvements. At this stage I would like Mr. Winston Rudder, Chairman of the Public Service Commission, to please introduce—[*Technical difficulties*]

Mr. Rudder: Thank you, Chair, members of the Joint Select Committee, for the invitation to participate in this virtual public hearing. My sincere apologies for any inconvenience we may have caused in having this particular meeting rescheduled. The Public Service Commission is pleased to assist in the enquiry into the institutional strengthening initiative of the Service Commissions Department. Indeed, it will become apparent in my brief remarks there are very clear linkages between these initiatives, their impact on the operations of the SCD and the constitutional mandate of the PSC. As a result, the PSC has taken very close interest in the progress made in this regard and has designed arrangements to support the process.

The functions of the PSC are well documented and do not exist in a vacuum. Their relevance relates to their intended impact for the successful implementation from the national development thrust pursued by whatever Government of the day exists, in particular the provision of a professional efficient public service, people with competence, motivated impartial public officers working in a system dedicated to servicing the public interest. The ability of the PSC to deliver on this mandate crucially depend on the abilities and capacities resident in its secretariat, the SCD. In this regard, the PSC has vital interest and actively supports the institutional strengthening initiatives undertaken by the SCD. We wish particularly to note the vital final report on institutional strengthening of the SCD, Deloitte, November 2015, which provided wide-ranging recommendations embracing governance, policy, legislation, human resource management, process development, et cetera. These ideas and proposals seem to be at one with the national institutional transformation agenda that exists for public sector reform.

The PSC espouses a vision of an SCD as an organization fit for purpose, a centre of excellence mirroring the attributes we seek to instil in the wider public service. In light of the foregoing, the PSC's strategic framework and road map is inequitably and inextricably coupled with that of the SCD. This strategic framing establishes the rationale for forging alliances with Ministries, Departments and agencies, all of which engage in the delivery of human resource management services to the public sector, but it also identifies the need for an integrated approach to human resource management across the public service. Our current focus over the next six years resides in decision-making and transparency with the very focused use of data; the establishment of a road map or institutional reform and the strengthening associated therewith; the determination of competency models for increasing efficiency and meritocracy in the public service, and strengthening strategic alliances.

In this regard, the PSC has provided an approved strategic remit in 2021 linking its constitutional mandate very directly to the operations of the SCD. And in collaboration with the SCD it has established three monitoring oversight committees comprising Commission members of the PSC and SCD management to oversee progress on its intended objectives and initiatives, and as a mechanism for the Commission and its membership to provide guidance and assistance to the SCD. I trust in these opening remarks the linkage between the SCD and the PSC, and the involvement and concern of the PSC in the strengthening initiatives are well understood. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Rudder, and it is indeed a pleasure to have you present with us because as you mentioned the delay was actually—that a meeting this month was actually to have your esteemed presence here. Because you and your team would have had a cadre of persons there in your Public Service Commission who may be able to push forward recommendations that may be able to give a better service to the population, and I am glad you mentioned that you are highly dependent on your colleagues in the Service Commission Department for your efficiency and your efficient running. So, I thank you for that introduction. At this stage, Mr. Corey Harrison, the Director of Personnel Administration, Acting, could you please give us a brief opening remark?

Mr. Harrison: Chairman, members of the Joint Select Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to report on the institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department. As intimated by the Chairman, the DP is the principal advisor for the four Commissions, and the SCD is the administrative secretariat for the Commissions. The institutional strengthening report provided a framework for the SCD to modify and strengthen the areas, specifically of people, process and technology. However, the initiatives for those areas required support. Therefore, the SCD through its own expertise did its best and I must admit did a remarkable job so far. COVID-19 and limited available resources like—[*Technical difficulties*—our trajectory, and creative opportunities for innovation.

The Government's COVID-19 road map for recovery and vision '20 played a pivotal role in our strategy. The end result to date has been incremental improvements for the operations of the SCD at the secretariat for the four Commissions. We would, however, require further resources to effectively make the changes that are required. I thank you and I anticipate the Committee's questions. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Harrison. And at this stage I would like to remind persons out there that this public enquiry, the objectives are really:

1. To examine and assess the administrative and operational changes that have been implemented at the Service Commissions Department during the past three years;
2. To evaluate the impact of these administrative and operational changes on the ability of the Service Commission to execute their responsibilities;
3. To obtain insights into the plans and proposals for further improving the institutional capacity of the Service Commission Department; and
4. To examine the factors and conditions that are hindering the successful implementation of organizational transformation measures at the Service Commission Department.

So, it is really here to see if we can somehow get that improvement to the public, because the public are the ones who are day-to-day facing with the inefficiencies that may exist. And if we in this capacity can lay it all out and give the constructive criticisms, sometimes, to say how we think we may want to go, what direction, what are the deficiencies, and see if we can get this forward. So, I have to remind Committee members and officials to direct their questions and concerns through the Chair, and to remind members and officials kindly activate your microphone on the devices when they are acknowledged by the Chair and to turn it off when they have concluded their contribution.

So, at this stage I just want to give a brief summary to the listening and viewing audience. From the inception the Commissions were destined to have a role of having that sort of independence in the Constitution, where you would have had—a government would have had the Service Commissions there to function in an impartial way where no one could run to the conclusion where the Government was really interfering into the choice of persons in the public service. So it was really a historical aspect, not just in our Constitution, to insulate the public service from any sort of governmental influence, and this was seen in other Constitutions right through, in Bangladesh, South Africa, and it still runs so in the United Kingdom's running of their things, their whole scenario of the Commissions. But I must say that for the viewing public out there and the listening audience, we have to appreciate the fact that there are the Commissions that are highly dependent on the Service Commissions Department to provide them with their groundwork, to give them that ability to function in terms of making appointments, in terms of disciplinary actions. And as

mentioned by the Chair of the Public Service Commission, they are highly dependent on a proper running of the Service Commissions Department.

So, as we proceed, we have to appreciate that the members of the public sometimes would have their concerns. Recently the Prime Minister voiced concern where he stated that he may rather hire out the top positions in the public service, contract workers to come in with their expertise; and also recently there was a question in the Senate where Independent Senator Vieira had voiced a matter where he actually tried to raise an issue where there were deficiencies—

Ms. Peterkin: A Motion.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah—and he raised a Motion where he actually said that there would have been deficiencies within the services. And actually in his Motion, he tabled the fact that you know should we now call on the Government to review the Trinidad and Tobago Constitution and their enshrined Service Commissions, and to table in Parliament within a reasonable time a clear plan for the update of the Constitution and reform of the Commissions.

So clearly it seems that the Commissions are under some sort of criticism from persons out there, some sort of a need for improvement, and we are hoping today that we can get that improvement. Because you see it is highly dependent on what we do today that may determine the success of the Commissions later on, or the availability of the Commission to really get its mandate into the Constitution in providing a free, independent assessment of the disciplinary action of the Motion of the running of the civil service. So it is a very, very important role these Commissions have to play, and our enquiry seems to look at not just the Public Service Commission but later on the Police Service Commission and the Teaching Service Commission.

So at this stage today, I would like to start the ball rolling by a question to probably the Chair of the Public Service Commission in terms of the recent statement by the Prime Minister that there may be a need prior to looking for contract workers. Now, I understand in the United States system it is mainly that. So when a regime comes in, it hires its own people and they leave. There is also the fact that in the Canadian system it is like that, but they more have independent persons hiring out these contract workers and sometimes they are kept on when there is a change of regime. So there are different situations. Where it occurs in the UK, they still, you know, very well hold on to the issue that the public service should guard against any sort of politicization of the public service, and even as far as—recently Tony Blair had his problems there with the Head of the Public Service when there was a major fallout where he wanted to bring in two persons.

So from your opinion the fact, Chair of the Public Service Commission, the need to put in contract workers, do you think that is something that could—it is a good idea; could it factored in? What is your view on that point? Because you see if we have a fully functioning system in place there may not be a need to try to reach out for expert guidance. So, could you give me your views on that please?

Mr. Rudder: I have been a public servant myself for many years prior to this—[*Technical difficulties*]*—incarnation. I have also been an international public servant. But coming back to the specifics of Trinidad and Tobago, I do not—it is not my view that one specific, particular intervention is the requirement of the day. It may, may be contribution yes, but if everything else remains the same, I think that we will be no better off. My view is that there are things that are required to be done, and there are things that can be done even without the need for any constitutional change. That is a fact. So that the one point introduction at the level of Permanent Secretary of individuals who may or may not have done well in the private sector is no panacea for dealing with the issue of the transformation of the public service of Trinidad and Tobago.*

We need to take a much more informed, holistic view of the matter. The crisis lies in the fact, in my view, having been a public servant for 30 years and have been involved with public sector reform from the very early beginnings, is that everyone looks for solutions tomorrow and there is not a clear understanding that you have to commit to public service reform over the long haul with a clearly identified road map and clearly identified milestones to achieve over time. Public service reform, public service transformation cannot be switched on and off as a tap, neither could it be solved by one point intervention.

So yes, there may be specific instances where the introduction of individuals in specific instances out of the private sector they make a contribution. But if we are serious about public sector reform and transformation, we have to be committed across the political lifeline of individual governments to a programme over a 15- to 20-year period, clearly defined road map and commit to that. And that takes, in my view, serious discussions at the parliamentary political level. That is apart from what you do specifically at the public service bureaucratic level.

Mr. Chairman: But Commissioner, as you have a very impressive track record of service, of being in the trenches as it were and now you are in a different position. You are in an independent role where you may have to defend the public service from what people may look at in the UK system as an attempt to bring in outsiders which may somehow—the Permanent Secretaries may feel a

bit, you know, that they are not worthy of it. Now, I see the need for the Ministers sometimes to bring in that expert advice, and you as the Chair there may have to give your views in your reports how we can probably make such a system work within the needs where the Ministers and Prime Ministers to say, yes, we need expert advice as occurs in the United States system with somehow having that advice, but also having your independence of your public servants. So would you be giving that in any sort of your report and annual report of what you think may be necessary to help this situation?

10.50 a.m.

Mr. Rudder: Chair, in the first instance, the route to Permanent Secretary as currently, we can only operate with the rules that currently exist. The route to Permanent Secretary is via the office of Deputy Permanent Secretary and at the level of Deputy Permanent Secretary, there is a mechanism assessment centre that is applied and in that process individuals outside of the public service are enabled to apply to be considered for Deputy Permanent Secretary which is the entry point for the Permanent Secretary. So in fact, there is a measure which reaches out for a wider cadre for recruitment in the public service itself and at the level of Deputy Permanent Secretary.

Mr. Chairman: So therefore, it is really, I think, to get expert advice or to get expertise in the system. What I am getting at is really the Deputy Permanent Secretaries there, the hiring of them, getting them in those positions would highly be something that, you know, would actually help the proper running of this system. So I want to question you. For that running of the hiring practices of the Deputy Permanent Secretaries, are you somehow involved in consultancy services? I think I saw somewhere to hire consultants to help or assist in that mechanism to hire the—

Mr. Rudder: Mr. Chairman, with respect, the assessment exercise is undertaken with the assistance of experts, consultants, who are hired, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Because part of the delay is really when you see a lot of persons acting, eh, even when we got the introductions this morning, we heard a lot of persons are in their acting position. So I am thinking we would have to reach a stage where persons somehow actually have their positions, they know they have that responsibility, so probably the expediting of the performances and actually getting persons hired permanently is something that may have to be looked at.

Mr. de Freitas: Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rudder: May I, Chairman? Is this in respect of Permanent Secretaries specifically?

Mr. Chairman: No, the Deputy Permanent Secretaries.

Mr. Rudder: Or, okay.

Mr. de Freitas: Chair, might I ask a question here? I just wanted to find out in relation to the administrators in the Tobago House of Assembly who have always assumed were at the level of Deputy Permanent Secretaries in Trinidad? Is that true? Are they considered to be at the equivalent level in the public service?

Mr. Rudder: The administrators in the various Divisions in Tobago House of Assembly are considered at the level of Chief Technical Officers. The Chief Administrator is at the level of a Permanent Secretary.

Mr. de Freitas: Okay. So in terms of filling some of the positions of Deputy Permanent Secretaries, is that possible that administrators can be advanced up to that level? Because the work that administrators do in the Tobago House of Assembly is no different, in my opinion, to what a Permanent Secretary or a Deputy Permanent Secretary does in the public service in Trinidad. So is it not possible that another pathway is that you take an administrator and you promote them to Permanent Secretary or even Deputy Permanent Secretary if that suits the rules and regulations state that must happen?

Mr. Rudder: Let me defer to the Director of Personnel Administration on that particular technical point.

Mr. Harrison: What it is I would advise is basically that because the Commission has gone to a process where we use merit, the issue of automatic promotion would not step in. Therefore, the assessment centre was included and it captures all persons who are eligible to compete for the position of Deputy Permanent Secretary. And I want to add to the point that the Chairman had raised about the possibility of persons from the private sector. Regulation 15 makes provision where the Public Service Commission advertises positions inside and outside of the public service so therefore persons are eligible to apply who are outside of the public service for the position of Deputy Permanent Secretary. I hope I answered your question.

Mr. de Freitas: Not really because what you have just indicated to me was that you look at merit and so the question that I am asking is can an administrator of the Tobago House of Assembly be promoted to a Permanent Secretary and a Deputy Permanent Secretary? The reason I am saying this is because as much we are talking about bringing in individuals from the private sector, which is all well and good, I am just trying to figure out how wide the pool is internally, because you have all of these administrators to a certain extent, I mean, as much as I know there are rules in

relation as to what age public servants retire and whatnot. But the fact is there is a large pool of individuals if you include those that are eligible to become administrators in Tobago. The fact is that they are doing the same job as a Permanent Secretary and a Deputy Permanent Secretary, and if it is that you are looking to that pool for promoting individuals. I mean, if you are talking about merit, I would go out on a limb and say they do have merit, they are doing the job, they are running entire divisions and departments in Tobago.

Mr. Harrison: We have been utilizing the administrators in Tobago for acting as Deputy Permanent Secretary.

Mr. de Freitas: Why acting and not appointed?

Mr. Harrison: Because we have been utilizing a process of the DPS assessment centre to appoint and promote persons in those positions and a few administrators had applied for the position of Deputy Permanent Secretary and probably going through the process as well.

Mr. de Freitas: So they have applied and they are going through the process. I do not assume that that process has now started, I assume that given that the Tobago House of Assembly and its administrators have been around for a while. My question to you is: How many administrators over the years have been promoted to Deputy PS or PS?

Mr. Harrison: That is a question we would have to get back a response to with. We will provide that in writing.

Mr. de Freitas: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I would like to ask a bit to the Service Commissions Department. In your submission you stated that the Department has been conducting an on-going in-house leadership development programme with a view to improving internal human resource capacity among the managerial and supervisory staff. Please state the key areas of focus for the leadership development programme?

Mr. Waldron: Yes, Chairman. So the programme was envisaged by the DPA to look at our middle management staff, those who are in supervisory positions and look at conducting modules related to self-development, communication, coaching, mentoring, leadership as a whole. So—

Mr. Forde: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. Again, I am straining to listen, my volume is up on high and you know what I mean, it is a little difficult in hearing. I do not know if the other members are experiencing it also.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yeah, I am as well, Chairman. I do not know if—

Mr. Chairman: Probably if you come forward with—I do not know if you could fix it on your end, yeah.

Mr. Waldron: I will speak louder. I will speak louder. You are hearing me now?

Mr. Forde: Go ahead.

Mr. Chairman: A bit muffled.

Mr. Forde: A lil better.

Mr. Waldron: Yes, so I was saying we would have done some of the areas because it is essentially to build our internal capacity. So at the time, we would have done some self-assessment, some—*[Inaudible]*—analysis and some of the areas that we would have looked at would have been, as I said, coaching, mentoring, communication, leadership, myself as a leader. We would have done some change management and the issue of feedback and so on. So those were conducted over a period 2019/2020 and some part of last year with that cohort and the intention is of course to continue that with our middle management group. What we saw at the point in time is that we would have gotten some few officers, new persons at that role and we saw the need internally to assist those officers as much as possible to bridge that gap that we felt was necessary for the SCD to continue its job as a Department.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, I would add as well, seeing that the limited resources that we got for training, we were able to partner with members of the Commission who had that expertise and was able to provide that support and training for us to be able to create and establish these development programmes for persons in leadership positions in the Service Commissions Department.

Mr. Chairman: So, two things come about there. The fact that you mentioned that you are doing a sort of—you are trying to, even though lack of resources seems to be a problem but for training, you seem to have tried to make a system work for your benefit, but then, how many people have benefited from this programme since its inception?

Mr. Waldron: Chair, I would say about 40 of our staff members, 4-0.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. And what metrics have been used to evaluate the effectiveness of this programme?

Mr. Waldron: So our annual—we do conduct our quarterly reviews that filter into our yearly reviews. Also, we have productivity metrics that we use and those were introduced in last year and I think we would have submitted some of that in our responses. So our productivity metric is being

used to track and monitor some of what would have been implemented in late 2020 and in last year.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Lutchmedial, I think you wanted to—

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes, Chair. I have a question coming out from there and then I wanted to focus on one of the submissions made by the Service Commissions Department. But with respect to the in-house leadership development programme, which I think is very interesting, just a quick question to either the PSC or the SCD. What about leadership training across the public service? I know that that type of training is really done by each Department and depending on line Ministries and all of that. But is there any sort of professional development programme focusing on leadership for public servants, and if not, is this something that you think perhaps the PSC aided by the Service Commissions Department may wish to implement and to manage so that you have across the board leadership development in the public service?

Mr. Rudder: Thank you, madam member. That is a matter of extremely grave concern for the Service Commissions Department and the PSC. We do have the capacity or the responsibility for training, let me say, but clearly in some of the exercises that they have engaged in, for example, particularly emerging from the assessment centre for the DPSs, we have been able to identify lacunae in terms of leadership and this is a matter we have drawn to the attention of the Ministry of Public Administration and more latterly to the PS to the Prime Minister. So we are aware at least insofar as the discussion with the Ministry of Public Administration are concerned that attempts are being made to improve, develop the curricula of the Public Service Academy to take greater account of this need for leadership development training. But it is a fact that is a soft spot in terms of training and development public sector wide.

Ms. Lutchmedial: All right. Mr. Rudder, sorry, I just— [*Inaudible*] —that question in the context that I spent a small amount of time in the public service, but what I found is that technical people lack leadership development and people with excellent leadership skills perhaps do not have the technical capacity and so you need to bridge that gap somewhere. And I am wondering if—you know and what I found as well is that really it depends, if you have an academy and you are training people to move up into positions like DPS and PS and so on, it ought not to or perhaps it may be a bit unfair if the training that they receive in terms of leadership training depends on where they are stationed within the service because there are opportunities in different Ministries for different

types of training, so maybe something to take into consideration. I think someone wanted to comment, yes.

Mr. Rudder: Thank you very much. Sorry for intervening but one of the things about the leadership that has to be emphasized also because I have experienced it myself, you have to have that internal motivation for wanting to improve and so if you are at a sufficiently high level in the system, you also have to invest in your own capacity—

Ms. Lutchmedial: Of course.

Mr. Rudder:—and ability in that regard too. I just say that as an aside, not to diminish the importance of the institutional responsibility.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yeah, quick comment though and again from my experience, what I found was that a lot of training that is available in terms of leadership and management out there, it is really skewed towards private sector and not public sector. So, for example, I have studied management but it was all very private sector driven and skewed in that direction as opposed to public sector. So I just make that comment by the way.

But let me move on to asking the Service Commissions Department, you stated that you all have been seeking to fill your middle management vacancies and I think that is commendable because I think middle management really drives a lot of activity within many departments and I wanted to find out how many vacancies have been filled and how many are still remaining at this point in time within the Service Commissions Department and do you have a time frame in mind for filling the remainder of those, what you classify as middle management positions?

Mr. Harrison: We have advertised the positions within the middle management and I could always share with the Committee the exact numbers but we have advertised and we are hoping to fill those positions within the middle management as well as top management by the end of June, probably July.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Sorry, Chair, through you, you can provide the data for us in terms of how many, let us say, have been filled within the last—

Mr. Harrison: Yes, I will provide the data.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes, and how many existing. Yes, thank you.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chairman, just a follow up on my colleague's question there. Why so long, June, July? We know the importance of this particular Commission, right, because this Commission affects the whole public service, so if the Service Commission is not probably tooled and human

resourced with regard to the personnel, you know we will end up with a serious problem. Why June, July? Just a quick answer, please.

Mr. Harrison: What it is we are doing is a holistic approach to the filling of vacancies. What it is we have currently at the Public Management Consulting Division is a restructuring of the Service Commissions Department, so we do not want to fill positions when it is we plan to restructure the existing structure at the Service Commissions Department. We are currently improving the structure to accommodate our future state and we want to be able to fill the positions within that future state.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chairman, can I proceed? Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, member Forde, you can proceed.

Mr. Forde: Okay, I understand the answer. I am now a Member of Parliament from since 2015, all right, which makes it just about the seven years and since I came in, you know it has always been, you know what we are still hearing, we are going to hire, we are going to confirm, we are going to put persons in positions, how many positions with bodies and you know I mean, all the different terms that we hear but somehow, you know, we are not seeing the evidence, we are not seeing the benefits, the advantages, as we continue to be in a situation where we are of the opinion quote and quote that the public service is not operating efficiently and I believe that it starts with the Service Commissions. I am of the opinion that the Service Commissions Department has to be totally managed with all of the necessary persons in the various positions and then once they are operating efficiently from a human resource function, we can then go forward to deal with the other aspects of the public service.

My simple question to again the Chairman, Mr. Rudder. Right. In 2017, there was a report that would have come out of Cabinet and came out of the Ministry in 2017. What aspect of that has the Commission since implemented? All right. You all have said that I think you all have now been there three years. What changes have you all started? And I am talking about changes just as you mentioned, you know, the issue, where you made mention of the crisis. You talked about the solutions for tomorrow, it is over a long haul, it is milestone reform, futuristic and it must be a clearly defined model. As the Chairman of this particular Commission, what have you all done within the last three years? “Gimme” at least two or three points that you all have done, right, and what advantages have we seen as a result of these changes that you all have made within the last three years. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rudder: Done in respect of the institutional strengthening of the Service Commissions Department?

Mr. Forde: Well again, I think we should start with the Service Commissions Department to make sure that you are fully strengthened to ensure that you can then go forward in implementing to strengthen the public service. Right. I am looking at your Commission. Right. What changes have you all implemented within the last three years, right, and the benefits that have been derived in going forward on these changes that you all would have made in the Service Commissions Department.

Mr. Rudder: The Public Service Commission is not the responsible agency for institutional strengthening of the Service Commissions Department. The institutional strengthening report that went to Cabinet in 2017 of which Cabinet noted was an exercise that under the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Administration. What the Public Service Commission of which I am currently Chair at present had done is that when we came on board and we found that report, we have used that report to establish a linkage which I mentioned between what that report proposed and what our commitment or mandate is and established a strategic remit in which we are overseeing how the activities are being implemented, such activities as could be implemented with the resources that are made available, how these are implemented and the extent to which they are contributing to the undertaking of our mandate. But the specific responsibility for institutional strengthening of the Service Commissions Department is not the responsibility of the Public Service Commission. I do not know whether the Director wishes to speak further to the matter.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, the question directly specifically was directed to the Public Service Commission and I could probably assist as best as I can. One of the things that the Public Service Commission when they came in which was top priority was ensuring the issues surrounding their mandate is better done basically by the Service Commissions Department. So they went about a mandate of ensuring that the disciplinary process was much more efficient, the focus on the issue of meritocracy, they also focused on the review of the regulations and filling top positions. The Commission also focused on the issue of transparency as to how it is they can improve what it is they do. So in a synopsis, those are the sort of issues I would think in the past three years, this Commission has done as they entered and took over from the previous Public Service Commission.

Mr. Forde: All right. And so therefore, what will be the main disadvantage in you all going forward? Is it funding? Is it allocation? You know what I mean, the financial resources. What is

the main criteria in you all not being in a position to work with haste, with speed? As we concurred again, while all of this is happening, you know Rome is burning, well not Rome but in this case, Port of Spain is burning. So what it is that you all need in order in going forward?

Mr. Harrison: Financial resources.

Ms. Lutchmedial: I have to just step away for a few minutes, Chair. With your leave, member Forde, can I just ask one quick follow-up question?

Mr. Forde: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Lutchmedial: I just need to step away for a few minutes but I just want to clarify something. Is it that the Ministry of Public Administration as you mentioned should be the one driving the process of reform? And you know, is that really—because I hear what the Chairman is saying, it is not really the Service Commissions. Service Commissions' remit is very clearly set out in the Constitution so I tend to agree with that. But with respect to the restructuring of Service Commissions Department which will ultimately lead to public sector transformation, is it the role of the Ministry to drive that process and are they the ones tasked with that responsibility in your respectful view, Chairman, and from the Service Commissions Department?

Mr. Rudder: Well, member, when we came into position, we met the institutional strengthening report which seems to have been dormant for about three years. It had not moved and what we did as a Commission, since it had all the elements in my view and in the Commission's view for institutional strengthening and for making the SCD more fit for purpose, we intimated—we have no responsibility but we intimated to the Director that he may want to use that as the mechanism for effecting change and go back to the Ministry of Public Administration to ensure that the Cabinet provides the funding for the areas that had been noted in 2017 because Cabinet noted what the institutional strengthening meant but Cabinet did not have proposals for funding these requirements. And we suggested that discussion should take place between the Service Commissions Department and the Ministry in that regard. Meanwhile, we used the ideas to fashion how we should strengthen the link between the Public Service Commission and the Service Commissions Department to oversee what initiatives could be implemented within the limited resources that were available and that is the process which we are following.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Okay, so let me just and with all of that in mind, I want to just pin you down to— I am sorry if it sounds as if I am in court, I am cross-examining you, right, this is how I am trained to ask questions. [*Laughter*] But if you can just say yes or no. But funding, taking the

recommendations from that report that you have amazingly said was dormant for three years and driving it at a Cabinet level and all of that, is that the responsibility with the Ministry of Public Administration in your view?

Mr. Rudder: I would argue that that will be the place for initiating action.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Right, good. Thank you very much.

11.20 a.m.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chairman, just one last question with regard to—as I have Mr. Rudder there with us.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, member Forde.

Mr. Forde: The freeze, when we talk about freeze hiring in the public service, will that affect your commission, in terms of hiring also?

Mr. Rudder: It affects the commission in the sense that we are minded that the individual Ministries and Departments have no funds to employ people. So in that regard, we await the direction whether funds are available or else people cannot be employed.

Mr. Forde: Okay. Have we been able to identify, from the Permanent Secretaries and the Heads of Departments, what are some of the most critical vacant positions in the public service that are not being filled due to, whether financial constraints, merit list, whatever is the operative words there? Are we able to identify the number of vacancies that we have?

Mr. Rudder: That is a process that is in train currently. And more than that, as a result of the discussions taken both at the level of the Service Commissions Department and at the level of the Public Service Commission interfacing with Permanent Secretaries, we are seeking from them what are their priorities. In fact, that is in train currently. I do not know whether—

Mr. Forde: Last question, Mr. Chairman. Again, Mr. Rudder, in terms of your stewardship, again, you made it clear in terms of the crisis that we could be into and what I would suggest is that, based on your over 30 years of experience in the public service, and now you are wearing a hat where you could be considered in a position to make an input, I suggest that, coming out of the end of your term whatever proper documentation in charting the way forward for the public service. Because as you said, it would take 20 to 25 years but if we do not start and if we do not have it documented or digitized, based on the new word that we are into, I think we would have really, really wasted time as not ensuring that we do something, especially during your term of office, to

ensure that we utilize your knowledge and capacity. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I do not know if you want to comment, Mr. Rudder.

