

# Personnel Responds to the Competition



In the last issue of *TCS International* (Vol. 5, # 1), we were provided with some insight on how our competitors deal with human resource development (HRD) issues. The Trade/Political Personnel Division (SPF) thought it might be interesting to see how DFAIT compares, and to highlight some new initiatives in the works. Check out the previous article on the Intranet under "News".

## 1. RECRUITMENT

As most of you know, the process of recruiting Foreign Service Officers and, more specifically, Trade Commissioners, has been in place for many, many years. Most of us can still remember sweating through those tricky interview questions and wondering what happened to the other prospective candidates. Our recruitment process still involves writing the Foreign Service Knowledge Test, and then going through a day-long interview and other hurdles. Since our system recruits, for the most part, at the entry level, we mostly target our outreach campaign at recent university graduates.

One element of our recruitment that has changed over the years however, is that of eligibility criteria. In an effort to reduce the number of candidates writing the FS Exam (from a high of 7000+ in one year) and to target candidates with profiles more closely aligned to the needs of the department, we have established fairly specific eligibility criteria (e.g. two Bachelor's degrees, one of which must be in Law, Economics or Commerce, or any Bachelor's degree

combined with knowledge of one of the five difficult languages). This targeted campaign has been successful in that we now recruit candidates with specialized skills and with proven abilities in one or more foreign languages.

In 1997, we also undertook a proactive outreach campaign targeted at university business faculties, to ensure that the TCS career opportunities were well known in that community. This outreach campaign has generated positive results, in that we noticed a marked increase in the number of business graduates who wrote the FS exam last October.

The composition of commercial staff in our missions overseas mirrors that of our competitors, in that a growing proportion are locally engaged staff (LES). While LES provide much-needed continuity and sectoral expertise, there is some concern that approximately 60 percent of the total complement of trade commissioners is based in Canada, with only 40 percent in our missions. The Minister for International Trade is committed to reversing this trend, and has pledged to work assiduously at creating more positions overseas for trade commissioners. A few concrete steps have already been taken in this direction, with the creation in 1997 of five new Canada-based positions overseas, and the promise of a few more in 1998.

While other agencies tend to run student trainee programs in their missions, DFAIT is not in the business of

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