Mr. Rudder: I will make a comment. I think there is a discontinuity that exists inevitably between commissions and that contributes to it. What I have determined for my own self, having regard to my own personal experience, is to ensure that my tenure, when it comes to an end, whether it is next year or whenever, that the concerns, not only that, but the achievements, the concerns and the targets that ought to be progressed would be documented by way of handing over to whoever succeeds me.

Mr. Chairman: In terms of the freeze hiring in the public service, the PSC, I think, intimated that they paused initially. You have a constitutional mandate and that freeze could be seen as a decision that disrupted your execution of your mandate. So, I understand the position you are in. You have a mandate to fill certain vacancies, but with the Government's announcements of the freeze, you do not know if to go forward, if you should just continue as an independent body to try to fill these positions not knowing what would become of it; if it is a waste of time, effort and money. So particularly to the Service Commissions Department, I want to ask: Did the Government or the Executive consult with the Service Commissions Department before or after this announcement was made?

Ms. Warner: Good morning, Chairman. I will answer that question. The service commission, there was no consultation. In the process of filling vacancies, the process the Service Commissions Department takes is that we look at the state of the office, if it is vacant, if we are able to fill, if there is recruitment process going on. We do all of that. And one of the more significant aspects of filling a vacancy is confirming that as of 2020, is confirming that the funds are available. Now, that particular situation really relates to those entry level positions where we will not have any bodies. And in those we take care to ensure that funds are available and that is through communication with the Ministries.

With respect to the offices where we have acting bodies, those funds are, and this is based on advice from the Director of Budgets and the Ministry of Finance, where there are acting bodies or where there are live bodies in the positions, the commission would go ahead and fill. So, while the "freeze" exists, which was only for a year, according to the budget statement, the commission as of 2021 continued its mandate, taking care to ensure that those entry level positions had funds, of course. Their due diligence ensured that we did not fill without funds. So that meant consulting

with Permanent Secretaries. So I think the commission continued its mandate. That particular year, from '20 to '21, we were cautious, concerned, as the Chairman expressed, but as of '21, we again continued our filling positions that there were bodies in them.

Mr. Chairman: Well, with the economic conditions Government may be forced to sometimes freeze their hiring practice. But it is good to know that we are back on track, according to what you are saying. But based on the feedback from Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments, what are some of the most critical vacant positions in the public service that are not being filled due to any sort of financial constraints?

Mrs. Warner: Chairman, the Service Commission as part of our initiatives going forward for institutional strengthening, and so on, the commission had mandated that we seek to fill the senior positions in the public service, because the commission felt that once the top was strengthened, the rest will follow. So that is one of the projects the Service Commissions Department is embarking on, ensuring that the top positions.

In doing that we are reaching out to permanent secretaries. The DPA has been in consultation with a few Ministries. We have met and we have asked those Ministries to prioritize, give us those Ministries that you are really anxious and willing to fill. Now, this is besides the offices that we have in train doing recruitment processes for. That has been successful. We have had a few Ministries indicate to us which offices they require immediately.

In our prioritization of those Ministries that may not have answered quickly, we assess those offices: What is the national impact? What is the status? Do we have funds? We have different criteria that we look to in order to decide which one we will prioritize ahead of the—

But to specifically answer your question, we have been meeting. We have been having stakeholder engagements with our Permanent Secretaries to ensure that we meet what they want, in terms of filling the offices that they require. We can provide a list of those offices, those Ministries that have responded but it is in its infancy and we are still arranging to meet a lot of the Permanent Secretaries.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Chairman, if I could just jump in here and ask a question with your leave, please?

Mr. Chairman: Sure, member.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes. I want to raise an issue, which I think is a bit topical right now and that is a real large vacancy and gap existing in the prison service with the Head of the Commissioner of

Prisons, basically proceeding on preretirement leave and there being no one appointed to act in the interim.

Now, it has come to the fore that—and I take what has been said by Ms. Warner about filling key management positions, about the national impact, and so on. And I want to ask about this situation that has arisen within the prison service where the head of the prison service has proceeded on leave and what has been stated in the media are very strong statements saying—

Mr. Forde: Chairman, just one clarification. Is it that the prison service commission that deals with this particular question that is about to be raised here?

Ms. Lutchmedial: The Public Service Commission.

Mr. Chairman: The Public Service Commission.

Ms. Lutchmedial: There is no prison service commission.

Mr. Rudder: The Public Service Commission.

Ms. Lutchmedial: There is no prison service commission. This is a Public Service Commission matter. Yes. So, and as I was saying, it came out that there is also a vacancy for six positions of Senior Superintendent of Prisons, as well as, I believe, subject to correction, three vacancies for Deputy Commissioner of Prisons. Now, I find this situation to be a bit untenable. And in light of what is being said here about identifying key positions, national impact, this is part of our security service, for want of a better word, the management of our prisons, and so on, given the situation that we are all living in and the amount of issues involving prisons. Has the Service Commissions Department or the Public Service Commission really taken any immediate action to rectify this position? And, again, why has it come to this, that you have so many? I am counting here basically nine key vacancies at the top of the prison service that have not been filled for some time. And according to the Prison Officers Association in their media release which I am sure you are all familiar with, they are saying that this situation has been in existence for some five years. So I am very much concerned about that. And I would like to get some sort of information and explanation from either the Service Commissions Department or the Public Service Commission to, perhaps, explain us what has been the challenge in filling these very key positions, given the point that it cannot be a secret, first to begin with, that someone was about to retire at the top of the prison service.

Mr. Rudder: Let me first correct the bit of information. There is a Commissioner of Prisons in office as of now until—and that Commissioner demits on the 5th of March, and by the 5th of March

there will be an acting commissioner taking over from him. So that is in the press release wherever—that is inaccurate information.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Sorry, Mr. Rudder, are you saying he has not proceeded on preretirement leave?

Mr. Rudder: I am saying that he has not proceeded on retirement leave.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Thank you. Well, thanks for that clarification then.

Mr. Rudder: But there is an explanation, a deeper explanation, to the apparent conundrum that exists at the level of the senior management in the prison service, which I will ask the DPA to deal with.

Ms. Warner: Chair, I will take that question. Member, in 2017, we have been committed to filling the senior executive positions in both the prisons and fire service. We felt that, yes great national impact. They are two offices that are critical to our society and they needed to be filled. I will just start just briefly with respect to fire service. We advertised those positions and we were able to fill the top positions in the fire service within a year. The preparation took long but we were able to complete four offices. We still have one office still outstanding. But we were able to fill those vacancies.

The same vigour was applied to the prison service. We attempted and started the process of doing assessments for the positions of Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent of Prisons as well as Senior Superintendent of Prisons. We were able to fill the positions of assistant, all. There are no vacancies as Assistant Superintendent, as well as Superintendent. Unfortunately, for the Service Commissions Department, the court applied an injunction for the position of Senior Superintendent. We had gone through half of the assessment and one of our candidates applied to the court for the injunction for the release that, I am sure may be public by now.

So that was successful and there is an injunction and we have stopped that process. The final leg of that process was a competency-based interview, and having completed that we would have filled the offices. Once we have successful candidates, we would have continued to fill the office of Senior Superintendent.

The DPA proposed to make recommendations to fill the next position of Assistant Commissioner. Now, if this had been done, we would have continued. We have other persons on order of merit list and we would have been able to systematically fill the offices to the top. The Commission's decision with respect to office of deputy and commissioner is to have a more robust assessment.

So that would have been looked at as well. But with the injunction we sort of had to change gears and manage how we would fill the other positions. So we are unable right now to fill any offices or go forward with the office of Senior Superintendent, and there is also a court action with respect to assistant. And out of caution the DPA advised that we hold with respect to those offices.

Another key part of the story was that the commission's policy is that we do not skip ranks. So we could not move forward. We literally could not move forward to do it. But had everything gone as we had planned, by now we would have been looking to, we would have had no problem with an acting incumbent and well on the way for a recruitment process/a selection process for the other ranks.

Ms. Lutchmedial: A quick question.

Mrs. Warner: Yes.

Ms. Lutchmedial: With respect to the court matter and the injunction, I think that that relates to the competency-based assessment or something that you all, if I am correct; correct me if I am wrong. Before the introduction of that process, there would have been a process before that, which was not the subject of court action. Is it possible to use the existing process in light of the injunction to fill the vacancies that exist right now, so that you do not have that? Because I understand what you are saying about not skipping ranks, but what it means is that if there is a court action involving Superintendents, then that will affect everything above that, Senior Superintendent, Assistant Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, you know, whatever the ranks are, going up. So you are basically, while this matters proceeds, you are going to have almost no senior management positions being filled unless you revert, or you find a way to fill them. And I am suggesting, I do not know, correct me if I am wrong, is there something preventing you from using the old process to fill the positions?

Ms. Warner: So, the commission recently made a decision with respect to the offices of deputy and commissioner and that is still being worked out and we could inform the Committee in writing. If the Committee wishes to disclose at that time, I guess you could. So I rather not continue with that process until that is finalized. Yes, only Senior Superintendent and Assistant Commissioner, those are the officers that are affected by the court's decisions. But I wish to assure the Committee that the commission has made a decision with respect to the other two. We are looking at the policies that exist that seem to be tying the hands of the commission and we will move forward.

But I just want to add also that since 2014, the commission has indicated to the prison service, as well as to the Ministry of National Security, that it would pursue more robust means of assessment. And this is indicative across the public service. We have done it for fire. We have done it for deputy. We have done it in the Service Commissions Department as well and that is our mandate. That meritocracy that the DPA was speaking about is to ensure, and even the concerns of the Prime Minister, is to ensure that the best candidate is chosen for the office, and that is what we want to reflect in the prison service as well.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for that. I just want to put something into perspective. I think what member Lutchmedial made mention of is really a report, I think was it in yesterday's paper, an editorial of the *Newsday*:

"Prison Service: Who is your leader?"

And:

"The POA..."—said they were—"extremely dissatisfied with this 'sad state of affairs,' saying it shows 'the great incompetence, neglect...culpability' of the commission and what is called the commission's constant failure to carry out its lawful obligations in having timely assessments and promotions to fill the vacancies'..."

I heard the commission give an explanation. I heard also that there is a court matter delaying this process. But:

"The association also says it tried numerous times to discuss these and other issues with the Director of Personnel Administration, but with no success."

And:

"...the association wants an immediate and comprehensive investigation into the deficiencies of the commission."

—which is what we are trying to achieve today. And they said:

"The commission must explain how it allowed the leadership of the Prison Service to reach this awkward situation..."

So this is what we are attempting to do today. And also they made mention:

"...the National Security Minister..."—they must—"also explain why his ministry felt it necessary and appropriate to interfere in the...sluggish operations of an independent service commission."

So this was really out in the public domain. We have heard the court matters. We have heard that things are in place. So I am feeling—should we be comforted that we would not be left without a

police in the hierarchy of the service, either an acting or—? So the same debacle that followed the Police Commissioner would not occur? So are we to be reassured from the Public Service Commission that that would not occur?

Mr. Rudder: I wish to let the Committee know that there is currently a Commissioner of Prisons in place and as of March 5th, there will be an acting Commissioner of Prisons in place.

Mr. de Freitas: Mr. Chair—sorry, I think member Lisa Morris-Julien has her hand up but I want to ask a question after her, if it is that we are inclined or if we have time.

Mr. Chairman: Sure. So, I am very comforted to know that and as you made mention there may have been an erroneous report in the newspapers. So I think the populace would feel comforted to know that things are in place. Ms. Morris-Julien, could you please ask your question.

Mrs. Morris-Julien: Thank you very much, Chairman. I just wanted to know, through you Chairman, to the commission, does the commission have to wait for the ministries and the departments to request that a vacant post be filled to begin the process? This is a question from the public and this is something I have been waiting to hear. Is it a process where it must start from the Ministry's side, or can you start it? Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Rudder: You want to answer that?

Mrs. Warner: Okay. Good morning, member. How I will answer that, I will go straight to our regulations. First before I start, we have two types of offices in the public service. We have those specific offices that occur in the specific Ministries. So immigration officers will only occur in the Ministry of National Security; so along those lines. Then we have the generic offices that occur all over the public service, clerks, accountants, accounting assistants, and so on. Our regulations, regulation 13 to be specific, first invites Permanent Secretaries to inform the service commissions, and this deals particularly with all offices. We invite the Permanent Secretaries to indicate what vacancies exist and what are your plans to fill it. With respect to the generic offices, the Service Commissions Department could go ahead. We do not need a recommendation. But with respect to the specific offices, the Permanent Secretary is responsible for signalling to us that there is a vacancy, they want it filled, who you may want it filled with, or do you want a recruitment process. So regulation 13 allows for that process.

Depending on what the Permanent Secretary indicates to the service commissions and the Public Service Commission we will proceed. If there is a recommendation to fill with probably a very suitable person, the Service Commissions Department will research that person and ensure that

that person is truly eligible and the right person to be appointed. We will do so. If it is a recruitment process, we go into the recruitment and selection process.

And to specifically answer your question, there are some offices that are very specific to certain Ministries that we await the direction of the Permanent Secretary for them to indicate what you want for that Ministry.

Mr. de Freitas: Mr. Chair, can I jump in here?

Mrs. Morris-Julien: Thank you very much, Chairman.

Mr. de Freitas: Proceed, member Julien. You have another question?

Mrs. Morris-Julien: No, thank you. I am just giving way to you, Sir. Thank you, Chairman and thank you very much for the opportunity.

Mr. de Freitas: Okay. Thank you, member Julien and thank you, Mr. Chairman. So this line of question is along the lines of where I wanted to jump in, because as I am listening to everything that is taking place here today I started to realize that what seems to be occurring is that we are more reactive than proactive in relation to filling vacancies, especially some of the higher ranks. What concerned me, just off the bat, along the lines of what member Lutchmedial was questioning, I am very scared that for certain high-ranking positions for certain very important services in Trinidad and Tobago that for whatever reason, be it that the assessment process is being questioned or not, that the court allows an injunction then that process stops. The reason for this is that some of these positions need to be filled and they were never built out or catered for that they would not be filled. Hence the reason we usually put in an acting person in that position. And if it is that a simple court injunction can stop you moving forward with that process, then it tells me disgruntled individuals who may not have been successful could easily just file a court injunction and the process is stopped for whatever reason, and to me that is very scary.

But the line that I am going down now, in terms of this entire process being reactive and not proactive, I am now starting to figure out, that from the service commissions standpoint for certain positions, as you indicated just specific, it is almost as if you are waiting on the permanent secretary to sort of initiate the process by, one, indicating if they have an individual who can fill that position for which you can do an assessment, or they ask you to go find somebody.

So, let me ask you directly now: This entire process, where these vacancies are piling up in the public service, is the process of having the Permanent Secretary indicate to you all that the vacancy is there and they need somebody or somebody is there for the position, is that efficient? Because,

based on what you said it sounds to me as though it is not efficient, because a Permanent Secretary is supposed to know beforehand whether a vacancy is coming up. I am not an HR person but in layman's terms you would understand that if someone is approaching the age of 60, that they are going to retire from the public service as is stipulated, and you know that. You know the person's age at a particular point in time. You know when they are turning 60, and you know when that particular position is going to become vacant. And if it is that you know this, then it means that you are able to, one, in a timely fashion, receive all indication that you need from the Ministry so that the service commission can begin its assessment at least 12 months before the person turns 60. I am certain, either through digitization or either through just HR practices, that the service commission and every single Ministry in Trinidad and Tobago knows when individuals in every single position are going to retire by virtue of the fact that they are turning 60. So you are supposed to know that by December 31, 2022, how many positions are becoming vacant by virtue of the fact that individuals are going to retire, because they turn 60 within that period of January 01 to December 31, 2022. That then tells me that you can plan far in advance for these vacancies and begin the assessment period, so that you do not end up with these types of vacancies. Tell me, can this not be made more efficient? Do you all need to do something to get these Permanent Secretaries to do their jobs?

Mr. Rudder: May I take a stab at that? I have been professionally involved in planning in the public service and you are entirely correct. The question is: What is the database upon which these decisions can or should be made? And that is number one, because from the time you enter the public service, it is known when you have to leave, if all things are considered. So one of the problems is the nature of the database on public servants in the public service. And I suspect that this is one of the prime initiatives that the process of digitization would resolve. Because you run the risk, if you digitize the Public Service Commission and Ministries are not digitized, you have two different sets of information. Which one is the information upon which you make decisions? So the member of the Committee is absolutely correct in that regard.

But at another level, what in fact would the initiatives that are taking place currently in respect of the application of technology would ensure that there is the same information in the service commission as exists in Ministries and would facilitate in a much more proactive way, the Service Commissions Department being able to prompt Ministries when they do not, by a certain time,

provide information in respect of certain positions. But, perhaps, the Director may have some additional thoughts on it.

11.50 a.m.

Mr. Harrison: Member of the Committee, I think you are absolutely right. And what it is you speak about is succession planning, not only at the level of Service Commissions Department but at the Ministry's level as well. But I think we need, as a public service, a wide initiative to institute succession planning in the Ministries and Departments so that we could be proactive when it is we are filling those offices. It has been—

Mr. Chairman: Do you mind speaking—sorry. Do you mind speaking a little louder or going closer to your mike? It is a bit muffled. Yeah.

Mr. Harrison: Okay. My apologies. What it is I am saying is the member is correct and the member speaks about succession planning in the Ministries and Departments. I think and the PS, Public Administration, is also part of this Committee and he should be able to provide some light on that as well. Because we have been working on some sort of holistic approach to succession planning and I think that is the only way we can be proactive when it comes to filling of offices, not when it is it became vacant but at least being proactive to fill the vacancies before. So by the time somebody leaves, we have coming in but we also have somebody who is coming in based on merit and not solely on seniority.

Mr. Chairman: I would like—in the submission from the Service Commissions Department, it was stated that:

The Service Commissions Department continues to engage Permanent Secretaries and the Heads of Department to conduct regulatory reconciliations of the job positions within the establishment with a view of identifying vacancies. Further, the SCD has extended its vacancy reduction project to include the development and utilization of a priority matrix. The matrix will prioritize the selection of offices for filling of vacancies.

So the question I ask: What is timeline for completing the process for identifying vacancies?

Ms. Warner: The process is ongoing. We sanitize the list—our establishment list on a regular basis. The Service Commissions Department liaises with the Ministries. Notwithstanding what I said, we do follow up. We ensure that that regulation is fulfilled which also requires us to, if there is no response, to reach out to the Ministry to get a response.

In terms of the list of offices, those are stated in order—and the commission had indicated—in order of range. So the most senior positions come down, we seek to fill those offices. So what the Service Commissions Department does is ensures that the offices that are not filled, that they are ready to fill. So it means pursuing proper identification of the vacancy and that means making sure it is a valid vacancy; ensuring that if we need a recruitment process that that starts in a timely manner. And the project that we are engaging, we are—our timelines were again for the first start, June of this year. We had started a similar project not targeting the senior offices last year. So that is on its way and we are now concentrating on the senior positions in the public service. Chairman, I hope I have addressed the questions.

Mr. de Freitas: So, Mr. Chair, just another question. So when we say vacancies, and I guess this is for the public as well, are you referring to—there are two instances where vacancies can occur. One is where there is nobody in the positional at all and therefore nobody is executing the job description on that position or a vacancy where you have an acting person in the position but the actual substantive position is vacant and needs to be filled. So when we are referring to vacancies here, which is it in the public service? Because I am assuming that in the public service, depending on where the position is or where the title is, some may have nobody in the position but it is preparing to be filled. But as you get higher up, there always needs to be somebody acting in the position because those positions involve decision-making processes that are essential to the running of Ministries. So when you are talking about vacancies here which you are really referring to?

Ms. Warner: Okay. Our project is to permanently fill vacancies. So those are the offices with no—it does not matter if there is an acting incumbent, that there is no substantive person. That is a vacant office that has to be filled. We do fill on a temporary basis and that is where the commission appoints persons to act on a temporary basis to have a body in it. So—

Mr. de Freitas: Okay. Okay—

Ms. Warner:—I do not know if that clears it up.

Mr. de Freitas: So that answers the question. That is what I thought it was, that is how I have seen it. So then it begs the question—because I keep hearing the word “merit”. So you have individuals who are fulfilling the duties of the acting position. Now, I am aware that the full job description sometimes is not what is being fulfilled for various reasons. Right? But the fact is that you do have a body, more times than none, fulfilling the majority of the duties in an acting position. Why is it

that we do not have a system in place that we take these acting bodies and put them into a substantive position? And I am asking this of the Permanent Secretary because I understand limitations of the service commissions now, but the Permanent Secretary is where this whole thing starts.

So let me ask that of the Permanent Secretary just for the Ministry of Public Administration simply because you are the one that is here. It is not that I am targeting you all in any specific way. But why is it that people in acting positions who are already fulfilling these duties cannot be given the substantive position? And where they do not have the full criteria, the fact that they are acting means that they can be given the opportunity to at least acquire the criteria and then be put into the substantive position.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Thank you, member, for the question. As it is, Permanent Secretaries can make recommendations to officers who are in acting positions to be promoted to those positions. And I think that that was shared by one of the members of the Service Commissions Department before. So a Permanent Secretary or head of department can make such a recommendation to the Service Commissions Department.

Again, there may be instances where it may be determined, whether based on performance appraisals, reports or otherwise, that notwithstanding somebody is currently acting in the position, that the Ministry or Department wishes the Service Commissions Department to advertise the position either within the broader public service or within the national community, advertise it to the world at large. Because it may be that the incumbent, while executing some of the duties of the office, the Ministry or Department may feel that in order to get the best fit or the best likely fit for the position, they may wish the Public Service Commission to advertise beyond to public service. So again, one, a recommendation can be made by the PS or the Head of the Department to appoint, promote the incumbent who is acting or it may feel that its purposes may be best suited to request that the position be advertised either to the wider public service or to the world at large.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. de Freitas: So that is the process that we have gotten today and we have come to understand. But we still have an issue in terms of vacancy. So the question is, to the Permanent Secretaries, how proactive are you all in this? Because if you know that there is somebody acting in the position—and we have heard all the stories in the public service, people acting for years, doing the job for years and years and years, why is it that the Ministry—and I guess you can only speak for

your Ministry—is not as proactive if it is you know the position is coming up to be vacant by virtue of age that that process is not started in a timely fashion so the service commissions can do their job?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Well, again, member, as you rightly said, I can only speak for my Ministry and as far as I am aware, once we have been alerted either by the head of division in which there is an upcoming vacancy or by our Human Resource Management Division that a vacancy is about to arise, we would normally do the necessary alerts. So that either somebody could be put up to act in the position that is likely to become vacant or to have a suitable replacement provided by the Service Commissions Department.

Mr. de Freitas: Good. So, now we are coming right down the order list. So we are now at the HR department. What is average amount of the time that you all, as the leaders in the Ministry, would normally get in relation to vacancies upcoming?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Okay. Again, so our Human Resource Management Division—and again, I can only speak to myself—we have an establishment that, as one of the members said earlier, from the time somebody enters the public service, we are aware of when they will approach retirement. Right? We are aware of that. And as part of that process there is the annual preparation of pension and leave reports. It is required on an annual basis, so we do know—and I think that was clearly stated earlier—we do know—sorry, even more than a year in advance that somebody’s retirement is approaching.

So as far as I am aware, Sir, the necessary information is available to the HR department and is brought to the attention of the relevant parties to have the vacancies addressed. Like I said, in the first instance, the Ministry or Department can make internal arrangements to have acting arrangements put in place or to have the position filled from across the wider public service.

Mr. de Freitas: Okay. Thank you. I give way to Sen. Lutchmedial, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, with your leave, please—sorry I was away for a bit so I am sorry if I am duplicating any questions here. But my first question relates to the implementation of digitalization and ICT. You mentioned pension and leave reports which there are a lot of the complaints by person in the public service about delay in preparation of pension and leave reports and that results in a delay later on in persons being able to get their gratuity and so on. But I want to find out something as well, is the monitoring of vacation—how much vacation time someone has inside, when they are expected to retire, whether reports are submitted on time,

is this process digitalized in any way? You made mention of some operational dashboards that have been created about attendance and discipline and all of that, and I find that that is commendable again. But this whole process of—in order to aid with the filling of vacancies, has ICT and digitalization been deployed in this area to make that process a little more effective? So that is my first question.

And my second question is, with respect to recommendations and coming out from the PS of various Ministries and line Ministries and so on, to have vacancies filled, is there anything—and I wrote this down because I thought it was very important when Chairman of the commission said that you could only operate within the rules that currently exist. Is there any rule that allows anyone from a Ministry, from PS or Minister or anybody else, to make a recommendation with respect to who should be appointed to fill a position when it becomes vacant? So anybody could tackle the ICT question first if they wish.

Ms. Warner: Member, could you confirm that you are hearing us?

Ms. Lutchmedial: I am hearing you now, yes.

Ms. Warner: We had a major glitch. We were all disconnected from the meeting. And I got the tail end of your question and I beg that you just repeat, please.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Sure. I just wanted to find out about the deployment of technology, ICT and digitalization, with respect to monitoring retirement dates, the amount of vacation time someone will have inside, the submission of pension and leave reports. Because I have information and complaints from many people in the public about delays in processing gratuity because of outstanding pension and leave reports for many, many years as well as performance appraisals and things like that. Have you all deployed ICT in a way that is—could aid in the filling of vacancies by having a digitalized format for monitoring things like that? The same way that you said that you deployed ICT for discipline and correspondence and attendance and those other things that is contained in the submission. So I just wanted to know if that same sort of approach is being taken to monitoring the filling of vacancies and the progression of people as they progress through the public service—[*Interruption*]*—that in mind? I hope they did not get disconnected.*

Ms. Warner: Okay. Ms. Ramcharan—[*Inaudible*]*—*

Ms. Ramcharan: Thank you for that question. So what we have been embarking on is a number of digitalization initiatives and one of them would include e-establishments. So that process is currently on its way where it is that we would be monitoring the number of persons in a particular

vacancy, in addition to that in terms of the data being captured, et cetera, to ensure that we have that data readily available for consumption to monitor the pension and leave and all the other areas that you identified.

Further—I mean, in terms of other initiatives, the online application as well as the virtual interview processes which all feed into that entire HR cycle—so that in terms of monitoring that data part of it, we do you have a silo database right now that monitors that. However, a more enterprise-wide system is being established to be implemented for e-stabs.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Do you have a time frame in mind as to when something like this would be off the ground?

Ms. Ramcharan: Hopefully this year. In terms of—it is also linked a little bit to the EDMS project, the electric document management project. So that initiative is happening this year where it is that we would be monitoring or collecting that dataset.

Ms. Lutchmedial: And this process, I assume, would require the digitalization of quite a large volume of paper-based records. Has that process started in terms of—

Ms. Ramcharan: Yes, it has started. [*Technical difficulties*] I am sorry, Ms. Lutchmedial, we are having some little technical difficulties.

Ms. Lutchmedial: I understand.

Ms. Ramcharan: What is happening—

Ms. Lutchmedial: “Uh huh”, go ahead.

Ms. Ramcharan: So, what is happening is that in terms of the back end, we have the—so the status of the EDMS project, let me just put it that way. We have signed off with the vendor to start that contract. It is hoping—it is in hope and in light that that target date is in April. So that EDMS project is supposed to start in April this year to get that paper to a paperless environment. The current consultancy or that service is for nine months and we are in rigorous preparation for that system to be implemented in the Service Commissions Department.

Mr. Harrison: But in addition, we have had approximately about 20,000 pieces of correspondence that were digitized already, awaiting for the consultant to come on board. So files, everything—we have already started the back end of the digital transformation.

Ms. Ramcharan: And if I may—

Ms. Lutchmedial: Okay.

Ms. Ramcharan: And if I may further what Mr. Harrison would have said, we also—with the backfile conversion process being undertaken with persons' CPF, confidential personnel files, it also what you call the day forward approach where it is that we would be digitalizing registry in a bigger way. So that as correspondence comes into the organization, that would be placed into the system and further in time to come, maybe in a year, two years from now, we would be “digitaling” or digitalizing the entire system where it is Ministries and Departments would be able to send that correspondence or even data online to the Service Commissions Department, thus furthering the entire cycle of data within the Service Commissions Department.

So, in a nutshell, what will be happening is that Ministries and Departments, that same vacancy data that we have been talking about that Ms. Warner would have shared, that data can be sent to Service Commissions Department on an online application or online system, and then enter into our entire data repository, to then be placed into say the different HR functions which includes the recruitment, discipline functions, et cetera.

Mr. Harrison: Which would be the end result of the efficiency cycle within the Public Service Commission.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Right. So our hope is that all of this—I am sorry it sounds very—it is way above my head but I understand the concept. But I am hoping that all of this—the end target is a more efficient system of filling vacancies. That is what we are looking at here. Right?

My second question, really quickly, because I know we have a lot to cover. Someone mentioned about, you know—and I was following—that it—you know, you ask the Permanent Secretary as well to make recommendations or to highlight critical positions. I want to find out if there is any rule, regulation or room for a recommendation to be made about a specific person to fill a vacancy, whether as acting—*[Interruption]*—whether as acting or otherwise when a vacancy arises?

Ms. Warner: Previously, I had explained about the specific and the generic offices. So particularly, in the specific offices, the regulations allow that leeway for Permanent Secretaries to make that recommendation. Even though the recommendation may come for—and let me just answer specifically your question. Yes, the regulations allow for the Permanent Secretary to make a recommendation for a specific person but there are other considerations. For example, let us say somebody recommends the appointment or the promotion of an Economist I to a Senior Economist. Yes, the Ministry may make that recommendation but that office—the commission must satisfy itself that no senior person who may exist in another Ministry is being overlooked. So even though

the PS by law can make the recommendation, they are free to make, the research is done by the Service Commissions Department to ensure that no one is disadvantaged. Where the commission may likely consider a promotion of a specific person, it would be in a really peculiar office where we know for sure it does not exist, there is no competition in any other Ministry and that person is truly the eligible person. But that also tells certain—

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yeah. I understand. So, does this exist within the regulations? Is this under the Public Service Regulations, the law that says that the recommendation of a specific person could be made?

Ms. Warner: It does not say it clearly like that. Regulation 13 allows for the Permanent Secretary to make recommendations. That recommendation could come in the form of—*[Inaudible]*—or it could come in the form of “service commissions please find me somebody”. It could come in the form of “please advertise my position in the wider public service or the wider public” or it could come in the form of “please advertise this position within the public service”. So those are the options the Permanent Secretary has—

Ms. Lutchmedial: Right. Do you think—

Ms. Warner: *[Inaudible]*

Ms. Lutchmedial: Right. Then it is not specific. Do you think—or has it been the practice that a PS would recommend say, for example, can you fill the vacancy of Economist—of Senior Economist with Mrs. Lutchmedial who is currently the holder of X post? Is that a normal type of recommendation that you would get?

Ms. Warner: It is a normal one we would get but—

Mr. Harrison: The Service Commissions Department has to do its due diligence. Yes, we can get the recommendation but we have to follow due diligence in submitting for the consideration of the Public Service Commission.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Thank you very much.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chair, can I?

Mr. Chairman: Sure, Mr. Forde.

Mr. Forde: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am just going go back the topic of digitization and I know the—I think we know answer for it but all these systems will be offsite, one, and will be backed up accordingly? Just for the records.

Ms. Warner: Yes, yes.

Mr. Forde: Thank you. Just for the records. Mr. Chairman, I want to go across to the Ministry of Public Administration. Mr. Mc Kellar, Permanent Secretary, in your submission, you stated and I quote:

The PMCD received eight draft Notes for Cabinet from the Service Commissions Department that related to the restructuring and redesigning of the department for the last three years.

Right? And that is on page 1. My question is: Is enough attention being given to the central human resource agencies such as the Service Commissions Department and the CPO that have responsibilities for the entire public service to ensure that they are adequately staffed? Thanks, Mr. PS.

Mr. Mc Kellar: In answer to your question Sir, I would say, yes. So, we have been addressing the issue of Service Commissions Department and we are currently conducting—and in a very advanced stage—looking at the structure of the Personnel Department headed by the CPO. Those two central HR departments that you mentioned, we have been addressing their needs.

Mr. Forde: And to coincide with Mr. Corey Harrison where he made mention that hopefully that June/July, the timeline that he gave, as the PS, you can synchronize with that same time line too?

Mr. Mc Kellar: That would be feasible.

Mr. Forde: Okay. That would be feasible. Okay. Secondly, with respect to the ability of the SCD to support the work of four service commissions efficiently and effectively—as you know the responsibilities that they hold. My question is: Is the Ministry of the view that the current model is still relevant and suitable in terms of this particular commission handling the portfolio? Is the portfolio too large? Such should the responsibilities be separated? What is your take on that, Mr. PS?

Mr. Mc Kellar: That is a difficult question for the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration to address. As has been clearly stated, the Service Commissions Department is the secretariat for the various commissions. It may very well be a matter to be opined on by the commissions to come to some either collective decisions as to how best their secretariat should be structured or operationalized. That one may be a bit above my head, Sir.

Mr. Forde: Above your pay grade, you think? *[Laughter]*

Mr. Mc Kellar: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Forde: [Laughter] No. But in terms of the PS having the responsibility for the whole Ministry, recommendations can be sought and you can advise accordingly? At least that should be able to fall in your purview.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Well, okay. So just on a point of clarification, the Director of Personnel Administration, the DPA, who is the head and accounting officer for the Service Commissions Department does not report to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration. Right? What the DPA may choose to do, and he has done, would be to make recommendations in terms of the structure, the staffing of the SCD, again, coming out of consultation with the respective service commissions that he supports and serves and come to the Ministry of Public Administration with his structural staffing proposals which we will consider and make recommendations on. Right? But I think the starting point is the service commissions and then through the DPA to us.

Mr. Forde: So therefore, Mr. Rudder, you care to share a little input there then, in terms of what you think and in terms of your experience and so on, the idea of, you know, the portfolio? Efficient, capable, not enough, you all can manage? What is your opinion? Mr. Rudder? Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. So I think the question is, is the commission satisfied—

Member: [Inaudible]—Mr. Rudder.

Mr. Rudder: “Oh” okay. Thank you.

Mr. Forde: Well, the same question I would have asked to the Permanent Secretary and, you know, he said it is above his pay grade, I am wondering what is the opinion of the Chairman of the Commission? What is his take in terms of the responsibility that they now carry and if it is, you know—what I mean, you know, if he would need support, a secretariat, a reporting officer—

Mr. Rudder: Okay.

Mr. Forde:—you know, like that, you know?

Mr. Chairman: I think Mr. Rudder is offline for some reason.

Mr. Rudder: [Inaudible]—I would answer it.

Mr. Chairman: He is speaking.

Mr. Rudder: May I answer it now?

Mr. Forde: Yeah, yeah, please.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you can go ahead. Proceed.

Mr. Rudder: I can answer it from two perspectives. I can answer it from two perspectives, from the perspective of the Public Service Commission and from the perspective of the heads of

commission because the heads of commission do meet on matters of mutual interest including the functioning of the SCD. I think we are agreed that having regard to the portfolio responsibilities of the SCD and in particular, the observations that had been made and the recommendations emanating from the institutional strengthening report, that there is need for restructuring of the public service—of the Service Commissions Department.

We have seen proposals that had been developed in consultation with PMCD in that regard and we have shared our views, as I think some of the other service commissions have shared with the DPA. And therefore, I suspect and I am hoping that the proposals for restructuring that would ultimately find its way or their way to Cabinet will include these recommendations and proposals that have been made and seen and commented upon by the service commissions—the various service commissions. I do not know if this adequately answers your question, Sir.

12.20 p.m.

Mr. Forde: Thank you. Last question Mr. Chairman, last question. And again, it is also to the Permanent Secretary and I probably suggest that we may probably get this in writing. Again, you stated that:

The PMCD efforts resulted in the creation and abolition of offices, which were no longer considered necessary for the SCD in its future state—right—for the Service Commission in its future state.

—and that is stated on page 8 of your report and in your report to us. And the questions that I will need answered and I presume you would probably need to submit it in writing: What offices were abolished in this restructuring exercise that is one. Secondly, what new departments and offices were operationalized in the streamlining the operations of the Service Commission and thirdly, provide a brief status update on the report on the restructuring of the Service Commissions Department that is currently being reviewed by your executive? Am I clear, Mr. PS? I know the Secretariat will provide it to you in writing also.

Mr. Mc Kellar: I will go with the submission in writing, Sir.

Mr. Forde: Okay. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Mrs. Morris-Julian, do you have a question?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Chairman, member Forde just asked a question I was interested in so, I would just await for those answers in the meantime, and let me just continue to look at the issues paper. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. So from what we gathered so far, there is a problem in terms of the financing available to the Service Commissions Department to fulfil its function, in terms of training, et cetera, so this is something that keeps coming forward. And I saw a report here that TTUTA had actually given out where, from 2014 to present, the Service Commissions have continuously had their subventions from the Government reduced. In 2015, they were given a grand total of 104 million to service all five commissions. In 2022, a budgeted figure for the commissions is approximately 72 million. So we see a reduction over time of approximately 31 per cent. And you know, it mentioned here that one legal matter, sometime could go to the Privy Council could run into thousands—hundreds of thousands of dollars. So therefore, in terms of the decreased financing available, I think the Permanent Secretary present today would realize that we need to have some sort of discussion in the proper financing of the Service Commissions Department and more so, in terms of not just the training as mentioned but also in terms of their legal research resources, because the Service Commissions Department mentioned in their submission that:

To improve the quality and timely receipt of advice proffered by the SCDs legal unit, the DPA sought to acquire a robust legal search engine, where legal and journalistic documents could be more accessible on an electronic platform, in this regard, due to the lack of funding—again mentioned—for this initiative, the SCD has been unable to procure the software.

So I am asking the SCD, what is the cost to procure this required software?

[Mike muted]

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, we are not hearing.

Mr. Harrison: Approximately US \$20,000 per annum.

Mr. Chairman: And as an alternative solution, can the SCD collaborate with another Ministry or Department that already has access to legal research resources?

Mr. Harrison: Now, the independence of the Service Commissions and the four commissions of the Service Commissions Department tend to avoid us partnering with Ministries concerning legal matters. Because sometimes a lot of the legal issues we get is from the Ministries and Departments or from employees within the Ministries and Departments, so we avoid partnering with them—with the Ministries and Departments concerning that.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Quick question, with your permission Mr. Chair? Is there in-house legal counsel at the Service Commissions Department and how big is the legal department, if so?

Mr. Harrison: We have approximately nine persons as part of our unit which includes Legal Research Officers, Senior Legal Advisor, Legal Advisor and State Counsels and Senior State Counsels.

Ms. Lutchmedial: And these are permanent positions not—well some are—I think some of those positions you mentioned would be contracts—some on the establishment.

Mr. Harrison: All the positions are permanent.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Mrs. Morris-Julian.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you, Chairman. Through you Chairman, I have another question from the public. How often does the Public Service Commission actually meet and given its critical role in the effective functioning of the public service, does the current meeting rate—is it sufficient, does the commission believes it is sufficient, and if not, are there any plans to increase the frequency of the meetings? Thank you.

Member: Chairman.

Mr. Rudder: Uhm?

Member: Question.

Mr. Rudder: Are you hearing me?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, we are.

Mr. Rudder: Currently, the Public Service Commission meets once a week.

Mr. Chairman: Sir, do you think that in terms of the Commissioners, in terms of their functionality—is it—would it be advisable to say that sometime a full-time basis they could be compensated either on a full-time basis, or accordingly to if you have to meet more often that you somehow that is factored into some sort of salary to you guys—is it that somehow you would recommend that Commissioners be appointed as a full-time job on a seven—five to seven-year basis and compensated accordingly?

Mr. Rudder: I think it is something that needs more serious examination to make an adequate judgment on but we do in fact deploy to supplement our regular meeting, we do have—we form part of a committee that assists the SCD in terms of advice, we also—individual commissioners get involved in matters related to the institutional strengthening exercises that take place within the SCD. My own sense suggests that the advantage is after two years that it is something that, probably, we need to look at in some depth.

Mr. Chairman: Sure, so therefore, okay, because remember we are looking at—sorry—how do we increase the functioning of your department and I think you are highly—it is highly dependent, that the DPA’s office provide you with files on time, give you the necessary information. Has this recommendation been wanting at times?

Mr. Rudder: Well, the want can only be determined by the demand and the inadequacy of our data and technology to reflect more clearly on what the demand is, really does not permit an informed conclusion on that particular point but I would say, based on the information that has been recently provided by the Service Commissions Department as to the state of the implementation of technology, to generate data on the volume of work coming in to the Service Commissions Department on a daily basis now, I think, within the next few months, I say by the middle of the year, we would have a very good handle about the extent to which—the rate at which we perform, adequately addresses what comes in and can be processed and made available for the Commission to deal with. What has been happening now is the deficiencies in the data systems really do not give us a good handle on been able to conclude on that particular matter. But I am sure that by mid-year, on the basis of what has happened so far, and we know is taking place, the Service Commissions Department will be in a much better position to be more informed on that particular matter.

Mr. Chairman: So, you gave me some encouragement that soon we may get an improvement in the workings of department and knowledge, et cetera, but remember most of it really is reflected in the public dismay. So in response of the Committee’s questions on communication channels that have been established by the SCD to obtain public feedback, so, from the SCD’s point of view, your submission indicated that it used the following:

A designated email address for public queries and service to get feedback on the eRecruit and virtual interview platform—so—in October 2021.

So, with respect to the survey on the eRecruit and virtual interview platform, how many persons participated in these surveys?

Mr. Harrison: We would have to respond in writing concerning that question.

Mr. Chairman: Sure, thanks, and do you have any issues that stand out that the survey respondents complained of?

Mr. Harrison: No, I think it was primarily positive, I think the issue of the Internet usage was one of the concerns. Because when it is you have interviews and the bandwidth is not wide enough and

the interviews continuously drop, we have issues with that. So, the interview has to continuously be starting over.

Mr. Chairman: Sure, I guess the public feedback is important to know how things are being run. And in terms of COVID, how did COVID really affect you in terms of you know, because the business continuity plan for the SCD that you had was actually before the COVID-19 pandemic. But was this plan completed and was it used to guide the SCD's response to COVID-19, did you add on anything when COVID-19 came on board?

Mr. Harrison: Our business continuity plan was not completed, however, we utilized certain units in the department, which was critical for our operations. Take for example, the discipline, the recruitment, as well as appointments and promotions and exams. What we also did was ensure that that business was able to continue. So we introduced VPNs, where it is persons had access to work from home. We introduced the virtual interview platform where it is we continue to have exams, we also introduced digital means to conduct the tribunals and we are also looking into e Exams, so we would be able to have the examinations online, so therefore our business would be able to be maintained at all times. And the Commission's meetings have always been done virtually since the introduction of COVID-19.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, so that is comforting, but in terms of the important document—what contributed to the delay in the completion of this document?

Mr. Harrison: Repeat the question.

Mr. Chairman: In terms of the document—the—what caused or contributed to the delay in the completion of this important document?

Mr. Harrison: Funding, we did not have the funding to continue.

Mr. Chairman: Funding mainly funding, okay, so I guess PS, you know, it is on board so, I guess they realize one of the major issues there. And when do you expect this plan to be completed? Again, it depends on funding or is it that—

Mr. Harrison: It depends on funding.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Mrs. Morris-Julian.

Mr. Forde: Chairman, Chairman, okay.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Yes, Chairman, thank you. Chairman, through you, the SC—it was stated that the SCD is in the process of proposing to the Commission a methodology for a merit-based approach for appointments and promotions in respect of generic civil offices. I would like to know

what is the anticipated timeline for implementing this merit-based approach for appointments and promotions because I think this will be a very long way and two, will the further expansion of merit-based appointments and promotions require adjustments to the Civil Service Regulations?

Ms. Warner: I will take the question thank you. We had a little error on that document, it should have been promotions only. We do have a merit-based system with respect to appointments, because we do interviews and so on. In terms of those offices that do not go the way of interviews, that is the process we—that is the approach that we are preparing to present to the commission and we anticipate that will be completed by—our first submission we are looking to do that by June.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Through Chairman, so everything is on track and by June you expect that it would be implemented, correct?

Ms. Warner: Not implemented it is not a matter—the DPA is now proposing in light of the commission's mandate to go—to more merit-based selection—more merit-based appointments—just to explain we—several offices those are the more peculiar offices we go to the way of a recruit process—a selection process, which is purely merit based. But there are some positions that we historically appoint by seniority, Clerk I to Clerk II—along those lines. To truly embrace the—

Mr. Harrison: Principles of merit.

Ms. Warner:—principles of merit, we are looking to see the DPA and its executive—we are researching how we could add that—apply that principle of merit to those more generic offices. So it is something that we wish to propose to the Public Service Commission for their consideration and that proposal will come. Once the commission agrees or amends or suggests, we will take it from there. But it is quite—it is just a proposal at this time. And that will take care of the final tier of offices to bring the Public Service Commission—to relieve that it is principle of merit.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Okay, thank you very much. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Forde.

Mr. Forde: Yeah, thanks, Mr. Chairman. Oh, I think in terms of the service commission again, right, because I think this is the hinge, I think the service commission is the hinge in us going forward for the Ministries and the public service to be efficient and to be effective. So, in your submission on page 6, you stated and I quote:

During the work from home period—

—which I would presume is during the COVID period within the last two years—

—certain officers were given access to the department's VPN and as a result, were able to conduct duties remotely.

—right. Again, having sensitive information I do not know the whole aspect of who these persons were working from home. So, if you can give us a little idea of some of the individuals that were working from home, in terms of their seniority, in terms of their responsibilities, because again, to be given the VPN for the department, it is very critical. What measures were implemented to ensure that these employees maintain confidentiality in the agreements while working from home? Shed some light please?

Mr. Harrison: Chair, first to begin, all members of the Service Commissions Department, swear an oath of confidentiality—so we start with that. Secondly, the issue of whom was given access to the VPN, we started with based your seniority position in the organization. So gave executive directors, we gave persons who—

[Technical difficulties]

Mr. Forde: I lost you there.

Mr. Harrison:—have routine, day to day operational work. So, the persons who got VPN access were persons with high level of responsibility, and we were also able to track the usage of the VPN from the IT's perspective. So, we put things in place to be able to manage and secure the data, but just like paper-based data, persons have access within the department, so that data could have gone away as well. So we made sure that we put things in place to ensure that the VPN access was secured as best as we can.

Mr. Forde: Okay. Again, in your submission in fiscal 2022 to 2021, no allocations were made and these were financial allocations from the Ministry of Finance—I presume therefore, the electronic document management systems project. Could you tell us what that project is about one and, as a result, what is the status of this project at this time? Right, what is this electronic document management systems project about—a little synopsis on what it entails?

Ms. Ramcharan: So, the electronic document management system is about changing all our paper systems into a paperless environment, where it is all correspondence received from Ministries and Departments would come into a system that you scan those paper documents into an electronic system in registry, then it would be routed automatically to the relevant business units, including some of the core business units, recruitment, discipline, et cetera. Thereafter you could be—

Mr. Forde: So, this is all part of the whole digitization project—

Ms. Ramcharan:—right—

Mr. Forde:—that would have—

Ms. Ramcharan:—correct.

Mr. Forde:—that we are now going into?

Ms. Ramcharan: Correct.

Mr. Forde: Okay.

Ms. Ramcharan: So this is one of the main ICT systems that we are targeting for this year to ensure that not only the Public Service Commission, but other commissions get involved, and it is rolled out for the entire Service Commissions Department.

Mr. Forde: Okay, so for instance—

Ms. Ramcharan: Sorry, no problem.

Mr. Forde:—I think we have an idea because you would have explained it earlier.

Ms. Ramcharan: Right.

Mr. Forde: So I fully appreciate, you know, just to be sure that we are on the same page. So in terms of the allocation you all spoke about, you all can do virement in order to ensure that, you know, you all do not run behind in terms of ensuring that this project is given the priority that it deserves, right, you all could vire the necessary funds in order to ensure that it continue on an on-going basis?

Mr. Harrison: No, this is a PSIP project so, you do not utilize virements for PSIP projects.

Mr. Forde: Okay, but in terms of the allocation, because remember you said that—

Mr. Harrison: We have allocation in this financial year for the project.

Mr. Forde:—to ensure that it is up and running?

Mr. Harrison: Right.

Mr. Forde: Your submission also indicated that the project will commence in the first quarter of 2022—has the project commenced and it is progressing good I presume?

Mr. Harrison: Yes, we have been doing as we stated earlier, we have been doing the backend part of it, we have now introduced our project manager, and we are now finalizing the contract with the consultant who would come and finalize the project which will take approximately nine months to finalize. But most important, I think we now have sight of this. The EDMS project is not only to digitize, it is also an information system where the service commission would be using data and making decisions based on data, which is critical.

Mr. Forde: Now, tell me for edification purposes as a Member of Parliament, because again, individuals will come to us just recently seeking employment. They would have had some communication and I know on one or two occasions I think I have written to the Commission in order to get some feedback as to the delay, right, because we know that there is a whole process, right, in an individual being hired through the whole public service, right. What assurances can we give to the listening public out there, to the individual who is seeking employment, to the individual who may have applied years now and is still waiting to be interviewed—to be a teacher, is still waiting on whatever—what assurances can we give in going forward—because again, it is tough out there—I know as a Member of Parliament, you know, individuals will come to us—you would want a recommendation to send to the service commission—Mr. Forde, I have been waiting on an interview seven years now and so on. What assurances can we give out there I do not know which one of your members can give an answer with regard to that aspect please?

Mr. Rudder: Let me make a brief statement at the beginning and then I will ask the Director to follow up. One of the problems with the years-old application is the fact that people would just apply to the service commission for a job and there was—the application may have been acknowledged, let me put it this way, and the person would have been so advised and that builds up an explanation and an expectation. What is the procedure that we are now following is that jobs are advertised and you apply only in respect of advertisement for jobs. Jobs are advertised when the commission makes a decision that we should advertise in relation to the demands that are required by the managers in the public service for positions or whatever it is. So, this overarching approach ensures that there is a need that is to be filled imminently, as opposed to when you apply and perhaps there is a job available. But having said that, I go to the Director.

Mr. Harrison: Member, what it is I would say is, or what it is I would give the public assurance with is that, currently, the Service Commissions Department, in collaboration with the other core commissions and as we speak today the Public Service Commission, is strengthening its people when it is we talk about capacity and capability, we are reengineering our processes where our processes would ensure that turnaround time is much more quicker and much more efficient and we are introducing technology. We would be doing these things and ensuring that every aspect of the commission's mandate would be done much more effective and much more efficient. And I can assure the public that is what is happening.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, thank you for that. And I just wanted some clarification, Sir. The delay in the implementation of the COVID-19 business continuity plan—business continuity plan, you said you needed more funding, but if it just a plan is it—why is funding necessary for completion of a plan?

Mr. Harrison: Because initially, the plan was done internally but we recognize that we needed the expertise outside of the service commission to effectively come up with a business continuity plan. We do not have that capacity or capabilities within the Service Commissions Department to develop a business continuity plan, a robust business continuity plan.

Mr. Chairman: And then funding is important as you— [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Harrison: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay, well I am looking at the time. It is 12.48, so I am suggesting now we know that we are coming to the end of the closing. And I would like to invite Mr. Claudelle Mc Kellar, to please give us some brief closing comments.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Thank you, Chair, I will be brief. I just want to again express the Ministry's appreciation for the opportunity to respond to the questions that were posed in writing and also, the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. And again, we look forward to any subsequent questions or queries that the Committee may pose to us and assure that we will provide the necessary responses. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Mc Kellar. Now, I would like Mr. Corey Harrison, the Director of Personnel Administration, Acting, to please give some brief closing comments.

Mr. Harrison: Thank you Chair, I would like to thank the Committee for giving us this opportunity to display the initiatives that the Service Commissions Department has initiated. And we assure the Committee as well as the public that improvement is imminent, incremental improvement has already begun and we look forward to the questions that you submitted and we will provide our responses, I thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, and Mr. Winston Rudder, Chairman of the Public Service Commission. Could you give us some brief closing comments, please? **12.50 p.m.**

Mr. Rudder: Mr. Chairman, I am excited with the way the discussions went. You have given us a lot more food for thought and that we will incorporate in our plans as we go forward. I make one more comment and, that is, however more effective the Public Service Commission and the Service Commissions Department could be, we would still have a problem with respect to the

transformation of the public sector to the extent that it will become more productive and efficient if there is not a more cohesive alignment and coherence across the several agencies of the public sector that are responsible for human resource management.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Sir. And as you appreciate the fact that you in that independent position chosen by Her Excellency, your recommendations also, as an independent body, will go a long way in letting the other entities realize what is needed.

And, Mr. Harrison, I think it is appreciative that you realize you are one of the main drivers of the service to the population, because your body actually serves all the commissions that are actually service providers and even the Government's whole capability in providing services is highly dependent on your department working and functioning effectively. So, I thank you for your submissions here today and your participation.

And, again, the Permanent Secretary now, lastly, Mr. Claudelle Mc Kellar, you know money, money, seems to be the problem, so we have to look at that. We know that there are a lot of factors involved here that was discussed this morning and I have to thank all of you members for being here. I have to thank all the officials from the Ministry of Public Administration, the Service Commissions Department for your contributions in today's proceeding. I have to thank the committee members who participated remotely for this virtual hearing, the staff of the Office of the Parliament for your procedural and logistical support and the viewing and listening audience. And, again, I hope we could achieve something for the benefit of the people.

And I want to just remind members of the public, the public is advised that the Committee's Fourth Report: An Enquiry into the role of NIHERST in the development of science, technology, engineering, and Mathematics sector of Trinidad and Tobago was recently presented in the House of Representatives and the Senate, and the report can be accessed on Parliament's website www.ttparliament.org, and I hope you could look at this to see the work of this Committee. And, again, I want to thank the viewing and listening audience, and I now declare this meeting adjourned. Thank you.

12.53 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE ELEVENTH VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS AND STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA), HELD (IN PUBLIC) ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 13, 2022, AT 10.25 A.M.

PRESENT

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh	Chairman
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal	Member
Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian	Member
Mr. Nigel de Freitas	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Sherlana Ramdeen	Procedural Officer Intern
Ms. Terriann Baker	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Nicole Brown	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Ms. Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Esmond Forde	Member
Mrs. Ayana Webster-Roy	Member

SERVICE COMMISSIONS DEPARTMENT

Mr. Corey Harrison	Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
Mr. Martel Waldron	Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
Mrs. Farya Mohammed-Basdaye	Executive Director, HRM (Ag.)

TEACHING SERVICE COMMISSIONS DEPARTMENT

Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch	Chairman
Mr. Ishan Mohamed	Member
Mrs. Claire Brathwaite-Alexander	Member

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ms. Donnis Bourne	Director of Human Resource Primary & Contracts (Non- Teaching)
Mrs. Sharon Ashman-John	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Hardai Seepersad	Director Human Resource Secondary & Delinked

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO UNIFIED
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION**

Mr. Darren Lee Him	3 rd Vice President
Mr. Kerry Broomes	Industrial Relations Officer

Mr. Chairman: Good morning, all. I would like to welcome you to the Eleventh Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (Including the THA) in the Twelfth Parliament. Members of the listening and viewing audience are invited to post or send their comments via our Parliament's various social media platforms, Facebook page, *ParlView*, the parliamentary YouTube Channel and Twitter, or even if they so desire to WhatsApp members with any sort of concerns they have, members of our Committee.

At this stage I would like to introduce myself. I am Independent Senator Dr. Varma Deyalsingh. I am in charge of this Committee and my members will introduce themselves in a short while, but first I would like to welcome the members who are here from the office of the Director of Personnel Administration, Teaching Service Commissions, the Ministry of Education and representatives of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association.

I know this week we are going towards a holiday so some may be in holiday mode; others may be geared up for school starting next Tuesday. So there may be different areas that persons are here in different capacity, some gearing up, some going into holiday mode, but we thank all for being here present this morning to assist us in this very important hearing and venture.

At this stage I would like to invite the office of the Director of Personnel Administration to introduce himself and members of his team.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Good. Are there any members again? Is Ms. Tavita Ramcharan there?

Mr. Harrison: Ms. Ramcharan would be absent today.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Well, welcome you all and thanks for being here in this discussion today. And at this stage I would like the members of the Teaching Service Commission to please

introduce themselves, starting with Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch, the Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, members, for being here this morning. And at this stage I would like to invite the members of the Ministry of Education to introduce themselves, starting with Mrs. Sharon Ashman-John, the Deputy Permanent Secretary.

Mrs. Ashman-John: Good morning, I am Sharon Ashman-John, Deputy Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Chairman: Would your team introduce themselves?

[Introductions made]

Mrs. Ashman-John: I must apologize for the absence of Mrs. Lisa Henry-David who is unavoidably absent today.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Okay. Members, thank you for being here this morning. Could officials of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association introduce themselves, starting with Mr. Darren Lee Him, the 3rd Vice President?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Good. So thank you all and a warm welcome to you all and I hope we have a productive discussion. At this stage I would like the members of my Committee to do the same and introduce themselves.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Good. Okay. Members, thank you for being present this morning. And I would like to remind all that the objectives of this enquiry is to:

1. To examine and assess the administrative and operational changes that have been implemented at the Service Commissions Department during past three years;
2. To evaluate the impact these administrative and operational changes on the ability of the Service Commissions with the exception of the JLSC to execute their constitutional responsibilities;
3. To obtain insights into the plans and proposals aimed at further improving the institutional capacity of the Service Commissions Department; and
4. To examine the factors and conditions that are hindering the successful implementation of organizational transformation measures at the Service

Commissions Department.

So at this stage, you know, we have that agenda this morning and I would now like to invite the following persons present to make brief opening remarks, and I would like to start with Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch, the Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission.

Mrs. Crouch: A very good morning to you, Chairman, and members of the Committee and all colleagues gathered here today. As you know the Teaching Service Commission comprises the following members, Dr. Olabisi Kuboni, Dr. Martha Des Vignes, and with us here this morning Mrs. Claire Brathwaite-Alexander and Mr. Inshan Mohamed. We Commissioners are all deeply rooted in the field of education having served for many, many, many years in the full range of the spectrum. For example, I have served as a principal in a large secondary school for 15 years and I followed that career with another 15 years as principal of a large primary school.

I now want to refer to the Commission's Annual Report of 2020 that we submitted to this Parliament and where we stated our intention to pursue eight strategic goals. Over the last year and a half, the Commission has focused its energies on the achievements of these goals and indeed we have added a launch.. Upon taking up our responsibilities as commissioners in October 2020, we were acutely aware that COVID-19 would have a major and deleterious effect of unknown proportions on the health of the school system and the Teaching Service. So we determined through these eight goals to treat with our remit of appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline in such a way as to ensure a robust response to the challenges the system will of course experience when the pandemic ended.

Fortuitously for us digital transformation is now pivotal at the Service Commissions Department, and through the mechanism of the highly acclaimed Virtual Interview Platform or the VIP, which is our singular creation of the IT division of the Service Commissions Department, we were able to successfully interview 557 applicants for the position of Head of Department, and we are currently filling 315 positions of Head of Department (Secondary). Positions which, Chairman, are critical to deal with student learning loss and the restoration of full delivery of the curriculum. But I do not have to remind everybody here, many of you are educators in your own right, that delivery of curriculum is the meat and bones of a school, and so through this extraordinary effort we accomplish this goal—the goal that we told you we had in mind back in October—in time for the reopening of school, come April 19th. We also filled positions of curriculum officers in technical and vocational subject areas and mathematics where there was a dearth.

So here, Chairman, to start in our preliminary remarks, I am bringing to your attention an example of a goal we said we were going to attempt and a goal achieved through the use of ICT, with the combined vigorous efforts of Commissioners and senior officers at the Ministry of Education. School supervisors, curriculum officers, secondary school principals, we all sat, commissioners and senior officers, for months—months, confident that this hard work and team effort would redound to the benefit of the nation’s children. And so I also want to draw to your attention that all of this was supported by very well-trained and professional officers at the division—of the Department who gave the kind of administrative support that speaks to an efficient public service. As we speak, Chairman, the labour-intensive, meticulous and legally fraught process of the screening of hundreds of candidates for the positions of supervisor, principal, vice principal, deans, guidance officers, that is being undertaken by the officers of the Service Commissions Department. And notwithstanding the scope of the task, commissioners are determined—and I really want to say this from the outset that the appointment of deans and guidance counsellors is critical. We know this. We know it needs to be done in order to meet the emotional and psychosocial needs of the children who after two years of dislocation have to be successfully transitioned back into their school communities and we aim to accomplish this goal in 2022.

So, Chairman, what I have just described to you are just the Commission’s first two goals, however, the report that we gave you back in October identifies six other goals which we are acting on and which are equally important to our remit. With regard to goals three and four which were impacted by the termination of physical—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Chairman: Mrs. Crouch—yeah—I thank you for that introduction. It is very, very welcoming to hear all that you did. I am sorry to interrupt you but we want to go into the meat of those other goals within the discussion of our hearing, but I thank you, because so far what I am hearing, it is very, very enlightening to us here to know that you have instituted those changes and goals. But we will go into the others whilst we are in the process of this enquiry. So I thank you, Mrs. Crouch.

Mrs. Crouch: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, as long as we do get the opportunity—

Mr. Chairman: We will. We will.

Mrs. Crouch:—to establish what we said we would do—

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Crouch:—and leave this morning having established what we have done.

Mr. Chairman: Sure. So, thank you. At this stage, Mr. Corey Harrison, the Director of Personnel

Administration, could you please give us brief opening remarks?

Mr. Harrison: Good morning, Chair, and members of the Committee. It is a pleasure to be here. As the Chair highlighted with the issue of achieving—setting and achieving its goal, the Service Commissions Department played a pivotal role in achieving those goals. It is important that the role of the Service Commission basically is to provide that administrative support and technical advice to the Teaching Service Commission, and we ensure that the Commission carries out—and ensure that the Commission carries out its constitutional mandate effectively and efficiently.

We have embarked upon this by identifying three pillars: people, process and technology, and we set about improving our processes, building our capacity through our people and introducing technology throughout all our operations. I am therefore, pleased to be part of the discussion this morning as we respond to your questions and have fruitful dialogue to the benefit of the education system. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Harrison. And at this stage, would Ms. Sharon Ashman-John, the Deputy Permanent Secretary give us some brief opening remarks?

Mrs. Ashman-John: Good morning again, Chairman. The Ministry of Education welcomes this opportunity to be a part of this meeting to treat with the institutional strengthening and innovative—of the Service Commissions Department. We at the Ministry of Education work together with the commissions and other stakeholders to develop and devise ways of providing optimum service to our nation’s children. The events of COVID-19 during the last two years has enabled us to be resourceful and innovative as we have moved from the traditional face-to-face learning to an online system, and as we continue to strive for excellence the Ministry is committed to improving the service delivery to our principals, vice principals, administrators, students and parents, along with all our stakeholders in education. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. And I am happy I am hearing the whole procedure, you know, the different parties mentioning digitalization, technology, so they seem to be moving in a right new direction. At this stage would Mr. Darren Lee Him, 3rd Vice President of TTUTA, give some opening remarks, please.

Mr. Lee Him: Pleasant good morning to all present here today. And let me first apologize for the absence of our President, Ms. Antonia Tekah-De Freitas, who is unavoidably absent due to an illness that she has right now. So she would have been happy to be here this morning. The Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers’ Association, we welcome this opportunity to contribute to the

discussion on the institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department. We believe that this is important in ensuring the overall effective functioning of departments and/or institutions that are directly or indirectly impacted by the work of the Service Commission. And we know that the work of the commissions and all Ministries would have been affected with the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years. We look forward to the reopening of school on the 19th of April, and we look forward to the initiatives that the Teaching Service Commission just explained that they would have accomplished over the period of time with the filling of vacancies as we know that our schools are currently faced with a lot of shortage of teachers in various departments.

So we look forward to hearing what the Commission has to say here this morning. And as the Association—the recognized majority union that represents all the teachers in the fraternity, we will be monitoring and looking forward to those vacancies being filled in the near future. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Sir. And I hope a speedy recovery to your President who I know has been very vibrant to the rights of the teachers. So at this stage I would like to remind both Committee members and officials to direct their questions through the Chair and also to remind members and officials to kindly activate the microphone on their devices when they are acknowledged by the Chair and turn it off when they have concluded their contribution. And at this stage I think we all know that the importance that we have—the important role that education plays in society—I mean, it was a dream of our first Prime Minister, Eric Williams, to have that, you know, educating the school children. He mentioned—and he made mention of “thrust”, and we did a fantastic job so far in our success in educating our public. And I am sitting here today as a product of teachers, dedicated teachers, and I might say from my primary school dedicated teachers like Ms. Joyce Clarke, and St. Mary’s College, Father Lai Fook and [De Verteuil](#). Those were the persons who actually helped mould my character.

Yes, I would have had a home with certain disciplines and certain rules and regulations but coming to schools, you know, that exposure would have helped. And certainly the well-being of the teachers to mold our next generation is very, very vital, because, you see, a teacher would often be the one to first see a child who is leading to be a delinquent child; a child who may be depressed because of abuse at home. A child who may have a learning disability and sometimes the role of a teacher is really to be like a nurse, a psychologist, a policeman to at least bring that discipline. So

the role of a teacher is very important. I think a lot of persons may have not appreciated the role but with the COVID pandemic and persons and parents having to teach their children, I think they have now again appreciated their role. When I see my first set of teachers I still have that love, that respect for them and I am thinking that if this exercise today is to ensure that we have teachers who themselves are facing problems out there with the COVID and their own families to somehow get them to function better, to fill their roles and vacancies better, to get their promotion better, we would be having better teachers who would be able to at least mold our national forward, to mold that other generation. And I am thinking the role of the teacher is really one not just to teach and to educate but to socialize and to actually create another generation there that would be a generation that is civic-minded that we would be proud of.

I know that you may have had during the COVID many challenges and I am hearing challenges occurred in the Service Commission where it was mentioned that, you know, even in spite of the COVID they were still able to have all these applicants they interviewed and again this is a matter of success working within the pandemic to at least achieve something. And at this stage now, I also realize that even though this was a success in the Teaching Service Commission, you may have had teachers who may have had problems in terms of adjusting to the new digital world. Some teachers, you know, had that adjustment problem and some teachers even complained; even though they were on classes they had Zoom fatigue and burnout.

So at this stage I would like to start the question to members of the TTUTA first. Do you have instances that even with the pandemic with teachers at home, with teachers having the—you know, to be online, Zoom, to be adjusting their learning capacity? Are the teachers being burnt out in any way? Did they complain to you as teachers?

Mr. Lee Him: You are ready for us?

Mr. Broomes: All right. Good morning again, Chairman, and everyone else. Yes, we received several complaints of teachers being burnt out and teachers wanting to retire. Some teachers have retired and resigned because they felt that the emergency online engagement was too much for them, especially the older teachers who were—please forgive the term—“technological dinosaurs”. It was difficult for many of them to learn the new technology and, you know, and execute properly. What also happened is that some teachers felt pressured—whether it was an incorrect perception or indeed a fact they felt pressured by parents, by their administration, by society in general, you know, and they could not deal with it. Some other members could not

handle working from home in a situation where your home became your office and—because life happens and persons would have had different challenges. For example, having children of school age at home as a teacher trying to find a space for everyone to function and we all do not have the same size of homes. So it became very difficult and stressful. So we have had many complaints and we have tried as an association to support our members as much as possible, but we can say that it has indeed been a difficult time for many of our members. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Sir. And at this stage I would like to now go to the members of the Teaching Service Commission. So we were hearing that some teachers may be burnt out and sometimes that may have also been even before the pandemic where you had persons may had—schools where they were complaining that they did not have enough staff or when staff went on leave they would have had problems to fill that vacancy. Sometimes teachers may find it unfair they had to wait all these years to get a promotion, to get a hearing. And I heard some good news from Mrs. Crouch actually mentioning some of the—actually the applicants interviewed and actually able to get staff on board. And could you elaborate, Mrs. Crouch, about the members that would now be—how many persons that would be—in terms of like principals and vice principals and, you know, that were interviewed that would have been successful in their interview to be hired? Yes, Mrs. Crouch, I think you are muted. Yeah.

Mrs. Crouch: The Commission, as I said when I made my introductory remarks, would be building on the foundation of the virtual interview platform to conduct interviews for principals, vice principals, guidance officers, school supervisors and deans in 2022. This process is now currently under the hand of officers who are screening—meticulously screening all of these positions. You would realize, Sir, that what I did say was that during the pandemic with a rostered staff we treated with Heads of Department because we understood that once the pandemic was over it is the Head of Department who is in charge of making sure teams of teachers can deliver curriculum and what we are dealing here with is learning loss. So that was our first imperative.

In the course of 2022—my Executive Director will explain to you that we have in hand, using the virtual interview platform, the process to bring about positioning those senior officers. I would like Mrs. Mohammed-Basdaye now to further answer what you have just asked me, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mrs. Mohammed-Basdaye: Thank you. Thank you. Chair, in terms of the areas that we are screening and shortlisting, we are envisaged that we will be dealing with deans, vice principals,

principals, school supervisor and curriculum officers. So that area—those are the subject areas—the areas that we are looking at for the rest of 2022. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Sure. Yeah. Thank you. So, what I would like to enquire about, since the last set of appointments of the Heads of Departments—I think they were in 2013, and despite there being many vacancies those posts were only advertised in 2019 and the interviews only concluded in 2022—yeah—according to, I think, TTUTA had mentioned that. So that scenario, is it changed in the sense that you have had—as I say, I am gathering you had more interviews and you have also had more definite, you know, means of appointing those outstanding posts.

Mrs. Crouch: Chairman, the Head of Department normally operates around a cluster of subjects, so the fact that the interviews began in 2020 we had to receive—I think it was almost 800-plus applications. All of these had to be screened and eventually 557 persons were interviewed over the course of 2021. I described to you this took months and in fact commissioners spent many months and hours and days being part of the process. There were no paid panels. We did it because it needed to be done.

So what we are putting out in April, Chairman, would be Heads of Departments for the various subject clusters, math, computer science or biology, science or business studies or modern studies or languages. These clusters are now in place and right now in the department positions are being filled for the 135 secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. So this is, “mission accomplished”.

10.55 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: So basically, you had to draw the line also for new applicants coming in, eh? Because, I think with that backlog you had, I think, it was mentioned in one of the submissions that the Teaching Service Commission decided that as of 30th of September, 2021, it will cease accepting unsolicited applicants, applications, as it had become untenable since hundreds of applications were being received in subject areas where there was no dearth of applicants. So despite this policy, are you still getting unsolicited applicants coming to you?

Mrs. Crouch: No. We are not.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Crouch: Just as in all other areas in the public service we are now in line with the rest of the public service that applications are received for advertised positions. So that that terrible situation of, not hundreds, Chairman, thousands of applications when you have persons, for example, that

we have hundreds of people on the order of merit list waiting to be placed. So it is a good decision that we made and it certainly assists the department to be in line with the rest of the public service.

Mr. Chairman: Could you just indicate to me, what are the trends in what sort of areas are there, over applicants that are applying? You know, is there a particular subject matter that there is more, there is a glut of applicants coming in to try to get jobs?

Mrs. Crouch: Certainly, Chairman, biology. We are now treating with persons who were assessed in 2014, physics and chemistry, social studies, the business subjects. We are now treating with persons who were assessed in 2009. In every instance here the order of merit list has persons who were interviewed waiting to be placed. So you call for efficiency in a department, the department cannot be weighed down with, not hundreds, thousands of applications for which there is no job.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. So, thank you. So if you have all those teachers on that list, the merit list, why were there still some delays in appointing these teachers in secondary school? What were some of the reasons that caused the delay? Was it the interview process? You did not have enough panels? Is it that the DPA, you know, did not have funding to actually have funds to hire these teachers? What were some of the delays that were there before, that caused this situation to be as is now?

Mrs. Crouch: Are you speaking about the positions of Head of Department, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: No, teachers. Teachers in secondary schools. Because remember we are getting some feedback that, you know, certain schools were having teachers and waiting for those vacancies to be filled and in certain subject matters. So I am saying now, is it that, what was the keep back then? Could you give us an idea of what would have stymied the process before?

Mrs. Crouch: Mr. Waldron, do you want to take that question?

Mr. Waldron: Yes. Good morning, Chair, and Committee. There is a—it is difficult to perhaps give one blanket statement to say that there are some. So there are some areas, some subject areas that we would not get much applications. And in those areas—

Mr. Chairman: Could you, Sir, could you indicate which areas that you may not get? So could you just get—

Mr. Waldron: Yes. Thanks. So you have those tech/voc areas, certainly. You have EDP. You have auto and diesel. So those tech/voc areas mainly over the years and if I speak within the last three or four years, we have realized that those are some of the areas that you do not get or you would not have gotten many applications as business and social studies and so on. So what we

would have done about three years ago with the Ministry and with the THA—what would have been to identify those areas where there would have been shortages and to have as soon as those interviews come in—sorry, as soon as those assessments come in. So, Mrs. Crouch would have spoken about some areas that we are interviewing persons whose assessment would have been 2014, '15 and so on. What normally happens is that, some areas, as I just mentioned, if we get—once the Ministry would have sent the assessment, those persons would have been interviewed some weeks to some months after because there was no glut there. So, and I recall, I think, in 2019—sorry, perhaps 2018, I recall the Ministry of Education advertising, sending out an advertisement for teachers who were interested in those tech/voc areas, so, and that continues to be a problem.

So, and just to understand also and I think the Ministry of Education can speak to this. The process is, the applications come to the Ministry of Education, they assess the candidates and those assessments come to the Service Commissions Department, Teaching Service Commission for us to hold interviews. Once those interviews are held, we send to the Ministry of Education now, a list of candidates eligible for appointment. The placement of those candidates in schools is strictly under the purview of the Ministry of Education; the placement of those candidates. And the Ministry also has authority to give those candidates the first three months temp appointment. So when—so if there are any areas that there are no candidates, those are some of the areas that the Ministry will tell us and as soon as those, as I said, those assessments—and I am speaking about pre-September last year, of course, soon as those assessments come to us, we will arrange for interviews.

So there are some areas that there are many candidates on the list and the list is valid for three years and sometimes we can provide that information. After that three years, some of those candidates are not placed and they are asked to be re-interviewed. So it is not widespread as to say all subject areas there are no candidates. Those are few because some schools will have some areas that they really do not have persons.

Mr. Chairman: I recall a few years ago the CXC personnel came down here, there was a big meeting, I think it was in somewhere in Port of Spain where they met with the Minister of Education and they actually added on certain subjects more like IT and certain other subjects to the curriculum and in which was, you know, in keeping with the jobs that may be seen in the future. And so somehow, you know, we have to try and get an idea with the change in the CXC curriculum

adding on subjects. Are we getting the teachers to fill these posts? And if not, are you somehow giving an indication out in the public that those positions would be needed to be filled probably in a year or two years to somehow give the younger persons out there an idea of what they should pursue in terms of education if they want to teach a particular subject? Do you have a way of putting that out there for a teacher who wants to come in, come on board but does not know what subject matter they should try to specialize in? I think the Ministry of Education may be one to try to lead that.

Official: I think education can handle that, you know.

Mrs. Ashman-John: Yes, Chairman. With respect to the change in the curriculum and the upgrade of informing persons of subject areas that would necessitate them coming into the service, the curriculum division has been carrying out training and also we have the guidance officers within the school system educating children as to what avenues that they can pursue so that they would be able to come into the system.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So I would like to give way just now to some of my members of my Committee to ask questions. But before that, as I have the Ministry of Education on board, I just want to pose a question to you again. In your submissions you stated that the Ministry of Education is not fully satisfied with the rate at which vacancies at the school management level are being filled. I think that was in your report.

And additionally, during the Committee's first public hearing that was held on March 2nd on this issue, the DPA advised the Committee that his department must consult with the relevant public body to confirm that funds are available before vacancies are filled. So I need to find out, to what extent is the delay in filling vacancies at the school management level attributed to funding shortfalls within the Ministry of Education?

Mrs. Ashman-John: Within the Ministry of Education while we are not fully—while we are satisfied with the strides that have been made thus far with the teaching service in trying to fill the vacancies, we are not fully satisfied in the length of time it takes. Not so much funding. Funding once we put the funding with respect to our estimates, we have the funding for those particular positions within the estimates. So the issue is having the positions filled in a more timely manner.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. So thank you for that. So at least we know funding is not the issue. We know sometimes it may be the fact that we may not have the subject matter of the teacher being, you know, available, the particular training to teach that particular subject.

At this stage, but is there any—before I go on to one of my members, are there any loans, like UNICEF and these people, grants given to do like teacher training or even hire staff?

Mrs. Ashman-John: At present, we have loans from, I cannot recall exactly where, but we have teacher training ongoing with respect to—we have teacher training ongoing, different aspects being undertaken by the teaching service—by the Ministry of Education through loans and so.

Mr. Chairman: And if there is, as I say, a particular field that you do not have teachers in, do you advertise in the rest of the Caricom region where people may now have the freedom to come here and work? Do you, have you taken that initiative?

Mrs. Ashman-John: Not that I am aware of, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. So at this stage would members of my Committee, would anybody like to move some questions?

Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: Chair, with your permission, I can jump in at this point if no other member wishes to.

Mr. Chairman: Sure, Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal. Thank you.

Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: Thanks a lot, Chairman. Again, welcome to members of the Committee. Chair, through you, I know you would have asked pointed questions relative to backlog reduction delay. I would like to start by focusing on the disciplinary tribunals and I have some questions along the line of how discipline matters are dealt with, at least for the benefit of the listening and viewing public.

Now, I myself have some general knowledge as to how, you know, the teaching service operates being a teacher myself for very many years, you know. I served for about eight years in two major secondary schools from 2003 to 2010. And so I want to believe respectfully, I have some institutional knowledge as it relates to the teaching, you know, teaching profession, if not the service as a whole but the profession. With respect, and I am also an attorney-at-law by practice, so this is why I want to focus, Chair, on the discipline tribunals.

Now, if—this question, Chair, is pointed to the Teaching Service Commission through you or any other member that may want to jump in and respond. Now, in the Teaching Service Commission's submissions, Chair, particularly at page 8, it was stated that:

Disciplinary tribunals have indicated that the inability to have in person makes it difficult for the disciplinary tribunal to observe persons' demeanour, body language and also to hear their tone of voice directly.

So, as I said, this is on page 8 of the Teaching Service Commission's submissions. And I want to believe that this would have been a particular concern during the COVID period because I know pre-COVID we would have had in-person—I want to believe that there would have been in-person tribunals. Right?

What I want to know—so we have noticed that as a—the Government, of course, there has been a severe reduction in COVID restrictions as it relates to how many people can assemble, the public service being called out to work at full capacity. My question is, as it relates to the disciplinary tribunals, is whether or not the Teaching Service Commission in light of all of the COVID restrictions, the reduction in COVID restrictions, have you considered returning to in-person tribunals? Especially in light of the fact that one of the major concerns coming out of those virtual hearings was a live concern which is not being able to ascertain a person's demeanour and so on when being questioned by the tribunal. Has there been any consideration at all relative to the return of those in-person tribunals?

Mr. Harrison: Chair, through you, I will respond to that question. While we understand that we had to introduce the virtual tribunal due to the COVID restrictions, one, and also due to the fact that we wanted to maintain social distancing, I think the point that was raised is a critical point and at some point in time we will be returning to in-person tribunals. But at the moment, based on certain situations we would maintain the virtual tribunals. Hopefully, by the end of the year we would be returning to the in-person tribunals.

Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: Okay. Well, I am glad that at least the commission's mind is directed towards the return of that because I speak now as an attorney-at-law. Of course, we understand when someone is subjected to questioning by a tribunal how critical it is during cross-examination, at least for the benefit of the person who is appearing and more so for the commission, the tribunal that has to make that decision, to have that kind of access to the person. So, at least, I am glad that the commission is considering the return to that in-person tribunal.

Now, as it relates to discipline as a whole, I want to—before I jump into other disciplinary questions, other than the complaint or the point being made that at the virtual platform there was a concern about not being able to, you know, sense or being able to ascertain a person's demeanour, were there any other major challenges during those tribunal sessions that you all would have encountered? Or that you are aware of, save and except for the ones identified at page 8 in your written submissions?

Mr. Harrison: One of the concerns that we also—one of the other concerns we also encountered is the fact that the discipline tribunal is determined as low-tiered court, so as it relates to representation because a lot of the persons are now being represented by attorneys.

Mrs. Sagramsingh-Sooklal: Right.

Mr. Harrison: So therefore, as it relates to time, we have the issue of time because a lot of the cases have to be put off due to the fact that our court, or our tribunal is deemed a low-tiered court as it relates to the Magistrates' Court or the High Court or even the Privy Council as it may be. So those are the issues that we are encountering where as it relates to time. What it is we have also introduced to alleviate those factors is the issue of case management. And that has been playing a pivotal role in supporting how it is we manage our discipline tribunals.

Mrs. Sagramsingh-Sooklal: And that is excellent because the court itself, as you would appreciate has gone the way of case management. We have case management, of course, at the civil level, now we have at the criminal courts as well being subject to case management, eh. And you know, respectfully through you, Chair, I think this is something that is at least, to the development of strong case management systems, would be critical and I will tell you why I make this point. I mean, I would have started off by mentioning that I was teacher myself and I during my tenure as a teacher I witnessed that there were two teachers in particular that were before the Teaching Service Commission for disciplinary matters. One in particular went home and was able to do a PhD while waiting to be disciplined. And because of the fact that, remember you are off on full pay. Right? And I mean it is not fair to the public's purse. Now, granted, as an attorney I know when an allegation is made that is separate from someone being convicted. So, of course, I would—of course, and even section—even when we look at 127 of the Constitution that speaks to, you know, delegating the right to discipline and all of that, I mean, we understand why the Teaching Service Commission there will be processes in place as it relates to disciplining officers.

But certainly case management respectfully through you, Chair, I mean in my experience and I am sure many other teachers or people who were teaching, especially members of the public who may be looking on may have shared—share that similar concern that I would have shared even as a new teacher—as a teacher back then and now even more so sitting in Government where as I would have alluded to, I have personally witnessed being in the system and seeing one person in particular, as I said before, and I want to reiterate that point, you are home on full leave, of course, an allegation is made against you, you are waiting to be disciplined and you were able to

take that same money and complete a PhD. And that, I mean, by no—that could never be fair.

So, at least I am very, very proud and I am very happy that the Teaching Service Commission has recognized the role that effective case management can play as the court—as you would have alluded to, it is a lower court because it starts at that tribunal stage and then can proceed to, you know, other courts. But it is very, it is critical and I must applaud the commission for recognizing the role that these case management can play because certainly we would not want teachers especially those—and again, eh, as I said, I know an allegation is separate from a conviction. But it is simply not fair to the public purse that we have persons off and, you know, they are home for, you know, unlimited period of time. Anyway, Chair, can I continue?

Mr. Chairman: One minute. I just wanted to just find out one thing. So we are getting a sense that the case management system is somehow improving the whole disciplinary process which sometimes takes years. And I would like to ask the Service Commission at this stage, how many matters do you have pending in terms of disciplinary matters that are out there pending?

Mr. Waldron: Chair, thanks for that information—sorry, thanks for that question. So, currently we have at the Teaching Service Commission 46 tribunal matters ongoing. Now, before I go further just to—and we would have made it in our submission. So currently we have four disciplinary tribunals, four separate disciplinary tribunals but those tribunals are—also service the Public Service Commission. So the four tribunals service the Public Service Commission and the Teaching Service Commission. Currently, we have approximately 150 matters before both tribunals related to public and teaching, and the public side will be civil, fire, prison. Yeah? So over 150 matters.

So currently, as I said, we have 46 matters ongoing at the tribunals related to the teaching service. But I can also tell the Committee that between 2018—January 2018 and March 2022, there were 71 matters; of those matters, 25 have been completed, and of those 25 the commission would have finalized 19 of them in terms of fines, exonerations, dismissals, reprimand.

Mr. Chairman: So out of those, Sir, out of those, how many of the 25 that came to completion were reinstated or either dismissed? Do you have that figure?

Mr. Waldron: We only have for dismissal. We only have two. So others would have been fined and there was only one full exoneration. Yeah?

Mr. Chairman: Are there any means where, you know, I am hearing that sometimes you may have had a teacher who did some infractions but instead of pursuing this matter, you know, a sort

of a secret deal is made where you say, “well, better you just retire early to finish this matter”. Do you know of those instances that have occurred in the past? Or are they still occurring?

Mr. Waldron: Respectfully, Chair, not at the Teaching Service Commission. That is not—once it is referred to the commission, the commission takes the matter seriously. And once there is merit in the case, sends the matter to the tribunals for determination. So respectfully, I cannot speak to that.

Mr. Chairman: Could you just indicate one thing for our knowledge? We know that there are certain persons choose certain professions to somehow feed on their perversions and we know sometime doctors, sometimes gym instructors, et cetera, teachers may choose a profession to have that if they want to feed on their paedophilic tendencies. Do you have instances, the amount of inappropriate probably images or inappropriate contacts between teachers and students, any sort of percentage? Is it increasing? Is it the same? Any figures you can give us?

Mr. Waldron: Chair, well, we can provide that figure. But, yes, unfortunately it is a reality that we are faced with it. It is a reality. But to tell you here the amount and whether it is increasing or decreasing, what I can tell you is, yes, we have far too many of that. And those matters are being treated with at the commission.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you. I see member Lutchmedial wanted to ask a question.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Chair, actually you asked the same question I wanted to ask about the number of disciplinary matters. But that is okay. As much as I have the floor, I just have one other—let me ask one question about the disciplinary matters. You know, we have had similar challenges in terms of carrying on proceedings in courts and so on, and in certain exceptional circumstances where demeanour of a witness may be of particular importance to the enquiry before the courts, they have been able to make special accommodations through the Judiciary. Have you had that opportunity to do anything like that? That is my first question.

And secondly, how much reliance is there on written submissions from persons? As you mentioned, a lot of people are now represented by attorneys and in the course of regular litigation and even criminal law matters before the courts, because of the pandemic and the difficulties we have experienced with meeting in person, there has been a much heavier reliance placed now on attorneys and litigants making written submissions to the Magistrates’ Court, as well as the High Court, which is the norm but we have done a lot more of that at the Magistrates’ Court level. Have you had any luck or has it helped you at all or have you done it at all in terms tribunals with

receiving written submissions from the persons who may be before the tribunal for whatever infraction?

Mr. Waldron: Chair, through you. So before, well, of course, before the matter reaches to the tribunal, the commission will seek representations from the alleged offender. So those submissions will be made to the commission even before the matter reaches to the tribunal. But once the matter reaches to the tribunal, the tribunal has conduct of the matter. As far as I know, yes, part of case management and part of—you know, they will encourage and they will seek those types of submissions at the tribunal. But the commission itself does not get involved in the actual tribunal hearing for obvious reasons, so the tribunal itself has conduct.

11.25 a.m.

Ms. Lutchmedial: As far as you are aware, has the tribunal made any special accommodation to have a witness in a socially distanced room, or something like that, to be able to conduct a trial where you may have a witness? Because I am concerned that tribunal hearings are basically being deferred because of COVID. I mean, of course now we expect things to sort of resume, but have they made any or made any attempt to have hearings where this is specifically necessary so that they could progress with their work?

Mr. Waldron: Chair, through you, so, before we introduced the virtual tribunals we would have established guidelines with Public Service Commission and Teaching, and those guidelines would have been sent to all parties involved. Even when a hearing is about to be started, those guidelines are sent to the parties involved. And one part of that is, of course, if there is a circumstance that a witness cannot, for one reason or the next, present them self or have a space, the Service Commissions Department, notwithstanding the—

Ms. Lutchmedial: Protocols.

Mr. Waldron: Yes. We would have had arrangements and room at the Service Commissions Department for such persons. And I can say in the year and a half since we have started, we have only had one occasion that someone would have asked to come in to us to have his hearing.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Right. Now—

Mr. Chairman: So—excuse. One minute. I would like to appreciate the guidelines you mentioned, if you could provide it to the Committee in writing? Thanks.

Mr. Waldron: Sure. Sure.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yeah. But from what you are saying though—and sorry, Chair, through you,

from what you are saying, Sir, this would be a facility available if someone really needed to use it. But the tribunal would not request that the person present them self at this the facility so that they could now have a more interactive session with them because, you know, they want to be able to see the person and, I do not know, whatever is the subject matter, it really depends on whether you would need to have a more interactive session than the electronic platform allows. But you are saying that really it is very—from what you are describing it sounds very similar to the witness rooms that are made available through the courts and police stations at the Magistrates' Courts level where persons who wish to access a device or a connection or a facility can come to. But you are not commanded to come there then or you are not required to come there by the person who needs to examine you.

Mr. Waldron: Yes.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Am I getting it correct?

Mr. Waldron: Yes, yes.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I want to enquire something about the Teaching Service Commission. This is directed to them. As I am hearing the good news that you had more interview panels, you know, assess people, and it came about, I think—that push you got probably during the COVID pandemic. Would that continue? Is there a problem in getting persons to sit on this panel? Because what I gather, that if you have an interview panel, you need a member of the commission to sit with other persons involved and are those other persons like retired school supervisors, retired principals who would come on board in these panels? And are they paid anything to be on these interview panels? So, in some way, I am trying to say, do we have a way of having interview panels that would be set up, remunerate those persons well, get those members on board that will continue to deal with any further glut that could occur in the system?

Mrs. Crouch: Certainly if there is the funding, we would be able to improve the number of panels that we have. And we look forward to that in order to deal with the positions that we talked to you about at the beginning of the session; principals, vice principals, deans, guidance counsellors. Certainly there is a need to expand the number of panels to handle these positions for 2022. Yes, you are right, we do need to have increase in panels.

Mr. Chairman: So, do you have like a pool that you have available? And do you have a number that you could probably suggest so the Ministry of Education could somehow factor in their

funding for these individuals? And those individuals that come on those panel, would it be like retired principals or the other members like the school supervisors who would be on board to come on board, the School Supervisor III or whatnot, to be on those panels?

You see, I am trying to gather how many panels you may need to be in existence and sometimes the funding that has to be acquired from the Ministry of Education to continue with these panels. So, if you have an idea that you—if you do not have it now and you may be able to even submit it after, at least let the Ministry of Education or even in our report, we will say that we think that there needs to be this pool, this money allocated and an ongoing panel to at least deal with these interviews that would be coming in.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, first to begin, the allocation of that fund is supposed to come to the Service Commissions Department and not to the Ministry of Education. Any funding, as it relates to interview panel, it is supposed to be directed to the Service Commissions Department.

Mr. Chairman: So therefore, in our recommendation, if we get something from the Service Commissions, at least it would be directed to you and your department to be able to see how you can get that funding to prevent this, you know, from occurring again. So, I am trying to get something also. You know, when you are now interviewing those individuals like the heads, the deans, et cetera—

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Mrs. Crouch wanted to say something.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, Mrs. Crouch, you could continue, please. I am sorry, I did not notice your hand was up.

Mrs. Crouch: I am sorry. My hand was not up.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. No. You are not muted. Would you like to contribute something with this in terms of the panels? If you have a pool of people already? Do you need to expand the pool? Do you need, you know—anything you want to contribute to that as you have the ears of the other parties here today?

Mrs. Crouch: Mr. Waldron will speak to that more.

Mr. Waldron: Yes, Chair, thanks for that question. So, the Teaching Service Commission, I think, in and around 2008 got approval to engage a pool of 24 retired education professionals. So, it would be retired school supervisors, retired principals and so on. And we have engaged a number of persons over the years.

Now, you would appreciate that it would not be the same 24, and we are talking about the

last 15 years or so. So, we do have a pool of persons and in 2018 we got some additional persons because those who were there 10 years prior—and, of course, it is retired persons. So, after 10 years, you know, they—so we would have gotten more persons who would have recently left the service. We pay them based on the approval that we have, \$100 an hour. The issue with that is that based on the amount of interviews we have to do—and as DPA mentioned, that allocation comes to the Service Commissions Department and particularly its allocation to the Teaching Service Commission under the Vote of Fees which is at 23. The problem with that, the reality is that the allocation for the Teaching Service Commission has been reduced significantly for those years. That Vote of Fees is also where we pay attorneys-at-law for—to represent the Teaching Service Commission.

So, as Mrs. Crouch would have stated with the HOD, the fact that we had to interview 500 persons for HOD, we had no money literally; no money to engage those persons. That is why members of the, you know—and the problem that we have encountered is sometimes—well, not sometimes. The fact is after those persons complete their service with us or those interviews, it takes sometimes months; months to pay them because we have to request funding. So, there is some issue with funding but to answer your original question, yes, we have a pool of persons that we can use and they assist in having interviews for the last 15 years or so.

Mr. Chairman: In terms of when you are looking to hire the Heads of Departments and the Deans, I think you are really dependent on the principals to give some sort of an assessment of these individuals. Do you have any sort of, you know, like if confidential reports, special reports—do you have delays sometimes from the principals in giving a report to fill these positions?

Mrs. Crouch: Yes, I think that it is a problem that we encountered that really and severely hampered the process when the special report has not been completed or it has been done in such a way that it is not acceptable. So, there is room for both teachers and principals and supervisors understanding how important special reports are. I think that is a very good question, Chair, that you are asking and I hope the members of the teaching community who may be hearing this would understand that their special report plays a large role in the interview instrument.

Mr. Chairman: So therefore, we may have to nudge these principals to at least, you know—and even the Ministry may have a function there to say, you know, we need these reports to expedite certain matters so the Teaching Service Commission could do their jobs more efficiently.

And in terms of, let us say you get a report and it is not in a good light to certain applicants,

do you inform the teachers who may have a report to such that they have certain things that they may need to improve on? Do you see it as your duty to inform a teacher, well, you did not make the grade because of a certain need for improvement?

Mrs. Crouch: No, we do not.

Mr. Chairman: And is there, in terms of—I want to ask the TTUTA representative now. So if there was a teacher who was denied, you know—somehow in that merit list he figured, you know, I did not make that merit list because of my principal, probably give me a bad report, is there a way that TTUTA now could get to see that report? Is it confidential? Is it a way that, you know, not in terms of causing any sort of major conflict, but causing a way that if a teacher needs to improve, to say, why did I not make the grade this time, I want to make it next time, is there any way that TTUTA has been involved in any sort of instances like this?

Mr. Broomes: Thank you, Chairman. TTUTA has been involved in instances like that, especially with the recently concluded HOD interviews. There were many persons who were not pleased with their special report. As a matter of fact, some of them would even have produced confidential reports, annual confidential reports which would not have been in line with what was written in the special reports. However, there is no real process for dealing with such matters. While we may deal with it as a grievance, by the time it comes to its natural end, it may be too late for the teacher. We have been asking, not only for reasons why persons will fail interviews but, for just what you said, ways that these officers can improve for next time. But this is not something that happens, but the association believes that it should happen because the aim is to get a better officer.

So, if shortcomings have been identified through the interview process that were not picked up during the other processes that takes place in schools like the regular clinical supervision and class checks and so on, and even through the confidential report, then there must be a system to help the officer to correct whatever shortcomings or shortfalls may have been identified. And we look forward to hearing a proposal for such to be done. We are willing to have discussions, you know, to have that done. Because remember, whatever we do is in the interest of a better education system. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. So, thank you. And as I have you there, I would like to say that in the TTUTA's submission, you stated that:

TTUTA is against the further delegation of powers and responsibilities to the Ministry of Education and the school management team.

And given the fact that the Ministry of Education is of the view that increased delegated power is necessary to ensure greater efficiency, can you expand further on TTUTA's opposition to lay further delegation of powers to the Ministry? So, we want to clarify that. Do you think that somehow that would jeopardize persons? You know, so we need some clarification on that further delegation that the Ministry of Education may be entitled to get.

Mr. Broomes: Ok. Thank you, Chairman. We have had several issues with the Ministry fulfilling the things that are within their power to do. One of the biggest issues we have is with extended sick leave, the classification of leave. Even in assessing persons by the curriculum division, not only do we have a problem with the timeliness of the classification, but we also have a problem with the seemingly haphazard way that persons are assessed. So, it causes us to not have as much confidence as one would think in the Ministry's ability to take on further responsibilities because we have matters pending for years, some as far back as 10 years, that have not been rectified and it is our view as the association that it is well within the power of the Ministry to rectify some of these issues. However, the issues remain unrectified.

We also have the issue where there is one clerk assigned per education district to deal with confidential reports and increments, and so on. And if that particular clerk, who is sometimes a contract worker, is absent for some reason, nobody takes up the slack and then an entire education district is left to languish for a certain period of time. And it, of course, was exacerbated during the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. So, it is basically a case of, we would like to see improvement in what you have control over now before we would want to say, yes, give you more responsibility. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Member Ameen, I think you—thank you, Sir. Member Ameen, I think you wanted to ask a question.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My Internet has been coming and going all morning so I do not know if I missed it. But linked to the issue just raised by the TTUTA rep with regard to confirmation and assessments, there is a situation with APTs—ATPs, sorry, where you have Assistant Teacher (Primary) who has been functioning since 2013 on salaries within the range of—between 6,000 and \$7,000, and who have been—well, supposed to be upgraded. This upgrade has not been taking place and by now those teachers should be Teacher IIIs. Some of them have been reassigned to even secondary school. And with a salary of \$6,500 you can imagine that when they are required to pay their rent and just put Internet, they could barely afford food literally.

And I know of teachers who are in this situation, they are ATPs, and for years they could barely afford to live on their salary and some of them have been forced to take on second jobs outside of teaching and it, of course, is affecting them. But some of them have been assigned to secondary. They have their degrees, they have their requirements from UTT, they are well qualified. And the issue of upgrading, in addition to the salary issue, which is separate, but the issue of upgrading them from ATPs to teachers, grade I, II and III is still outstanding. I know that TTUTA has been speaking about it a bit but perhaps at this juncture we could get some information from the Teaching Service Commission with regard to these ATPs.

Mr. Chairman: Sure. To the Teaching Service Commission.

Mrs. Crouch: Thank you, Chair. I would now invite Mrs. Mohammed-Basdaye to respond.

Mrs. Mohammed-Basdaye: Thank you, Chair. So, once we have a recommendation from the Ministry of Education, we at the Teaching Service Commission will submit it to our commission for approval. We are aware that there are some ATPs who have not yet received their upgrade because from time to time they would call our department and we are trying to treat with those by way of communicating with the Ministry requesting the recommendation. So, in terms of that, we are trying to collaborate with the Ministry of Education so that we can receive the recommendation from the Ministry and submit it to the commission for its approval. Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Ameen: Mr. Chair, through you, even where in some cases the upgrade has been done, the upgrade is on paper, and those ATPs are still functioning on the 2013 ATPs salary, even though on paper they have been upgraded. Now, I do not think it is enough to tell them, well, whenever the Ministry gets money they will begin to pay them the new salary. What is the status with regard to paying the new salary to these upgraded persons?

Mr. Chairman: I think the Ministry would have to answer that question, so.

Mrs. Ashman-John: Through you, Chair, with respect to the upgrading of the teachers, once we get the approvals from the commission, it is forwarded to our Director of Finance and Accounts. And when they receive the funding, the necessary releases, they will be able to quantify the arrears and make those payments. But as with all other Ministries and Departments, we have issues with releases.

Ms. Ameen: So, I just want to get it correct. Is it that these—[*Technical difficulties*—ATPs have been upgraded but you are just waiting on releases?

Mrs. Ashman-John: I did not hear the first part of the question, sorry.

Ms. Ameen: Is it that the assessment and the request for funding has already been submitted to the Ministry of Finance and that the Ministry of Education is awaiting the releases?

Mrs. Ashman-John: More often than not, once we get the approvals, the Ministry would request the necessary funding to effect either the current salary increases and the arrears. So we would request those funds.

Ms. Ameen: All right. So, is it possible for the Ministry to submit to the Committee for us to include in the report the number of ATPs who have been assessed and upgraded, that they are awaiting funding to pay and the number—well, we still have a number to be assessed. Is it possible to submit that to the Committee? Because I find it—you have hundreds of ATPs affected in this manner and it is really unacceptable for a teacher to be working on a salary of \$6,500, going the distance with their students, especially with the COVID challenges. These teachers literally cannot buy food for their families. So, to me, this is a really serious situation that has to be addressed urgently and any recommendations from the—well, the information from the Ministry will aid the Committee in making recommendations.

Mrs. Ashman-John: The Ministry will provide such information.

Ms. Ameen: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. I would like to find out, is there some sort of administrative delay in getting this? Some sort of, you know—because I am asking now the Teaching Service Commission, what appears to be this delay? Could you just give us some clarity on the issue?

Mrs. Crouch: Thank you, Chair. In some instances, we have issues with the vacancy. So, sometimes we need clarification in terms of the vacancy that the teacher has been recommended in the upgrade. Sometimes we—of course, it is staffing issues we have here, you know, it is a number of things. But basically it is the issue of, in a lot of instances, clarification and vacancies. We really have an issue with that.

Mr. Chairman: So, I heard a member, I mean, you know, mentioned the fact that persons were waiting on their money that they worked for. But I remember some time ago when Mr. Garcia, I think, first came into that post of Minister of Education, I think it was some time ago, he actually pushed for the Substitute Teacher Management System, the STMS, where if a teacher was absent, you would have gotten a retired teacher to offer their services to fill that temporary position in schools. Because we still have certain schools that if a teacher is on maternity leave or if there is some illness with a teacher that we are still having that delay in getting some persons to come on

board. Is that STMS system still in existence?

Because I remember some persons even then complained that they would have come out as retired teachers sometimes to give of their service to be involved, which is excellent, but still they were not paid in a timely fashion. So, could anyone elaborate if that system is still on board or is it intended to be like a gap measure in cases where there may be a shortfall in a teacher being ill or not present for some reason?

Mrs. Ashman-John: Through you, Chair, the substitute teacher system is up and functioning within the Ministry of Education. The principals have access through the online system where they go and view the list of persons available and are able to reserve persons for a short period of time to fill certain vacancies. And that system has been operating.

Mr. Chairman: Because I noticed some principals were saying they are still challenged, eh, and sometimes they may have to try to hire someone and pay—let the teacher student association, the PTA actually help the funding. So there may be a delay in that payment which you may need to look at in terms of that.

What I want to ask though, I remember there was, I think six years ago, an audit that I was so proud of, where this audit was conducted where they looked at the staff, you know, in the schools, secondary schools. And I was wondering what became of that audit because that would have showed that there were gaps in the system. That, I think, it had showed sometimes that there may have been what you call “ghost staff”, where a school may have started with three classes because you had a whole set of students but when that class dwindled, you still had teachers there and there were not many students to fill.

So, there was a—that audit would have identified schools where there was an excess of, say like in PE in certain schools. And what I wanted to gather, if that is so and if the education system has it in certain regions that these schools are, you know—the supervisors and the issues, have you thought about implementing a system where you can have like a travelling teacher? For instance, I am in this school but I do not have the amount of students to teach in a full class that I can go in that district and rotate. I am not—now, I know the TTUTA members, they may have their objections, but I am looking at the fact that you may have a teacher trained in a particular manner and may be able to go in that area. In medicine we have it. A doctor could go in different health centres in an area once they are there to work, once you are given sometimes a travelling stipend. Is that something that is feasible? And is it—do you have that existence of some schools

may be having, as I say, an overabundance of certain teachers in a school that they are not really utilized fully?

11.55 a.m.

Mrs. Ashman-John: Through you, Mr. Chairman, with respect to the staff audit that has been conducted through the Ministry of Education, we are still in the process of finalizing that audit so that we would be able to see how best we could reallocate resources to help with the distribution of the teachers. We are still looking at that audit. Hopefully by the end of the month we should have that report done and recommendations made.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, so we at least got an idea that certain teachers, certain members of staff may still be waiting from sort of stipend or money allocated to them. I think the teachers are also working on a 2013 salary too and I think TTUTA is probably renegotiating this. I would like to find out at this stage now, in terms of the—you know, I apologize for not inviting the APPSS, the Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools and the Association of Principals of Assisted Secondary Schools for not being present also, because I think they may have contributed to this discussion further.

But in terms of that, they may also I think—I will write to them after to see if there is any suggestions that they have to or comments after our report is laid that they can help to improve. But I am looking at the fact that, let us look at the assisted schools now. I understand that if you are advertising for a post and you put out there that you need a post for a particular school be it for principal, vice-principal, whatever, and you now get applicants in, you have the merit list prepared. When this goes to a school, a denominational school, do they have that veto power that they can say, well, you know, they are not in tandem with the institution of the school and I am looking more in terms of the Concordat agreement.

Does that come about in a sense that persons are applying knowing that they may not get in to a particular because they do not have that religious persuasion to get into that school and in that way be turned away and if so, how do you actually manage those individuals? Is it that only certain persons of a certain religion would go to these schools, you would see those applicants or do you now have to send it to the schools and the schools may refuse to say well, this person does not belong, the board of the school may interview and say this person does not belong to our religion so they will now send it back to the Commission and further delay the process where you now have to get a new list and send it back. Is that a delay that occurs? And Mrs. Crouch, I know

you were in private and I know you would have had that experience. So now you are in that role now, you would have to see what is the best way that we can fast track these applications to those denominational schools.

Mrs. Crouch: Chairman, I was in public and private. I was in a public school, a government-assisted school and a private school. But to answer your question, I think it is not hard and fast, many boards do hire persons who are not of the faith. But I do believe that when it comes to senior administrative positions, like principal and vice-principal, this is where you find that the leader of the school boards would require that those persons be of the faith. But in terms of subject teachers, and I dare say even Heads of Department or Deans you would find in many board schools that persons who are not of the faith are recommended by the board. That is my experience. I know Commissioner Mohammed is here. I would like to ask Commissioner Mohammed to make a comment and possibly also Commissioner Claire Brathwaite-Alexander, could you respond please.

Official: Sure.

Mr. Mohammed: Thank you, Chair. Chairman, certainly our chair is right and from experience we have seen at the middle management level there has not been hesitation among certain boards to have recommendations made. At the level of senior management, the principals in particular, I think that they ensure that the ethos of the school is maintained, that is the justification on the basis from which the boards would tend to have someone of their faith. But we are in fact very happy that we have not seen a reluctance or hesitation on the part of the boards to recommend persons at the level of teacher, Heads of Department and Deans. So our chair is correct there.

Mrs. Crouch: Thank you, Commissioner Mohammed. Commissioner Brathwaite-Alexander.

Mrs. Brathwaite-Alexander: Yes, Chair. Thank you, Mrs. Crouch. I also want to add, I concur what was said earlier and I want to add, yes, I want to add that in our discussions, in our meeting stakeholder engagements with boards we highlight the importance of a speedy response so that there is no delay in appointing the critical positions. But generally boards are open except in the case of leadership, as said earlier, where the ethos of the religion and the school are critical in the leadership function. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So what I gather is that the list the Teaching Service Commission would send to say, a Catholic school, would it be only be those potential applicants, like a principal of that faith or do they just send persons of different faith and then let the board decides, the board of that

school decide. How does it go? Is it that you would now, in your interview process, say, well, okay, a Catholic school needs a principal but with your degree, your qualifications, your experience, you also have to give your religion before we send that to the school? Or do you send a list to the school, the board now has to decide now or see persons who are not of that religious persuasion to now send it back to you and then cause a delay. You see, I am trying to figure if there is a delay there going back and forth and if somehow we could optimize that little situation that we need to clarify.

Mrs. Crouch: Boards do interview all applicants. The list is sent to them and they do interview persons. They may very well have persons they have groomed and who are absolutely suitable for the job. The assumption is here that the board does not have someone who is suitable, but most board schools pay attention to successional planning and do in fact have persons who fit both public sector requirements as well as their own requirements. So I think this is part of the strength of the denominational system that succession planning is part of developing the whole school community. So you are not relying on if somebody is going to be out there who will be able to come into my school. You do have situations though where the board may not have someone who is suitable from the—and then they ask for the position to be re-advertised. So in that you are very correct that the board will wait for a re-advertisement to happen and another round of applications to be conducted.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. I think member Lutchmedial, I think you have a question.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes, Chair—thank you, Chair, through you I was just—it jumped out at me what the Chairman of the Commission indicates about succession planning at the denominational schools. I consider, I feel very lucky to have had that experience of a denominational school. It was a very well-run school, but I also experienced, you know, in government schools I have a lot of friends who are teachers in government schools and I was wondering, does the Service Commission have any role or any sort of vision for that type of succession planning within the non-denominational schools? Because what I have found and what I have been told and what I have observed is that when a teacher becomes familiar with the culture of a school, with its students, a school is supposed to be almost like your second family and I think to a large extent the denominational schools from my experience that is how a lot of them operate. And I am wondering if the Service Commission has a vision that the government schools, the non-denominational schools could operate in the same way and if succession planning for the

promotion, elevation of teachers from teacher, to Head of Department, to senior management and so on, if that is part of something that the Service Commission has considered to sort of structure into the non-denominational schools as well?—just because you mentioned how well it works for the denominational schools.

Mrs. Crouch: I have always, member, been very sorry that the local school boards never developed into a structure on par with the boards of the denominational schools. Local school boards are confined to certain kinds of routine tasks of infrastructure and so on. So I would think if there could be some amendment to the legislation whereby local school boards could begin to function in the way you find school boards in the United States and Canada and England, we could see an infusion of talent, an infusion of purpose and vision for state schools. That is something I envisioned.

But you know I have been around for so long, I remember doing a study on the local school boards when it was first started and there was so much excitement around having a community take charge of the well-being of the school. But that is not the reality, member, and if you ask, if I have a vision, that is the vision I would have, because something needs to be done with the legislation to make local school boards function in the way that denominational boards do.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Excellent. Thank you so much for that suggestion, Chairman, I think it is something that we would very much give further consideration to in our recommendations.

Mr. Chairman: So what I have gathered of your vision and I think it is a vision the country shares with you where we would want the government schools to step up to the sort of a indoctrination, the culture of some of some of the denominational schools who have a different sort of ethos. So your dream is our dream, it is the country's benefit to get that. But you know what I am looking at, Chairman, is the fact that you know if we can get persons who have retired from the denominational schools to come on board or to come into the government schools that may be something that could at least bring that level of—you know, you will still have the fallout with the community there maybe, not in such a way that you may have a single parent who may not be able to afford lessons, et cetera. But if you get that staff who show that commitment in the private—the denominational schools to go across, you may get that.

But you see I have seen something, I have noticed that, I think as far as I remember, the Education Act, you know, somebody at the age of 45 years, I think that is the maximum age you could apply to be a teacher, and I need some clarification to that. It struck me that if I did succeed

in my profession and I now would want to go give to teaching, to go into teaching or I am retired. You know, why is there that limit that you have to be 45 and less to apply to be a teacher? Is that so? Because if that is so I look it as ageism, as age discrimination and I do not think it would have any place in society where we have an ageing population, persons who may able to teach but because of their age you may not be able to apply for a teaching post. So is that age limit of 45 still standing? Could anybody guide me on that?

Mr. Waldron: Yes, it is, but it is part of the Education Act. Of course, that is under the employer, so it is not—the Teaching Service Commission has no purview there—

Mr. Chairman: But you see, we in our report we can recommend that some changes were made to the legislation if we think that that may benefit society or even if it is—as I say age discrimination in a sense, because it is not like the police service where you have to be fit and young at a certain age, once you have that mental capacity and you could teach I do not think we should deny persons because of their age. This is my opinion. But it is something for discussion that we may say there is no objection to carry that discussion forward.

Ms. Lutchmedial: In fact, Chair, if I may, in other fields, I mean, you mentioned medicine and law and so on, the more experience you have is the more—and the older you become and more experienced you are in the field is the more valuable you would become as a lecturer, a teacher at a university level and so on. So for persons who may cross that age of 45 in a particular area and have experience, may actually be better teachers and be more mature as well and be able to give a better, be more grounded in their respective fields and have experience in life as well as in their profession to be able to impart knowledge to students. So I mean, I think what the Chair is getting at, is this something that we should look at from a legislative standpoint and make a recommendation that it be reviewed?

Mr. Chairman: Okay, at this stage now I realize we left out our sister country, Tobago. So I would like now to say in terms of the Teaching Service Commission, you stated that the Teaching Service Commission also views the THA as an important stakeholder and in this regard did a two-day visit to Tobago in January 2022 and met with the administrator, Division of Education, Research and Technology. I want to ask, what were the main areas discussed during these meetings and what were the outcomes or deliverables which arose from these meetings?

Mrs. Crouch: Commissioner Brathwaite-Alexander.

Mrs. Brathwaite-Alexander: Thank you, Mrs. Crouch; thank you, Chair. As stated in the

submission, the Teaching Service Commission and members of staff of the Service Commissions Department went to Tobago on the 25th and 26th of January, 2022. The critical issue was to improve communication and to have a sense of what are some of the particular—the unique situations in Tobago that require the attention of the Commission.

Coming out of that, the backlog was one of the issues, the backlog of appointments and appointments in leadership position and general appointments and we looked at that. We looked at communication between the Teaching Service Commission and the Division of Education, Research and Technology as it is now called. And we also looked at the some of the concerns of boards in respect of appointments and transfers. We ourselves had some concerns about the communication and the information coming to us and the outcomes of that interaction were quite strong.

Since then one of the issues that the Division of Education had some concern about was regularizing their establishment of the schools, the nine secondary schools in Tobago, and since then that reconciliation has taken place within the two-month period. Since then communication has improved because with the use of the Teams platform we see that there have been more than six meetings between, in the two-month period and we cleared up substantially the backlog.

I know that if necessary Mrs. Mohammed-Basdaye, the Executive Director might be able to give you some information in that respect. So what we are seeing is an improved level of collaboration, of communication, of feedback. We have rationalized some of the issues and we are continuing to work on that kind of arrangement and communication. What it means is that we have given all the stakeholders a six-month period to come back to them and do some evaluation of whether their issues have been addressed and I can say already within two months we have addressed majority of those issues.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. So what I am gathering is that we have some improvements there, so this is something I think we are pleased to hear. And I think we have heard that the IT department, the future of teachers I think is like having to be like a hybrid system where a teacher may also be required to be, not just in a practical class, but also to be aware that if perchance the pandemic has a turn and a more violent strain comes about, we will have to revert to that old system of classes online.

So I want to ask a question in terms of, is there a consideration that a hybrid system could be there whereby a teacher will be teaching practical classes but we are not asking that teacher to

prepare classes especially for online classes, because that in itself, to have those notes to put on an online thing is an onerous condition. So I just wanted to find out, let us say in terms of, I heard the fact that if you are having practical classes, is it difficult to have like online streaming of that same class, just in case, as I say, there is a turn and we need to revert or in cases where, it is not asking the teacher to do any extra work but you just have that phone streaming that to individuals at home.

Ms. Ashman-John: Through you, Chairman, with respect to that possibility discussions have been held with our Ministry of Education executives and I am sure we would address the stakeholders to see the feasibility of that eventuality.

Mr. Chairman: Ms. Lutchmedial, I think you had a comment or question.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Chair, yeah, we have a question from a member of the public who wanted to know the current number of vacant offices within the teaching service and I received a question as well from someone about, what if any accommodations were made for teachers during the pandemic who were required to teach online but who had children at home attending online classes? I do not know who can take question if the Ministry would be best place to take that question. It is kind of a policy question. Anybody.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, with respect to the vacant offices we would submit to the Committee the number of vacant offices within the teaching service. As it relates to the other question, that is a Ministry question because that deals with more policy and that will have to come from the Ministry of Education.

Ms. Ashman-John: With respect to that question, I would be able to forward that information after consultation with the CEO and the director of school supervision.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I think—you do not even have a ballpark figure of the total amount of vacancies to give the public out there a sense of what we are dealing with?

Mr. Harrison: No, and that is one of the concerns we had with vacancies, as one that the Executive Director previously spoke about. I think we need some sort of recalibration of the vacancies. So therefore, to give you a ballpark figure it is a difficult one to do. So hopefully we will provide it in the future, to the Committee, we will provide it to the Committee in the future.

Mr. Chairman: Because I was aware there was an audit six years ago but I do not know if that would be dated. But I see TTUTA representative had their—wanted to make a comment. Could you—

Mr. Lee Him: Yes, Mr. Commissioner. So based on our feedback, as far as we are aware, because

we have raised the issue with the Ministry of Education with respect to the big question raised by Ms. Lutchmedial with respect to the arrangements for teachers who have students. As far as we are aware there has been nothing put in place to accommodate such thus far. We are coming out of the pandemic, we are heading back into the physical realm but during that period no such provisions were made for accommodation of those teachers. Thank you.

Mr. Broomes: All right.

Mr. Lee Him: Mr. Broomes will just add—

Mr. Broomes: If I may hasten to add, Chairman, on the issue of the hybrid system being put in place, the Association has been asking, we wrote to the CPO, we spoke to the Minister about having negotiations about any hybrid or blended system and the response has always been in the negative, that it is not necessary. I am glad you raised it because we know how the world is going. We all experienced the uncertainty of the pandemic and those discussions and negotiations must be had. And if I may even step back a little bit if you would allow me, I will talk about teacher education in terms of raising the age of entry into the teaching service. We have UTT, USC and some other institutions offering teacher education, UWI, in terms of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education. But the DipEd or the Postgraduate Diploma in Education is only available in service which does not seem to suit what we are trying to achieve here. It really should be available preservice so that anybody should be able to go and do the DipEd. But that is not the case right now.

Additionally, we have graduates from UTT and USC with programmes that were previously approved. Those graduates are now being told that the programmes did not suit the need. So now they have to go and do bridging programmes and extra courses. So unless we fix teacher education in this country we will have problems with persons especially coming in at later ages if we do not have proper standardized system of teacher education. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Chair, through you—

Mr. Chairman: Sure. Yes continue.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Sorry. Can I ask a question? Can TTUTA submit some more information about that issue of preapproved programmes and persons not being able to enter into the service because—I had a similar case like that coming to my attention with respect to persons who were being trained at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and there was a particular outcome.

So I would be very interested in finding out more about that because I am very concerned when people embark—education is not easy and when you embark upon a course of education only to be told that it does not suit the needs thereafter or does not meet criteria, when you were previously told that this is something suitable, I am very concerned about that. So I would like if TTUTA could submit some more information.

Just by way of comment, I am very disheartened to hear as a parent myself who had to go through the pandemic that there was no accommodation made for parents. But that is just a comment on my part. But we look forward to any further comment from the Ministry of Education on that matter.

Mr. Chairman: So, thank you and the members of TTUTA, I just want to ask a question here from the report that you stated that many principals do not properly follow the progressive discipline procedure, PDP. Yet teachers find themselves before a disciplinary tribunal. Could you just elaborate more about this PDP procedure? And what are some of the examples of the procedural irregularities that have occurred in relation to disciplinary matters involving teachers at the school level? And, yeah, so after that I would follow-up with one question after.

Mr. Broomes: Thank you, Chairman. The progressive discipline procedure is something that should be followed throughout the public service. What happens is that—and I need to be very careful with my words, it appears that when allegations are made that there is a scramble to show that progressive discipline was done rather than simply producing the records. For example, it starts with counselling and in the counselling phase there is a discussion and you know some exhortation and so on, and that is supposed to be recorded in the logbook. And what should be a part of that log entry is any reasons that may be advanced by the teacher or the education professional, to change language, are not being regular in his or her time of arrival to school. In many instances that is not done.

We have had instances where warning letters were placed on members' files and the members are claiming that they have never seen the warning letter. And there are procedures if someone refuses to sign a warning letter then the principal is required to get a senior teacher, maybe next in command to sign stating that the officer refused to sign. But those things are not being followed. There is no—the aim seems to be more to get the officer in trouble rather than to rehabilitate the officer. And when we go before a tribunal, the tribunal because of how the regulations are written the tribunal is not concerned with progressive discipline. They are

concerned that the officer has been charged and they are now before them and they must make a determination.

12.25 p.m.

So if the progressive discipline procedure is followed because the aim of the procedure was to rehabilitate the officer before the regulation 90 stage but sadly, our experience is it is not being followed as well as it should be and when persons are—when an investigating officer is appointed, in many instances we see that—careful with words here—we see that there is a scramble to produce some kind of proof that progressive discipline was done when in fact it was not properly done.

Mr. Chairman: So there may be a need to educate the principals and—but has TTUTA communicated its concerns regarding the procedures to the Ministry of Education or to the Teaching Service Commission?

Mr. Broomes: We have communicated that to the Ministry of Education at meetings that we would have. We would have monthly meetings. We did communicate such to the Commission when we had our one meeting with them and we were promised further meetings and those have not yet materialized but we live in hope. But we have communicated those concerns to them and I guess we are awaiting a response.

Mr. Chairman: The Ministry, could the Deputy PS, you know, give us an idea what sort of solutions you have suggested based on the TTUTA's concerns?

Mrs. Crouch: Again, Chair, with respect to the recommendations of TTUTA, within our monthly meetings we have discussions and through the CEO's office and the Director of School Supervision, they have also tried to educate the principals and the administration of the different schools and offer assistance with respect to the progressive disciplinary process so that once we have clear indication of the issues and documented evidence, we would be able to see those issues addressed more accurately. So I know it is with the Director of School Supervision and the CEO.

Mr. Chairman: Has any circular or written correspondence been sent out, out there to the school supervisors or to the principals?

Mrs. Crouch: I would have to check that and I will provide that response.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Is there any other member who would like to comment at this stage?

Mrs. Sagramsingh-Sooklal: Chair, just to add to what you were asking about, you know, I listened to the representatives of TTUTA, of course, the comment about, you know, when

disciplinary matters come, we have, you know, the scrambling for evidence, for want of a better word, especially to prove a particular allegation against its member. You know, member Lutchmedial and I are both members of the Law Association and I know with the Law Association in particular, we have a lot of training that goes on for its membership in various areas of the law, in ethical issues that may come up on an on-going basis. No doubt, the membership of TTUTA is not just teachers, right, it would be, for want of a better word again, the higher ranking officers, whether it is a Head of Department, whether it is a principal or a vice principal. What kind of training has the association embarked upon, if any? Because I know I did hear you mention about the education, Chair, but what kind of training at all has the union embarked upon in training its membership in this progressive discipline procedure? Because sometimes all people need to be reminded. I mean, it may sound simple, eh, but sometimes people may just need to be reminded and obtain that additional training.

I was a member of TTUTA when I was a teacher and I paid my dues diligently as a member of TTUTA but I am now sitting here in a different position and I want to know currently if there is any training that TTUTA actually engages as it relates to training its membership on progressive discipline procedures, bearing in mind its membership transcends just teachers, it would of course be persons who sit in the administrative roles in schools as well.

Mr. Lee Him: Okay. Through you, Mr. Chair, we have a department led by Mr. Marlon Seales, the 1st Vice-President of TTUTA which involves training. Right. So we conduct training for all our members who may be so interested. We do training with our staff representatives in the districts. We conduct workshops at the level of the union where we have—preparing for promotions, we prepare persons for promotions in the Heads of Departments, Deans, vice principals, principals. Those workshops TTUTA offers to all its members. We bring in trained personnel. We bring in persons who are experts in the field to conduct those training with our members.

So we from time to time currently—actually right now, the 1st Vice-President had workshops last week and he is also conducting workshops this week again for persons who are so desirous of being promoted in the education system. To the Ministry of Education, we offer our services to them to assist in the training of those persons who wish to have, you know, conduct workshops. We go out to schools and we have professional development days. Once a principal sees the need, an administrator has a professional development day that they would like to conduct in their school

and they send us the agenda, we provide the personnel free of charge and we assist in conducting the workshops in the schools. So TTUTA does provide these services to our members out there.

Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: With respect particularly to this progressive discipline procedure, have you all conducted any sessions on this particular area?

Mr. Lee Him: Yes, we have. We do conduct it with our staff reps because our staff reps really can do it for the association to the membership out there, we educate them so that they can ensure that the procedure is followed at the level of the school when they have to embark on matters related at the school level.

Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: Okay, thanks.

Mr. Lee Him: Mr. Broomes will—

Mr. Broomes: If may I add, Chairman. I get where you are coming from because we have been offering the training but unfortunately, we are not the employer. So if we partner with the Ministry of Education and do the same training, I think it will have more reach than when the association does it because we understand how some people see the association. We are not blind to that fact and even though we offer the training, persons may get a different perspective from officers at the Ministry of Education and they may be more inclined to lean towards the Ministry's perspective because they believe that they are the representatives of the employer, you know, for that purpose. So we have been asking to partner so that the training would be more widely accepted by the education professionals.

Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: And if you might want to agree with me too, Chair, respectfully, you know there comes a time too when as a—especially when you look at the teaching service, I recall in my days as a teacher, you literally “sign yuh book”, right? So there is this attendance book that you sign the time that you come in and with things like that, I mean, we have to be able to also impress, especially the role and the platform that you all have, to impress respectfully on your membership the need for this, you know, personal responsibility as well because, of course, this could only redound to the benefit of the children in which we serve, which no doubt is the future of this country.

And I must say and for the record purposes, you know, say it is really refreshing to hear that TTUTA has embarked upon a series of training sessions for its membership recognizing, of course, that as I would have indicated to you earlier, this could only benefit. This could only benefit our children and certainly we as the Committee can then consider the submissions that you would have

made relative to that partnership in relation to progressive discipline procedure and any other challenges and make the said recommendation in the final report. So, thank you. Chair, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So I thank you for that. Definitely, TTUTA, we have to congratulate you for that and probably you may have to also the association of principals, you know give them that so they would know. Remember, they are the main ones who may not, you know, go full to that disciplinary procedure.

So at this stage, one thing I would like to ask, I think during this pandemic, some teachers who had to have like, a sick leave, would have had to go—I understand that if you get a sick leave, you have to get it from a DMO whatever reason. It is not like a normal—so is that something, you know, when I looked at the pandemic where a teacher got a fracture but had to actually put in a sick leave but instead of getting it from an orthopaedic surgeon, still had to go to a DMO in a public institution where they were frightened to get that COVID exposure. Is there a reason why sick leave that a teacher will present must go through a DMO and especially in pandemic times, is there a case to revise this that it could just be coming from your private doctor?

Mr. Broomes: Thank you, Chairman. The issue stems from the Regulations. You must get extended sick leave countersigned by a government medical officer. In times past, we used to have a district medical officer who used to deal with those things but they are no longer the district medical officers for that purpose. The district medical officers are only for when there are crimes, when there are murders and so on, the police would come and that is on a rotational basis. We have petitioned the Chief Personnel Officer to have it revised because I think PSA has been successful in having their agreement revised and with the associated change in the Regulations if necessary, for it to be a medical officer registered by the Medical Association of Trinidad and Tobago. Because it is unfair, it is unkind for teachers who are already ill to have to be chasing a government medical officer from here to there and COVID of course exacerbated the situation because the doctors were pulled to do different duties so it was near impossible for persons to get their ESL countersigned and it caused problems with the classification of the leave and so on. So it is something that we hope that we will have negotiations and conclusions with the CPO on, and looking forward—

Mr. Chairman: We will address it in our recommendations also because it will in fact, for the proper running an administration to have an officer running back and forth to get these documents signed by a DMO, it may be in a sense taking from them in a sick individual. Sure.

Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal: Chair, if I may respectfully add my two pence on that issue, I respectfully believe the issue with the public—remember, let us be realistic right, we know we have the smart man and smart woman outside there and we know that people usually have a family doctor, that is the culture in most countries and sometimes what you find is that if you have a private—if you have leave being certified by a private doctor, we know the culture in Trinidad is that you could pay \$150 to some doctors and get a medical. And I think I respectfully submit I believe that when these Regulations were drafted, probably the mindset and I stand to be corrected but I could see realistically one of the reasons for wanting to encourage a public doctor is perhaps to reduce in some way at all, you know, the instances of people going to a family doctor, paying for a medical to get three months extended leave or however that works. So that is just my little two pence, my personal view on that point of a public as opposed to a private doctor.

But Chair, through you, it is just one question I had, a very brief question relative to digitization and it is a question really to the Teaching Service Commission. Now, I know the Commission would have mentioned and of course kudos to them relative to moving to an online platform, their tribunal hearings and of course migrating to the online platform, applications and interviews which were conducted but I cannot recall in their submission seeing a mention of an actual digitization plan and a digitization plan more so that speaks to how this plan is going to then translate into reducing backlogs in interviews and any other challenge that the Commission currently faces.

So my humble request, through you, Chair, is if in writing for the Committee's consideration because I know time is also of the essence, if we can perhaps have that submitted to us, the Commission's digitization plan or policy if there is indeed such in existence. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, so, thank you for that question and I hope we get that in writing. And at this stage, I would like to say we are now coming to an end of it. I would certainly love the members present from the Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission, Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch to give any brief closing comments.

Mrs. Crouch: Thank you, Chairman. In closing, I want to place on the record that the Commission remains goal-oriented. I had planned to share some of these goals with you but I guess time did not permit. However, we are letting you know that the ninth goal which is the appointment of the Chief Education Officer was accomplished through a very robust assessment centre exercise and Dr. Peter Smith was appointed Chief Education Officer on Monday. Additionally, we would like to let you know that we are in collaborative meetings with the Ministry of Education to work on

this digitalization that the member asked about.

Additionally, we do let you know that in terms of our outreach, the Commission is dedicated to reaching the average teacher through its quarterly newsletters which can be read on a smart phone and so that is the direction we will be taking. We thank you for your interest that you have shown and the probity of the questions that you asked the Commission and we assure the community that we are working for the benefit of teachers and children, post-pandemic. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I thank you for what I have heard and your successes and I wish you more success in the future and you all are doing a remarkable job. Thank you very much. And Mr. Corey Harrison, Director of Personnel Administration, could you give some brief closing remarks?

Mr. Harrison: Thank you, Chair. The issue here is the improvement in the education system. The collaborative effort between the Teaching Service Commission and Service Commissions Department and all key stakeholders is critical to the success. So based on that, I reinforce what it is the Chair had said where it is we look at stakeholder engagement. I reinforce a lot of the things that we spoke about where it is we are bringing value and accountability to the system. I thank you, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Harrison. And at this stage, I would like Mrs. Sharon Ashman-John, the Deputy Permanent Secretary to give some brief closing comments.

Mrs. Ashman-John: Thank you, Chair. I too, I am in agreement with the Chairman of the Teaching Service Commission and the DPA and the Ministry of Education is committed to doing what is necessary to improve our internal systems and too, the collaborative consultation with the Teaching Service Commission to effectively carry out our mandate. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. And Mr. Darren Lee Him, could you please give some closing remarks?

Mr. Lee Him: Thank you, Chair. We were grateful for the opportunity to be here this morning as we continue to work collaboratively with the Ministry of Education and we have our monthly meetings with them. We meet on a regular basis as time permits. Also, we continue to have our meetings with the Chief Personnel Officer.

Our aim here would have also been to have those regular meetings with the Teaching Service Commission. We know that there is a challenge with the Teaching Service Commission not being a full-time body and as such they would meet when they get the opportunity to have their interviews and so on but we as the association would like to have more frequent meetings with the

Teaching Service Commission so that we can address a lot of the issues that we would have been raised here this morning and also issues that we did not have an opportunity to raise.

But we again thank you for the opportunity to be here and we found it to be a very informative and fruitful session here this morning. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. So it seems that there seems to be an avenue where we could have had more discussion, eh, so I apologize for the timing that we could not explore that. So we may if we want, have another meeting sometime in the future if we decide. But at this stage, our purpose here this morning was really to make sure that we have a staff, a complement of staff and teachers who are adapted, who are happy in their jobs, who are serving us out there in the community to produce the next generation of children because a happy teacher would give of himself, will give to the children the best education, socialization and civic-mindedness to our next generation.

I would like to end with a quote. I saw the Acting Principal of Hillview, Derek Bissessar, had a quote in his WhatsApp message where he said:

If you light a path for someone else, it always brightens your path.

And this is something, teachers, we are totally indebted to your service and will always be.

So at this stage, I would now like to just make a brief announcement that the public is advised that the Fifth Report of the Committee on an Inquiry into the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board was recently presented to the House and the Senate. This report can be reviewed or downloaded via Parliament's website, www.ttparliament.org. For those persons who are injured, they would see means that they could apply to, you know, how they could apply, what recommendations we made.

At this stage, I would like to thank the officials of the Director of Personnel Administration, Teaching Service Commission, Ministry of Education and TTUTA for your contribution to today's proceedings. I would like to thank Committee members who participated remotely, also the staff of the Office of the Parliament for your procedural and logistical support and the viewing and listening audience and those who participated via messages. At this time, I would like to declare this meeting adjourned. Thank you.

12.47 a.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TWELFTH VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES, SERVICE COMMISSIONS AND STATUTORY AUTHORITIES (INCLUDING THE THA), HELD (IN PUBLIC) ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 04, 2022, AT 10.15 A.M.

PRESENT

Dr. Varma Deyalsingh	Chairman
Ms. Jayanti Lutchmedial	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian	Member
Mr. Nigel de Freitas	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Sherlana Ramdeen	Procedural Officer Intern
Ms. Terriann Baker	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Nicole Brown	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal	Member [<i>Excused</i>]
Ms. Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Esmond Forde	Member [<i>Excused</i>]

POLICE SERVICE COMMISSION

Justice Judith Jones (Retired)	Chairman
Ms. Maxine Attong	Member
Mr. Ian Ramdhanie	Member
Ms. Kavita Bassarath	Assistant Director Research and Evaluation

SERVICE COMMISSIONS DEPARTMENT

Mr. Corey Harrison	Director of Personnel Administration
Ms. Helen Warner	Deputy Director of Personnel Administration (Ag.)
Ms. Tavita Ramcharan	Executive Director (Ag.) ICT Unit

Mr. Chairman: Good morning all. I would like to, at today's meeting, the public hearing that we are having, our Joint Select Committee that we are hearing, it is the Twelfth Meeting of the Joint

Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (Including the THA) in the Twelfth Parliament. This meeting is being recorded for a subsequent broadcast on the Parliament Channel. And this is our Committee's third public hearing pursuant to our enquiry into the institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department.

The Committee met previously with the Public Service Commission on March 02, 2022, and the Teaching Service Commission on April 13, 2022. And today, we are extremely pleased to have before us the officials of the Police Service Commission and the Office of the Director of Personnel Administration. I would like now to welcome all those present. And I would like the members of the Police Service Commission to please introduce yourselves and also members of your committee. We will start with the Police Service Commission.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Do you have any members available? Ms. Kavita? So, okay—so, we have three members there. Okay. Would members from the Office of the Director of Personnel Administration please introduce yourselves?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: So, good morning to all—

Official: One more—we have one more member.

Mr. Chairman: Sure. Go ahead.

[Introduction made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for your presence. And I would like to introduce myself. I am Dr. Varma Deyalsingh. I am an Independent Senator and the Chair of this Committee. And, at this stage, I would like to invite my members to introduce themselves.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, this morning the objectives of this enquiry are to:

1. To examine and assess the administrative and operational changes that have been implemented at the Service Commissions Department during the past three years;
2. To evaluate the impact of these administrative and operational changes on the ability of the Service Commissions, with the exception of the JLSC, to execute their constitutional responsibilities;

3. To obtain insights into the plans and proposals aimed at further improving the institutional capacity of the Service Commissions Department; and
4. To examine the factors and conditions that are hindering the successful implementation of organizational transformation measures at the Service Commissions Department.

At this stage, I would like the—to invite the Chairman of the Police Service Commission, Justice Judith Jones, to give us some brief opening statements.

Justice Jones: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning again, Chairman, and members of the Committee. As indicated earlier, I am Judith Jones. I am the Chairman of the Police Service Commission. The other members of the Commission are Ms. Maxine Attong and Mr. Ian Ramdhanie, who are both present with us this morning, Ms. Maxine King and Mr. Rajiv Persad.

On behalf of the Police Service Commission, let me thank you for providing us with the opportunity of appearing before your Committee this morning on the topic of institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department.

This Commission was appointed to office on November 16, 2021. And like other commissions, as a result of the resignation of all the members of the past Commission, all our members are new to the Police Service Commission. Given the lack of institutional knowledge, of necessity, this Commission relies heavily on the input of the Service Commissions Department and our Secretariat. Indeed, to date, almost six months after our being sworn into office, we are still in the process of dealing with matters which have been left unattended, while the past commission was inquorate and matters which arose as a result of the incident of 2021.

We note that the thrust of today's meeting centers on the adequacy of the resources allocated to the Commission, the state of the physical accommodation, and the performance appraisals for the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Police. As you are aware, the Police Service Commission is serviced by the members of its Secretariat and the Service Commissions Department. Much of the information requested by the Committee today is not within the personal knowledge of this Commission. It is in these circumstances that most of the questions of this morning will, of necessity, be answered by the acting director—sorry, I must apologize to Mr. Harrison, the Director of Personnel Administration and his staff.

The Commission notes, however, the objectives of this enquiry and, in particular, that objective that speaks to examining the factors and conditions that are hindering the successful

implementation of the organizational transformation measures at the Service Commissions Department. While the questions posed by this Committee touch on some of the obstacles faced by the Commission, as for example, finance, the Commission wishes to highlight the need for the restructuring of the Commission in accordance with recommendations made since 2015, the appointment of staff to fill vacant positions, and the regularization of the terms and conditions of the members of the contract staff from the Secretariat.

The Commission is of the firm view that until this is done, the Commission will be hard-pressed to effectively and efficiently meet its constitutional mandate. That said, through you, Mr. Chairman, the Commission wishes to publicly acknowledge the yeoman service provided to the Commission by the staff of the Secretariat at the Service Commissions during the very trying experiences of 2021. Again, thank you, Mr. Chairman and the members of the Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Justice Judith Jones. And I think, you know, you are now in a position where you have to try to build back public confidence into your institution after the regrettable public discourse, you know, following the recent unfortunate state of events. We cannot afford to let citizens of this nation lose confidence in our independent institution, which serves as guardians of our democracy, to prevent any perceived administrative overreach.

So, at the end of the day, you know, that Trinidad, where I consider we have a vortex of crime in our country and it is a public embarrassment not to have this office filled. And we have come a long way from persons acting for years in the post, in limbo with no security of tenure. So, it opens a dialogue of the possibility of an Acting COP who has to depend on parliamentary approval or not want to rock the boat.

So, I think we all understand, due to the nature of the crime in the country, we have to get things right. And we need a Commissioner of Police or Deputy Commissioner of Police to stem this flow of crime; and your choice of providing capable men and women to provide leadership to our protective service to protect and serve every single citizen, despite their social status, geographical habitat, ethnicity, religious or political persuasion; and to investigate and bring charges to whoever breaches our laws without favouritism. And I think we really need an independent champion that we can have faith in. No process is foolproof but we are hoping you can give us the individual who will deliver this for us. And we are hoping this forum this morning would be able to provide you with your tools to deliver the best candidate. So, I thank you and

your members for stepping in to at least go a stage further into this process to choose our leaders in the police service.

Justice Jones: Sen. Deyalsingh, let me just thank you very much. I quite agree with everything that you have said. And it is a task that we recognize that is facing us. And on behalf of the Commission, let me say that we certainly would do our best. We are all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and we all recognize the importance of having persons that we can rely on and feel confident in at the head of our police service. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Justice. At this stage, I would like Mr. Corey Harrison, the Director of Personnel Administration, to please give us some opening remarks.

Mr. Harrison: Yes, Chairman, and members of the Committee, I thank you for this opportunity to discuss with you, again, the institutional strengthening initiatives of the Service Commissions Department, at this time, how it applies to the constitutional functions of the Police Service Commission.

The Service Commissions has embarked on likening its operations to that of a business organization. By this parallel, I mean we are striving to provide value to our stakeholders and customers who include the four Commissions, the wider public service, the Ministries and Departments, and the national public. By this approach, we believe that the institutional strengthening initiatives would be an investment that would be able to provide valuable returns to the stakeholders and customers.

However, we are cognizant of both our internal and external environment. We must pay attention to our budget allocations and whether it is sufficient to realize our success. We have embraced performance-based management, not only at the individual level but also at the departmental level. We are actively pursuing feedback in our customer experience. There has been stakeholder engagement to determine the priority needs of our stakeholders. I can safely say this Police Service Commission has been engaging their stakeholders. The Commission has maintained their independence without isolation.

The Service Commissions Department has engaged the PMCD of the Ministry of Public Administration to establish a modern organizational structure that is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the Police Service Commission. We have engaged a consultant to implement our electronic document management system which has reengineered our processes. And finally, we are embarking on a culture assessment which would assist in guiding a cultured body that embodies

our core values. Unfortunately, many of these initiatives are outside the direct control of the Service Commissions Department. We require an all-hands-on deck approach in order for the department to be successful.

I conclude by saying the Department has enthusiastic, committed and very capable staff who are eager to propel the SCD to the next level. We have recognized the necessity for change and are striving to achieve same. I thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Corey Harrison. Mr. Harrison, we seem to be meeting very regularly in our meetings.

Mr. Harrison: Yes, yes.

Mr. Chairman: All right. And, you see—and I wondered eh, you have to provide so much, you know, administrative staff even to see the proper running of these Commissions and I was also wondering, do you have enough staff? But you mentioned you may have had—you have enough staff to do this because it is really a great effort to be servicing these independent bodies. So, I commend you for your efforts so far and, as I say, if you need help, you have to reach out also to see if your department may need further staff or whatever.

Mr. Harrison: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: At this stage, I would like to remind members, committee members and officials, to direct their questions through the Chair; also to remind members and officials to kindly activate their microphones on their devices when they are acknowledged by the Chair and turn it off when they have concluded their contribution.

So, let us start. Madam Justice Judith Jones, I am saying I commend you for stepping into this process to at least give us that confidence. And I want to ask you, Madam, in terms of the staff that you have available presently in—I mean, you are now—I know you have—still will be having problems trying to assess what you have available because you are relatively new, your Commission is relatively new, and you are still being able to feel what you need—what other help or assistance you may need to get your proper running of your Commission. But, at this stage, could you—somebody from your department give us an idea about the amount of staff you have available to you and what different departments? I do not know if it is you or the DPA would be able to direct that question.

Justice Jones: I think the DPA would deal with this question, Sen. Deyalsingh, and I would add anything that becomes necessary.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, members, thank you. Basically, we have a police secretariat who provides technical as well as administrative support to the Police Service Commission. This staff, this group of persons is headed by myself, as well as we have an Executive Director HRM who directly interacts with the members of the Police Service Commission.

We also have staff within the administration, the Legal and Appeals body, as well as the Monitoring and Evaluation, and Public Education Units. This complement of staff provides that, as I said, administrative and technical support to the Secretariat which falls under the banner of the Service Commissions Department. As we speak now, we are engaging the Ministry of Public Administration for us to be able to regularize these staff members. Currently, there are some on short-term contracts and some of them on month-to-month contracts.

As it relates to the complement, and we talking about numbers, I think we are sufficient with numbers. However, we need to regularize the members of staff so that they would have some level of tenure with the Secretariat.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Justice Jones: Mr. Chair, if you would allow me. Yes, as I indicated earlier, the Commission is very concerned about the regularization of the members of staff. But I also want to say that we are concerned as well that the recommendations for the restructuring have not as yet borne fruit. It is important for us, in order to fulfil our mandate, that we have the restructured organization up and running on a, perhaps—I do not want to say a personal level, but really one of the things that we have encountered, for example, in trying to deal with the day-to-day running of the Commission is our attempt to tackle the appeal backlog. And that is one example of where we are in dire straits with respect to staff. The unit is poorly staffed and it makes our ability to clear that backlog extremely difficult. So that I know—I am hoping that our plea here will fall on fertile ground and we can get the restructuring on board so that we can continue to fulfil our mandate.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam. So, DPA, I have a question. Do you have a timeline for the hiring of those staff or the regularization and the PMCD?

Mr. Harrison: Well, in discussions with the Ministry of Public Administration, we anticipate that it would be concluded by the end of June.

Mr. Chairman: And, Madam Justice, the appeals, the staff you are looking at, are you looking for like attorneys—in-house attorneys to handle those appeals? Is it that—could you give us an

idea of the complement, the staff that you may need to try to, you know, expedite the appeals that you have before you?

Justice Jones: I think what we are looking for are mainly two types of—two categories of staff. You need case management officers. It is clear there that in order to, of course, bring the appeals from filing to conclusion, we have to have persons who are experienced in case management.

And the other thing that is causing some difficulty to us now are transcriptionists. It is absolutely necessary for us to have the hearings transcribed, particularly since we are doing—we are now doing virtually hearings and we particularly need those two categories of staff.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. I think member Lutchmedial, you may proceed.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Thank you, Chair. A couple questions, actually, about staffing. Let me start with where Madam Justice Jones spoke about the appeal backlog. You mentioned as well in your submission that a number of appeals were restarted. Do you have the information, Judge, about the amount of matters in backlog and the number of matters that had to be restarted when the Commission was reconstituted?

Justice Jones: I am not sure if we have the exact numbers here but we can certainly provide that in writing to you. What I can say is that, with respect to the restarting of matters, there were a few matters in which the past Commission had heard the appeals but went out of office before decisions were given. So, those were the matters that had to be done de novo and, Ms. Lutchmedial, you will appreciate that difficulty—

Ms. Lutchmedial: Of course, yes.

Justice Jones: —and the backlog, again, we can give specifics with respect to the numbers involved.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes, I think that would be helpful for us to know the numbers involved so we could appreciate the gravity of the situation as it is one of the matters you have highlighted, as well as the de novo matters, because we would want to know the impact on the Commission and perhaps, you know, the timelines or if there is any plan—I do not know if there is any plan, particularly, that you all have. I know you mentioned transcriptionists which is, of course, essential. Are there any immediate plans that you all have that could assist with the clearing of the backlog?

Justice Jones: Well, let me say that we have in fact started work on the matters that were required to be heard de novo because we really felt that, you know, if even with the situation with staff, it

was important at least for those matters, to get them off the ground. So, we have started doing that. We have—while we do not have a case management officer, we have someone who has operated in the system and can help, and it is very commendable the efforts made by that member of staff.

And with respect to transcriptionists, we now have a Clerk Typist assigned to the unit who is doing her best with respect to providing the transcripts. But you would appreciate that, you know, it is not the ideal situation, but we have started dealing with those matters.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Is—you mentioned—through you, Mr. Chair, in the submission of the Police Service Commission, you mentioned two things that I wanted to find out about the new function—additional function based on the Legal Notices of having recruitment and selection. Now, my reading of the 2015 Order, as amended, and then the new Order of 183, then revoked on 277 and 278, a firm had originally—there was a mandate to have a firm.

My reading of the new Legal Notices, it is not mandated, but I do not think it is prohibited for the Commission to ask for a firm to participate in this recruitment and selection exercise. You can correct me if I am wrong. But has the Commission considered the use of a firm, one. Two, my question would be, when the Legal Notices were redrafted—I do not know if the DPA may be able to answer this—but whether or not the additional funding needed and staff needed to perform that recruitment and selection process, seeing that the firm was no longer mandated, whether this was taken into consideration and whether there was any representation made by the DPA about the new requirements that that amended Legal Notice of 183 would require?

And secondly, if you could give us a timeline with respect to the—if you have any timeline or any information about the new structure which has been submitted to a PMCD for consideration?

Justice Jones: We can perhaps start just very briefly with the first part of the question and I think that was basically the Legal Notice. And let me just say that the Commission is actively considering now, considering the selection process. On a personal level, I tend to agree with you, with respect to your interpretation of the legislation. But again, we are still in the process of discussing and coming to positions with respect to the recruitment and selection process. But I recognize that one of the considerations, with respect to how we proceed, will, of necessity, be financed as well. So that in our considerations, we are going to have to be satisfied that if we do not go out, that we can properly conduct the exercise internally. And if we cannot, then we are going to have to find the money. And Mr. Harrison, I am sure, would—

Ms. Lutchmedial: So, I think that takes me—through you, Mr. Chairman, that takes me to the second question, whether the availability of the money to either do it in-house or to go outside, whether the consideration—because, of course, under the previous legal notice where you had the mandatory sort of clause about using a firm, I presume that funds would have been identified for that. And if it is that there was now an option to bring it in-house, whether the thought of moving budgets around and making adjustments to have the in-house competency there, whether that was considered prior to the drafting and passage of Legal Notice 183.

Justice Jones: Ms. Lutchmedial, before I pass you to the DPA, I just want to say that, of course, another consideration is—for us—is also the need to have this done as soon as possible given all the constraints. I think we all recognize that having persons acting in, particularly in a post as sensitive and important as a Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police, it is not the best.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Of course. And in my experience, when you talk about things going to be PMCD, that, and as soon as possible do not usually go hand in hand. So that is why I am asking about the timeline as well and whether consideration was given before about the in-house competence. So, perhaps I do not if the DPA could assist us there.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, and members, I could probably provide some guidance. The Service Commissions Department, while it is the expertise may not have been residing at the Police Service Commission Secretariat, we do have that capacity in-house. We have currently recruited positions like puisne judges, Chief Fire Officer, Commissioner of Prisons, very tough public service positions in the public service. So therefore, we do have the capacity in-house that we will be able to transfer to the Secretariat, the Police Service Commission Secretariat, in order for us to have the recruitment and selection of a Commissioner/Deputy Commissioner of Police.

However, as the Chair mentioned, the issue of finances was critical and therefore the legislation did not provide a mandate for utilizing a firm. The Commission may decide to utilize a firm or they may decide to use the expertise within. But we do have that expertise within where it is we could provide a competent assessment, where it is we can recruit a Commissioner Police and Deputy Commissioner. I hope I responded accordingly.

Ms. Lutchmedial: And with respect to our timeline for the proposals that were sent to the PMCD, would you be able to answer that?

Mr. Harrison: I indicated that we are anticipating that by the end of June we would be able to get some feedback.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Thank you. I will give way, Mr. Chair. I have other questions in other sections.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, member. So, I would like to direct this question to the Director of Personnel Administration. You stated that:

The premature dissolution of the previous Police Service Commission resulted in severe financial loss.

What was the total amount of money spent on the recruitment process up to its premature end?

Mr. Harrison: I am not understanding that question as it relates to the premature end of the police service.

Mr. Chairman: Well, let me direct this question to the Police Service Commission right, at the— at page 3, I think in your submission, this is to—you stated that:

The premature dissolution of the previous Police Service Commission resulted in severe financial loss.

Could you elaborate on the total amount of moneys that was lost?

Mr. Harrison: I would pass you on to Ms. Warner who would respond to that question.

10.45 a.m.

Ms. Warner: Chairman, good morning and good morning everyone. The statements related really to what the department spent on the process. So, we would have engaged a consultant to assist in setting the—

Mr. Chairman: Excuse me, Ma'am, you are sounding a bit muffled, if you could attempt—thank you.

Ms. Warner: So, the statement related to what the department would have had to spend in order to execute the process. So, we had to engage persons to set some of the papers—we had consultants, HR consultants—and when we made the statement, it was at a loss because the whole process ended. So it would have been money that we would have had to spend during the process that eventually nothing came out of it. So, it was in that context that statement was made.

Mr. Chairman: Have you calculated that loss?

Ms. Warner: So, it was \$124,725.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Yes. And in terms of the fact that, you know, the last Police Service Commission had to seek help outside to get, I think it was PricewaterhouseCoopers, for the recruitment process when that, you know, they were no longer hiring out to these service providers, the impression I got is that this would have saved money for the country, and also it

could have expedited the process of getting a Police Commissioner. Is the fact that we do not have that ability to hire out this or we are not, in fact, hiring out any persons to do the search for us? I am trying to find out, the money saved from that, if it would have come into the Police Service Commission to be able now to get your own staff on contract to help that determining factor in your research to find a capable candidate?

Ms. Warner: I am a little unclear, but what I can say—sorry. What I can say, it was considerably less and the last—and I am talking about the process of COP that was the standard of course, that was considerably less. Now, when we talk about using/not using a firm, before the entire process went out to the firm and the commission got in and, you know, where it was supposed to, what we did, we did go out for consultants, because notwithstanding what the DPA said that we have the competencies, yes, but remember the core competence of policing does not reside in the Service Commissions Department. So, in those areas, we would have had to go out. So, while we are not using an entire firm, we still need to consult with experts in that area for setting some of the assessments. So, right now, it is a combination in order to really have a robust process to get the right person.

Justice Jones: Chair, if I could just jump in slightly. The issue for the commission now is how do we conduct the recruitment and selection process. As indicated, finance is always a consideration. Finance and time, always a consideration. Our options—and, again, I am speaking for myself—are yes, at this stage, we can engage a firm to do it on our behalf or we can create a hybrid system in that, the service department can provide some expertise and we can determine that the expertise that cannot be provided by the Service Commissions but we employ those persons. At present, the Commission is considering the option. So these are options that are open to us. We are literally, at present, considering the options.

You know, we have started at our last statutory meeting. We continue tomorrow at our next statutory meeting and, you know, we are looking at all the options, weighing them. And, as I say again, important to us is the question of time, the question of the state of the country and, of course, the question of finance. But we want to ensure that whatever we do, we get it right. So, I do not know if that has helped.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, definitely, it has. Before I go on to a question Ms. Lutchmedial wanted to pose, Ms. Warner, Helen Warner, could you please repeat the figures you have mentioned before about the cost because somehow, it was not clearly heard by some members?

Ms. Warner: Yes, Chair. It is on page 3 of our submission, and it was \$124,725.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Lutchmedial, you have a question?

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes, thank you. Thank you, Chair. Through you, could the—well, I do not think the present members of the Commission would be able to answer this, but perhaps the Service Commissions Department or the DPA could indicate. The persons listed in that table in the submission who were paid with respect to the last Commissioner of Police recruitment process, the total cost being close to \$124,725, the bulk of those moneys was spent on four persons who were recruited, I presume as consultants. Could you tell us what is the process used to identify these persons and recruit them and select them to assist the Commission in the process of recruiting and selecting a Commissioner of Police? Is it a tendering process? Is it the three quotes process? How are these persons selected? So that is one. And, secondly, one of the things that came forward in the submission was that funds were not available and there were late payments of most of these expenses. What is the current amount of funding allocated and would be made available to the Police Service Commission as they are considering their options now with respect to the process that has to take place to appoint a permanent Commissioner of Police? Are funds available and how much funds are available?

Mr. Harrison: Chair, through you, could we respond to that question in writing because we have a proper tendering process and we could indicate the proper process in writing, as well as, we could give you the figures which are outstanding?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, sure.

Ms. Lutchmedial: You see, right. Under the—now, through you, Mr. Chair, the four persons listed here—well, persons and entities listed here, one being paid approximately \$36,000 and so on, for the scrapped process—well, participating in the scrapped process, if a firm had been recruited, would these costs have been part of, or were these service providers—would the services provided by them have been captured by the firm and what the firm was supposed to do under the 2015 Order?

Mr. Harrison: Yes. It would have been, yes.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes. So, you see, my concern is that under the 2015 Order you went through the Central Tenders Board and there was a process detailed in the Order whereby persons were recruited. So, I am concerned now, that we are still using persons outside of the Service Commission to provide certain services that obviously do not reside in-house, but I am concerned

about the process being used to select those persons, although you said it is considerably less. It is still close to \$125,000 being spent and to make matters worse, \$125,000 that was spent for really a list, a process that had to be scrapped eventually. So, I am concerned and I would like to get some more information about the process being used to identify those persons who are being paid external and also, yes, the funding that would be available. Because if what Madam Justice Jones said is, you know, that they are considering, I think a major factor that they would have to consider is what is available in terms of how they proceed to conduct this exercise that is so important for us to do. So, if we could get that information, I think it would be helpful to us.

Mr. Harrison: No problem. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, member. I would like to get an answer from the Police Service Commission in terms of the online platform for submission of applicants. In your first submission which was received on February 23, 2020, you stated that the Police Service Commission relied on an in-house build online platform which facilitated the submission of applicants by candidates for screening and short-listing. So, my question to you is, when was this online platform established by the ICT department of the service, of the SCD?

Mr. Harrison: Ms. Warner will take this question.

Ms. Warner: So, the platform was built for the Service Commissions Department in 2021. We used it first at the end of 2020 into 2021. We used it first for the positions of five—the inaugural positions actually. The use of the system was for the positions of Chief Fire Officer and mainly the First Division Officers. So that started. We subsequently used it for other offices in 2021, and when the opportunity came for the recruitment of a Commissioner of Police and the time frame in which that Commission wanted it done, everything fell into place, at that point, and we utilized it with some tweaking. Our ICT unit adapted it for our usage.

So in 2021, that was used for the Commissioner of Police. The system was built in 2020. It was something that the ICT unit was, for want of a better word, playing around with. COVID, of course, would have urged that into existence much sooner than we anticipated. So in 2020 it started, 2021 we were able to use it for other offices as well as Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Chairman: And will it be sustained?

Ms. Warner: Yes. I certainly—

Mr. Harrison: It has been sustained.

Ms. Warner: It has been sustained. We have been using it. We have been using it daily, and it

carries the bulk of the recruitment processes for the Public Service Commission, Teaching Service also and, of course, the Judicial and Legal Service Commission as well. So, yes, it will sustain.

Mr. Chairman: I do not know if the police, the present Police Service Commission would have been in office long enough, but I am trying to figure, has the Police Service Commission noted an increase in the efficiency of its recruitment process through the use of this online platform?

Justice Jones: But, perhaps, I could indicate that in terms of the present Commission, we have not as yet utilized it. So, I do not know if you may want an answer which would deal with the last recruitment process and then if that is the position perhaps Ms. Warner could answer that. But insofar as the present Commission is concerned, we intend to use it, but we have not yet had the experience of using it.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, what it is I would add as well is that the online recruitment system was implemented at the Service Commissions Department, which would field all four commissions. The Police Service Commission has not utilized—this current Police Service Commission has not utilized it as yet. However, to respond to your question about the efficiency and the effectiveness of it, we could attest to the fact that the process timeline that was given to the department was approximately two months and we were able to fulfil the recruitment process within the two months' time frame for the last Police Service Commission.

Mr. Chairman: So, we can gather from what has been happening in the other commissions, this platform could be beneficial if utilized?

Mr. Harrison: It would be beneficial if utilized.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Chair, through you, may I ask a question on the ICT platform please?

Mr. Chairman: Sure, member.

Ms. Lutchmedial: DPA, you mentioned, part of the submission, it talked about the time frame did not allow for robust testing and contingencies by the ICT unit. In the last recruitment process by the former Police Service Commission, were there hiccups? I expect that there would be in any ICT system, but were there any substantial difficulties experienced and have those since been resolved seeing that we have some down time now? Have those issues been resolved and are there contingencies in place now in the event that there are issues with the online platform?

Mr. Harrison: Ms. Warner?

Ms. Warner: Since then, as I said, the platform was used for other offices. The ICT unit would have put measures in place to track issues that occurred. Particularly, with the COP exercise on

the last occasion, we were able to develop a lesson-learnt document. So that would have fed into ICT actions in improving the system. So, there was some tweaking to be done, further testing as the report said, and that was because ICT was continuing—their agile methodology allowed them to continuously improve the database—sorry, the system.

One other thing, what we learnt from it also is that better sensitization for the applicants, because some of the applicants did not complete the application form as we would have wanted it, and that led to, you know, some misinformation which we cleared up. In terms of our communication, that was another area that we knew that we had to improve, how we communicated different steps of the process that took into consideration. So working with ICT, we were able—and evident in the other uses of the system, we have been able to make some changes as we go along and it is a new, 2020, it is a new system. It was in-house built. So we anticipated problems and we are looking—the ICT unit for the SCD has been, you know, really making great strides and we have improved as we go along. So, I anticipate if the system is used and when it is used next, we will take care of some of the problems that we encountered the last time.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Mrs. Morris-Julian, I think you had a question?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much, Chairman. Chairman, through you, I would like to direct this question regarding the recruitment process for the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police. What is the current status of the recruitment process for the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioners of Police?

Justice Jones: At present, we are, in fact, looking at the process that we will adopt. I think, as indicated in the response to the questions, we anticipate that by the end of the second quarter of this year, advertisements will be out. And, of course, once the advertisements are out, the process will run smoothly, we hope. And we anticipate that that, you know, that should take us—I suppose that is the answer, really. That is where we are. But, at present, we are actually looking at the system, looking at the process to ensure that we can arrive at a process that will meet all the requirements and I had indicated, you know, the requirements of finance, time and transparency. I do not think I said transparency, but that as well. But, as I say, we are really actively working on it. End of the quarter, end of the second quarter will be June, the end of June, we anticipate that there will be advertisements out by that time. I hope I have answered the question.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much. Actually you answered several questions that I

wanted to follow up on. So, thank you very much. Through you, Chairman, if I can just move on. Again, I noticed that you said the process—is there a variation from the process that was previously used? If so, could you tell us why? And also, is it possible that we can get an expected completion date, through you Chairman, through Justice Jones?

Justice Jones: There will be of necessity some differences in the process because, of course, the Legal Notice has changed. So our parameters are slightly different. Again, it is difficult for me to commit, at this stage, without the Commission actually taking a decision on how we will proceed. But I think, you know, I do not want to say that, you know, I can give—I suspect your question is asking me for an end date. Is that it?

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Yes.

Justice Jones: Yes. There are a number of matters that we have to consider and, you know, and there is a slight difference in the procedure as placed by the legislation and, of course, this is a new Commission. Things that were done in the past may not be things that this Commission may want to do and, in those circumstances, I hesitate prior to us making a decision, to give an end date. Certainly, I think that we certainly will try to have something in place as soon as possible and, certainly, speaking for myself, I would hope that certainly by the end of the year, we should have completed the process. But that is as best as I can assist, I am afraid.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam.

Mrs. Morris-Julian: Thank you, I appreciate your response.

Mr. Chairman: I think member Webster-Roy has a question, but before I engage that, I would still—coming on the same track, Madam Justice, your submissions outlined, I think, several limitations of Legal Notices such as ambiguity of terms, vagueness of minimum requirements and the absence of an up-to-date job specification, I think. So, has the Police Service Commission sought to engage in discussions with the DPA or the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs with the aim of determining options for eliminating these ambiguities? So, what I am trying to say, are you consulted if there are any changes that the Office of the Attorney General may want to make or the DPA may want to make? Because remember, at the end of the day, you may have had the experience of what may be needed for the best candidate.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Judge, you are still muted, so we are not hearing you.

Justice Jones: Are you hearing me now?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Justice Jones: I am going to have to ask the DPA to assist with respect to the job description portion of the question. When we say there are ambiguities, well, first of all, perhaps, I could say that so far we have not been consulted with respect to the contents of the Legal Notices, but that could very well be given the circumstances under which this Commission was appointed, and the need to, as quickly as possible sort out the situation that we found ourselves in as a country. I certainly, hope that in the future we will be consulted.

With respect to ambiguities, I think, perhaps, maybe ambiguities is not quite the word. There were some grey areas and that, in particular, were in respect to—just give me a second—the legislation makes reference to the qualifications of the candidates by reference to a master’s degree—at least, the candidates for the Commissioner of Police post—and they identified the areas, and then say any other relevant degree. What we recognized was that there was no set policy with respect to how the Commission is going to treat with a degree, and deem it to be a relevant degree.

So, the Commission spent some time and, you know, in developing a policy of what we call a relevancy policy which is now—has been approved by the Commission. It is now made public on our website and sent to our main stakeholders, in particular, the Commissioner of Police and the Police Welfare Association. So that, hopefully, has treated with that grey area or ambiguity.

The second one, and we are in the process now of completing that exercise is the question of both for the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioners of Police. The legislation refers to experience and increasing responsibility in law enforcement, and we felt, as a commission, that it was important for persons who were applying for the job to understand what was required of them, what were the basic requirements for the job and we felt that that term needed some explanation and the Commission ought to have a policy which will show how we will interpret and apply that term. So we are in fact in the process of completing that policy. Again, as with the relevancy policy, that will be made public and will be made public prior to our advertising the post, so that persons who wish to answer the advertisement can be, you know, can know exactly what we are looking for. I hope I have answered that question except with respect to the job description part of it, and I will ask either the DPA— Or, the DPA is going to deal with that.

Mr. Chairman: Well, before that, I would like to just mention, I noticed that, you know, the

requirements had actually now asked for a master's in criminology, a master's in law and actually seem to put in more educational aspect rather than experience. So, it is looking towards that. But, you know, I am wondering, in terms of persons who already had like, LLB and, you know, completed the LSAC, would this now put them at a disadvantage that they now, having this degree? So, I am wondering if—so while I understand the need for a better educated Commissioners of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Police, I am wondering if restricting it to a master's of, you know, just the master's, if persons with a fledge, you know, LLB, LSAC, if they would be considered or just persons with a bachelor, you know, have, you know, some sort of a first degree, if that will suffice. And while I am going with this, I noticed this change of policy, was the police, you know, their union—the union that they have existing—were they consulted in this? Because, you know, the association, the Police Association. Because you may have had some persons there already with a law degree, but not having a master's degree to think they may somehow be, you know, disenfranchised from the process. But I understood you said you are still working out that policy. So I do not know if those things are under consideration. And also consideration of community service, because you may have someone with a master's degree, but remember community service—going into schools doing that part—all these things, I am wondering if you all are going to be considering these aspects also.

11.15 a.m.

Justice Jones: Let me say that, you know, unfortunately and fortunately, we have to work within the constraints of the law. So that the Legal Notices require a certain qualifications and certain experience and we need to work with that. We cannot, you know—insofar as our recruitment process is concerned, we will have to work—comply with that. You know, that if we do not write young lawyers, like Ms. Lutchmedial, they would take us to court very quickly. So, let me try and clarify. When I say that we are working out the little ambiguities, there are particular ambiguities. One of the ambiguities is not the requirement of a master's degree, unfortunately, but the type of degree. So that is—you know, we have to work within our constraints, fortunately or unfortunately.

So, our two areas would be the type of degree, given how the legislation is worded, and how do we interpret increasing responsibility in law enforcement. We have done the relevancy policy—the relevant degree policy and we are now working on the increasing responsibility in law enforcement, but again we are constrained by what is required by the legislation. Insofar as consultation is concerned, I am afraid the change from—to include a master's degree happened, I

think, in 2019. So that is before our time. I do not know if there was any consultation but we certainly hope that if their intention is to change the experience or qualifications required for both or all the posts that the Commission will be consulted in the future.

I think that we have—you know, not necessarily this Commission now, but soon we will have the expertise to assist in this aspect of the drafting of the legislation. So, perhaps, Mr. Chairman, if I have answered that part of the question, I can just ask the DPA to deal with the job specification—job description part of the earlier question.

Mr. Harrison: Chairman, before we move on to the job description part, I think I want to add what it is the Chairman was saying where it is she indicated about consultation and add to the fact that when it is the Commission was determining its relevancy policy, it had not necessarily consultation but engagement with key stakeholders in determining how they define the issue of relevancy. So that is critical for the Committee as well as the public will be aware of. And I will then pass you on to Ms. Warner who would speak to the issue of the job descriptions.

Ms. Warner: Thank you, DPA. Chair, the office of Commissioner of Police, the job specification for that office is dated, I believe, 2015, which is prior to the Legal Notice. We had not have our job specification for the office since then, we relied on the requirements of the Legal Notice. And although it predates the Legal Notice, we still use aspects of the job specification; the list of duties, the knowledge, skills and abilities. We utilize what is there to enhance our recruitment process over the years.

With respect to the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Police, there are three job descriptions because there are three distinct areas for the DCOPs and again, we rely on those for crafting our—for crafting any recruitment process. But we have not had an updated job specification for those offices mainly because we have the Legal Notices. And I believe the Legal Notices will trump any job specification, so we do rely on those. So, I am not sure if I—I hope I answered the question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you did. Thank you. So, I am just wondering, you know, if they are going to change from one set of requirements to another—I know sometimes they may grandfather a little sunset period for those people who were probably hoping to come in with whatever qualifications they have, to still have that avenue within a period of time to apply before the full law sets in. So, it is just that. At this stage, I think member Ayanna Webster-Roy wants to pose a question.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Service Commission, I wanted to understand, Mr. Harrison, how do you think the Service Commissions, Legal Department, can better support the Police Service Commission to achieve its mandate?

Mr. Harrison: Madam, for the Police Service Commission to achieve its mandate, basically we need, one, funds. We also require staff in a stable environment, so therefore the organizational structure is critical. The Chair indicated the issue of the Appeals Unit and therefore, in order for us to support the Commission, we need staff who would be able to provide that support to the Commission.

The issue of building we are—the building is sufficient, however we still need certain specific things which again goes with the issue of funding. But primarily it is about funding and support staff in order for the Secretariat to provide that support to the Police Service Commission.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Thank you. I was not hearing you quite well but I picked up most of what you were saying. Mr. Chairman, if I may, through you, to Madam Justice Jones. Madam Justice Jones, how can this Commission be better supported so that you are able to fully achieve your mandate?

Justice Jones: All right. I think I am going to have to repeat what the DPA has said. It is key for us to have the staffing situation and the structure settled. You know, the recommendation for the change of structure arose primarily so that we can function properly in the changed environment. You would recall that—I think it was in 2006 the law changed and our—the focus of the Commission was then centred on the Police Commissioner, the Deputy Police Commissioners, you know, performance appraisals in that regard and some overview towards the management and, of course, the appeals procedure.

For us to get to satisfy the constitutional mandate, we must have the staff. We must have, first of all, persons on staff who can help us fulfil that aspect of our job. And, you know, we must have staff that is comfortable and, you know, that understand that their service is recognized. Because of the approach of changing the structure of the Commission, we have not been able to fulfil our duty to the staff. I think that is probably a fair way of putting it. So that is absolutely crucial to our fulfilling of the constitutional mandate and, of course, we need the money.

We need the finances to be able to, you know—we have to advertise for the posts. We need to be able to advertise. We have, you know—to attract the level of staff that we require, we are going to need the money to do so. So, I think the key thing is the restructuring, the finances and

the—well, I suppose once we get those two things on board, we are well on the way to meeting our constitutional mandate. I think we have—the Commission, if I say so myself, is a good commission. We are anxious to get things done. We are committed to Trinidad and Tobago and to trying as best as we can to deal with the situation that the country finds itself in.

It is not an easy task and again, you know, if we have the tools we can certainly go a long way to meeting our constitutional mandate. I do not know if the DPA wants to add anything to that.

Mr. Harrison: I think you covered it, Chair.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So, Madam Justice, I am happy to hear that you identified you need “transcriptors” and certain members of staff. But I am wondering now, since PricewaterhouseCoopers is no longer involved in researching and looking for suitable candidates, and it may be under your purview, do you—when you are looking at candidates, do you—for instance, of the top positions—do you go into their—what I am saying, are the financial—their finances, in terms of if we have, for instance—I know you are in charge of disciplinary procedures, but let us say a candidate is applying, are the top positions really—do they have to, you know, apply to the Integrity Commission, put their forms in—in terms of looking at any sort of financial problems that may occur, somebody may come into office, leave office after. So, is there—does the Police Commissioner office and the Deputy Commissioner, do they have to, you know—are they—their office, are they really needed? Is it necessary for them to do that or do you need some sort of forensic auditor or someone there that could look into their accounts? Is that part of your mandate to do those background checks? Do you need that staff available for you to say, “Hey, a candidate is coming in, you ask them to declare, you know, their accounts, whatnot,” does that come under your purview? Do you need a forensic auditor? Do you need somebody that with capability to look in? So, you know, persons may not be out there—be saying that there are persons in office who have ill-gotten gains. So, I am just asking you, do you need that caliber of staff?

Justice Jones: Chairman, as indicated, we have not ourselves conducted recruitment as yet. But I have looked at recruitment—the recruitment process that was established in the past and one of the things that is done is that SSA—am I correct?

Official: Correct.

Justice Jones: There is an in-depth security vetting at some stage of the process. I cannot at this

stage—and I am sure the DPA will help us with what stage but there is a very, very in-depth security vetting. I have looked at, you know, the type of vetting that was done in the past that, you know, it is—I have to confess that I was quite, you know, impressed with the manner in which it was done. I think that I understand that there is some input from the FIU as well. So that, again, at this stage, we see—I personally, again, am quite comfortable with the level of security investigation that has been done in the past and I assume that it will continue in the future. I am going to see if the DPA has anything to add to that because, of course, again, I am speaking from what I have seen, you know, in my perusal of past recruitment, the process.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, I endorse everything you are saying—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Chair, without going into specific details at least you can give us an idea of what is available for background checks to satisfy the public out there too that, you know, things are, you know—you are looking out for the public's interest also.

Justice Jones: Sorry, before the DPA, I forget to ask that we also consult with the Police Complaints Authority.

Mr. Harrison: Yes. Chair, I endorse everything you said where it is we utilize the services of the SSA. The SSA provides rigorous background checks of all candidates in the process. We also have credit checks as well where it is the candidate would have to provide issues of bankruptcy.

And one thing I need to clear up, Chairman, you constantly use PricewaterhouseCoopers, PricewaterhouseCoopers was not any consultant who did our assessment. Odyssey was the consultant who did the assessment for us, the last assessment; the DCOP assessment. But we do have rigorous background checks for all candidates as it relates to issues of finance, as issues relating to crime as well.

Mr. Chairman: So, I am wondering—so then let us say someone is going up for the position of a Police Commissioner and hypothetically you are looking at police officers to give that information and you may have the issue arising where he may claim that those same officers he may have disciplined in the past or the same officers may have a grouse if he is, you know—have been a very sort of draconian leader or, you know, on his way up. So, I mean, it is like you are depending on officers to give you a sort of a go-ahead with a Commissioner and so I am wondering if there are some sort of a—is the Police Service Commission comfortable with that? Should we look for an independent personnel? Should we outsource, say officers from Barbados to come in here and, you know, do some investigation? What—I mean, is it something that the Police Service

Commission is entitled to, comfortable with, seeing that a Police Commissioner may come and say, “Well, those guys who did my investigations may have had some sort of grouse against me”?

Justice Jones: Well, to some extent there is the—the FIU is independent and the Police Complaints Authority is also an independent body. I mean, I recognize that, you know, that our options to investigation could be considered a bit limited. I could only say that if it arises that we are not sure—and, again, I am speaking, you know, without discussing with my Commission. But if it arises that issues arise in the course of the recruitment process which cause concern and we are not satisfied with, you know, the reports of the response that we have gotten from the investigating officers, then we will have to put something in place. You know, it is difficult for me now to ascertain what because it depends on the particular situation, but I think that it clearly will be important enough for the Commission to devise a way or means of feeling comfortable with the investigation. I do not know if that has—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. Thank you. So, natural justice, I think, would probably, you know, ensure that you do tell the candidates that there are certain allegations against you and see their response. Because even now we are living in a world where you have social media misinformation where the public may suddenly be fed information about somebody who may be applying for a position. So, how heavily do you weigh into these? I mean, obviously it is really when official complaints go to the PCA that, I think, you would entertain that. But in terms of your vetting process, do you—also, if there are things out in social media, would you factor that process into telling the candidates that certain persons may be spreading things or misinformation? Do you have any—a need for any sort of personnel to look into these things that are out there in social media?

Justice Jones: Well, certainly. I mean, again, it is difficult to anticipate what we will do in certain circumstances. But if it comes to our attention that there are allegations, whatever level of allegations, it is important for us to investigate and also give the person an opportunity of responding. That is, you know—that is fairness that is justice that is how we will have to operate. In terms of—I think that you are also asking whether we will monitor social—I am not a social media person, I have to confess, but we will monitor these aspects. It would seem to me that the process of the investigation, all of those avenues will be monitored. You know, there are interviews—I assume that interviews with, you know, persons in contact with the individual, if there are allegations, they will be investigated and it will come to us for our determination as to whether the person is a proper and fit person for the job.

Mr. Harrison: Chair, what it is I would add as well, in the past when there was information that was received, be it social media, the Commission would take the opportunity during the interview to sort of enquire about those allegations, for want of a better word, and give the person an opportunity to be heard and then the Commission would decide whether or not, based on what it is they hear and heard from the social media, and what it is they are hearing from the individual, make a decision going forward. So, we have always been giving the person the opportunity to be heard, whether it is there are any allegations out there.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Member Lutchmedial, I think you have a question you wanted to pose.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Yes, Chair, I have quite a few now actually because—well, I am interested in, firstly—so, what I am hearing is that there are three bodies, independent bodies, that would be used in this vetting process, the SSA, the PCA and the FIU, all of whom are independent of the TTPS. But the experience of 2021, which has resulted in—well, the new Commission being here and, you know, the fact that we do not have an appointed Commissioner of Police and the fact that \$124,000 was spent without any end result, there was an issue that arose with information coming to the Commission subsequent to the merit list being prepared, despite all of that as described by Mr. Harrison as the rigorous vetting process, including credit checks and so on. Given that experience, has the Commission considered what would be its options moving forward if a situation—because what I am getting at is, should a situation like that arise again, information comes at you from many difference sources. We are even talking about social media now which is, you know—could be extremely reliable. It could range from extremely reliable to extremely malicious. So, how does the Commission intend when its legal process—because I am concerned about—there is a Legal Notice which details a process which, to me, the Commission is bound by. And if at some point when you are functus in your role as per Legal Notice, something comes to your attention, how would you treat with it? Because that to me is something that no one knew how to deal with and certain things may have happened which was a cause of grave public concern. So, has the Commission addressed its mind to that issue at all in light of what happened last year so that we do not have a repeat?

Justice Jones: Member Lutchmedial, I do not think the Commission has directly addressed its mind to that. I mean, what I would say is that, what we certainly do is seek legal advice, you know, to determine, you know, what is the legal—what are the legal options open to us before making

any decision. I think that is the best that I can say. Of course, each matter depends on, as you know, on the particular facts. But we will certainly—I think I can comfortably speak for the Commission and say that the Commission has shown a concern that it seeks legal advice where necessary. And I can say that this would be one of the situations where we would certainly seek legal advice and then do the best that we can in the circumstances.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Has the Commission—through you, Mr. Chair, has the Commission considered the role of—well, I think maybe someone already asked this—an independent investigator being attached to the Commission who is separate from any public bodies who may have had contact or any other body that may have had contact with candidates, and so on. I think the Chair alluded to this. There is someone outside of the jurisdiction even coming in to do investigations just to be a little more thorough and to have a process that on one can criticize as being contaminated and perhaps the DPA could say whether or not funds would be available for something like that.

Mr. Harrison: *[Laughs]*

Justice Jones: Well, because—*[Inaudible]*—I think, certainly, this is a suggestion that we will certainly think about and take, you know—it is worth exploring, you know. And I can speak for the Commission, I think that we are prepared to consider whatever is necessary to ensure a fair and transparent and safe process with respect to the recruitment of a Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Police.

Mr. Harrison: I think the purpose of this Committee is where it is we can actually get recommendations and try out best to see how it is we could implement those recommendations. So, it is something that we would take and find the means if necessary, if that is what the Commission so desires, and find the means necessary, because I think it would be beneficial if it is we have somebody independent or somebody, as you said, outside our jurisdiction who can perform that duty of investigator. So, it is something that we would take into consideration.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Sure. And the last question, Mr. Harrison, as I have you, in the event that this particular Commission now—because I think Judge said they are considering it—in the event that they decide they are not outsourcing the recruitment and selection process but they would like to do it in-house, you mentioned that the Service Commissions Department does in fact have resources, how soon could those resources be made available to the Police Service Commission, you know, in order for them to get started on this recruitment and selection process, provided that

they are not going use a firm but they want to do it in-house for financial or other reasons?

Mr. Harrison: We would work with the time frame that the Police Service Commission said. We did it in the past and we work with their time frame as well. But we must not use expediency as a crutch in order for us to not get the best person. I think we need to get the ideal candidate. We need to get the ideal persons to hold those two positions. So, we do not want to rush it. We do not want to have to repeat ourselves or repeat our mistakes from the last process. So, while it is the country wants us to appoint or wants the Police Service Commission to appoint somebody as soon as possible, I think we must err on the side of caution where it is we take our time, have robust testing, have robust vetting as well so that we can get the ideal candidate for the position.

Ms. Lutchmedial: But are you convinced that the resources needed for that robust process are available in-house should the Commission decide that they are not outsourcing that function?

Mr. Harrison: We have some—

Ms. Lutchmedial: And can they be made available?

Mr. Harrison: We have some and we can always make them available to the Commission. Yes.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Okay. Thank you.

Justice Jones: With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I just want to add one thing and I think it probably is important for me to—and this is the proper thing to hear. The Commission understands that the country is anxious with respect to the state of crime in the country and the appointment of a permanent Police Commissioner and permanent Deputy Police Commissioners. We understand that. As I indicated earlier, we too are anxious. But I think—and I speak for the Commission in this regard, that it is important that we get the process right. There are many things that can delay the process and cause—and when you rush something and do not think it through properly, the delays caused by that could be even three or four times the length of time it would have taken if we sat down and we looked at everything carefully. So, yes, the country is correct to be concerned. The Commission has been in office for six months. The country has not seen anything happening but a lot has been done and a lot is being done, but we have to ensure that we get it right. The country deserves nothing less than that and the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: I thank you for that and agree with you, we need to get it right and remember in the past we have been waiting years sometimes with an acting Police Commissioner, you know. But I would like to enquire this. In your second submission dated April 28, 2022, you stated that:

A mixed methods approach is used to assess the performance of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners of Police which comprised both result-oriented and competency-based components.

Now, seeing that we may have a delay because we are trying to get it right, and we may have our Acting Commissioner of Police in office for a while, is there any—is the incumbent subjected to any sort of appraisal methods? You know, how do you monitor our incumbent seeing that he may be in office, you know, for a while?

11.45 a.m.

Justice Jones: Yes. I mean, we certainly—the fact that we—the person in office is acting does not prevent the procedures that are in place in terms of the Constitution and in terms of how we manage the performance appraisals going forward. And, in fact, that is a continuing, an ongoing process that is not dependent on whether the person in the office is acting or not. I hope that has answered your question.

Mr. Chairman: So, is the Police Service Commission of the view that the current performance appraisal method is adequate in assessing the competencies of the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner of Police?

Justice Jones: We are—sorry. Perhaps I can put it this way. There is a system in place and that system continues to operate. The commission is looking at the performance appraisal system or process that is there and it is considering whether there are any things that we could do to improve it. But, again, that is also an ongoing process. We have a subcommittee that is in fact doing that as we speak. But while we are doing that, the existing system continues and at this stage I cannot say whether we are going to make any changes or not. But what I can say is that we are considering if there needs to be an improvement to the system.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I guess, as you are in office for a longer—you will be in office for a longer period, then you may decide, you know, what improvements you may need in that aspect.

The 2020 Annual Report of the Police Service Commission indicated that no performance appraisals were done for the Deputy Commissioners of Police due to short-term acting appointments. So this is why I was wondering, has the commission established a minimum period of service that an Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police must complete before he or she is subjected to a performance appraisal?

Justice Jones: Sorry. I now understand the question. I think I am going to ask the DPA and/or

the—

Mr. Harrison: We will pass on to Ms. Bassarath to respond to these questions.

Ms. Bassarath: Sure. At present the framework does not establish—At present, the framework—
[*Technical difficulties*]

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. I think we have to mute some of your devices and just have your own on. Thanks.

Ms. Bassarath: So, at present the current framework does not establish a minimum period someone must be acting in order to be appraised. And that is one of the considerations right now of the subcommittee who is looking into the performance appraisal framework in place.

Mr. Chairman: Could you give me the members of the subcommittee?

Justice Jones: Yes. The members of the subcommittee are within the commission. Members of the commission who—it is a subcommittee of the commission. I do not know if it is you want me to identify the specific members?

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Thanks. Yes.

Justice Jones: I do feel a bit uncomfortable doing so, Mr. Deyalsingh, but I suppose I will have to. They are—

Mr. Chairman: You could provide it in writing if you so like.

Justice Jones: We will provide it in writing if you want.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Yeah. Does any—at this stage would any other member have any further questions to pose to the commission? I guess, no. Well, one other question I have. As there is the new Police Service Commission, do you have like, a communications protocol where confidential issues that you may have had in your discussions would not put its—reach the public domain? Emails, finding its way in the public domain. Is there a proper etiquette on how to handle disagreements within your commission? Do you need someone with that training? For instance, when the Independent Senators were appointed, we were briefed of how we were supposed to behave by the President's Office and we had a two-day seminar. Persons coming into your commission, new members, do they have any sort of engagement where they are told how to actually conduct their services? In fact, do you have a dedicated secure email for your members now that they are within the Police Service Commission? The DPA could answer that also, you know. Anyone could probably answer that question. Yeah.

Justice Jones: Chairman, why we do not have a—we have not had any training or exposure in

this regard, I think that what I can say is that, we have all seen what has happened in the past and, you know, certainly, I speak for the whole commission and we learn from that experience.

Yes, there is a dedicated email that we have been advised assists in the confidentiality of our communications. And, of course, as an individual basis, each member is particularly given, you know, the circumstances that arose in recent past, is very, very concerned about confidentiality and even by way of mistakes, you know, ensuring that what is said and what is done within the commission, I will say four walls but you know what I mean, remains there. I think we had also given you a written response with respect to some of the security aspects that we have put in place with respect to communication. So, I do not know if you want me to repeat that but it is there in writing. And I do not know Mr. Harrison wants to add anything to that.

Mr. Harrison: We have also the vote of secrecy.

Justice Jones: Yes.

Mr. Harrison: We have the vote of secrecy with all members of the commission as well.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Chair, could I ask one question please?

Mr. Chairman: Sure, member.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Has—to the, I think this would be to the Police Service Commission. Concerns were raised about acting appointments given—when it came to our attention that the—well, the new notices now that parliamentary approval would be required for acting appointments. And a concern was raised about how tedious it might be for short periods of acting to have to go by way of notification to the Parliament. Is that something that the commission has considered making any recommendations with respect to having a period of time? Like let us say, under five days or whatever it is, for short appointments for acting in the absence of the Commissioner of Police? Just to minimize the amount of red tape and bureaucracy that is needed? Or do you feel that parliamentary oversight even for acting appointments is something that is still necessary, given the present notices and how it operates?

Justice Jones: Ms. Lutchmedial, we have to comply with what is the law. The position that we are faced with now is that we will require parliamentary approval for all acting appointments. We will put things in place to ensure that we can get to Parliament as soon as possible in this regard. I cannot, you know, confirm that Parliament will work quickly in that regard. But I can only assume that in the interest of the security and safety of Trinidad and Tobago that everyone will do their part to have these appointments made as soon as possible. I do not know if I have answered your

question but I think that is the best I could do in the circumstance.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Well, the question really was whether you, as a commission, whether you have considered making any representations to alter that process as required presently by the legal notices?

Justice Jones: I think we—look, I will say at this stage, no. And I will say that because, to be frank, we are at this stage engaged in really playing catch up. You know, we are, there are a lot things that the commission would like to do but we cannot even think about that now.

Ms. Lutchmedial: It is not on your radar at the moment, I guess.

Justice Jones: At the moment, you know. But certainly we will take that on board and, you know, work with that as soon as we are able.

Ms. Lutchmedial: Thank you very much, Judge. I appreciate your frankness.

Mr. Chairman: Are any members like Ms. Maxine Attong willing to share any other information? Do you have anything you want to share with us? Any thoughts you would want to give us as we are coming to a close? Or, other members, Mr. Ian Ramdhanie or Kavita Bassarath?

Ms. Attong: Thanks, Chair. I would just like to say that it is really a unique opportunity to be with Ms. Jones and the other members of the commission. And I am really, I mean, I am really, I am very happy and honoured to have the opportunity to serve the country. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Ramdhanie, any sort of comment you would like to make also?

Mr. Ramdhanie: Hi, good evening. I am looking forward towards the assistance that this service commission—sorry, the Joint Select Committee can provide us with our recommendations and their recommendations into the necessary institutions to assist us in achieving our objectives that we have and our mandate that we have towards the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, we look forward in where our recommendations and your recommendations can bear such fruit. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Kavita Bassarath.

Ms. Bassarath: I am good. Thank you.

Mr. Harrison: Ms. Bassarath is a member of the Service Commissions Department. She is not a member of the Police Service Commission.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. At this stage I must say I have to thank you for the, you know, the positions you have taken up. It is an opportunity to serve your country. It is not an easy job especially now that you have to build the confidence back into the country in terms of the—choosing the important functions of, you know, choosing a Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner of Police, fully

independent persons in that position who can serve the public.

So therefore, at this stage I am happy to say that, we are here to provide you with the tools. You have to identify the tools and then we have to work with the DPA, and our recommendations would be to try to get any sort of tools that you may need to help in the process of getting these individuals chosen.

And as we are coming to a close, any of my members would like to make any comments or ask any questions, again? I guess not. So at this stage I would like to invite Justice Judith Jones, Chairman of the Police Service Commission to give us some brief closing comments.

Justice Jones: Chairman, they did not put those on the instructions to us, [*Laughter*] but quite briefly, and I want again to thank the Committee for the opportunity of putting to you, to Parliament and to the country our position with respect to the Police Service Commission. It is and, again, I will speak for the commission, it is an honour to serve Trinidad and Tobago and we hope that we can serve well. Again, I thank the Committee because you have given us the opportunity of indicating what we need to perform our duty as required by the Constitution and I think that is invaluable. I anticipate that we will be meeting again and I welcome it.

And I think, again, I want to commend the Chairman and the members for the manner in which the proceedings have been conducted. I myself have been before the Joint Select Committee once before in a long, long time ago in another incarnation and I was not quite sure of how, you know, the reception—what the reception would be like this morning. But I am very pleased that we have both been able to take forward the mandate of the Police Service Commission. And I hope that we have been able to explain and answer all the questions in a sufficient manner that we can both move forward together in this regard. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and members.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Justice Jones. Mr. Corey Harrison, could you please give us some closing comments?

Mr. Harrison: Chair, and members, I thank you for this opportunity again. This is our third incarnation of discussions on the institutional strengthening as it relates to the Service Commission Department. What it is I would want to say and what it is I want to reiterate is the issue of the Committee being that support for us to be able to get funding and our resources required. This is the message I need to send, not only to the public but for the Committee to provide that support for us. It has been a pleasure and I take this opportunity to say thank you.

Mr. Chairman: So definitely we need Justice Jones' committee to succeed, to help the country.

We definitely need Mr. Harrison to provide the staff. And this morning I think we identified certain issues that, you know, we would be able to move forward with. It is really for the country's benefit and we are all here. Forget whatever mistakes were made before. We are all here to move forward to see if we could put things in this place to prevent any unfortunate events happening again.

So at this stage I would like to thank the officials of the Office of the Director of Personnel Administration and the Police Service Commission for your contributions in today's proceedings. I would like to thank my Committee members who participated remotely, the staff of the Office of the Parliament for your procedural and logistical support, and the viewing and listening audience. At this stage I would like to declare this meeting adjourned. Thank you very much. Have a good evening.

Members: Thank you, Chair.

12.05 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*