

Recruitment - Internal Audit

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Dates Conducted: 6th – 20th February 2018

Introduction

The following document details the process, procedures and findings from an Internal RED C audit into the recruitment processes used by RED C to provide members for the Citizens Assembly.

This audit was conducted in order to provide re-assurance around all recruitment, following identification of an anomaly in recruitment of replacement members for the January 2018 meeting. A small number of replacement members were recruited in a different way to that agreed. This came to light in final checks conducted by the Secretariat among new members attending their first meeting on the 13th & 14th January 2018, when one replacement member stated that recruitment had been initiated by telephone rather than face to face. The audit was conducted to confirm that this was an isolated incident, pertaining to one interviewer and not more extensive.

The audit examines and reviews;

- a. The recruitment methodology recommended by RED C
- b. The recruitment methodology agreed and used
- c. How and if that recruitment methodology was delivered
- d. The detail of if and how members were irregularly recruited
- e. Adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes

The auditors initially requested a full overview of processes from the project management team. At different points throughout the process the auditors met with and asked questions of the team to facilitate the process.

A full review of the project from start to finish was undertaken with particular emphasis on the recruitment procedures for members, validation of same and quality control procedures followed throughout the process. We also went through timelines of the project, from the original brief and recruitment of the original 99 members and 99 shadow members, through to the extension of the assembly to ensure the processes and procedures remained consistent throughout.

We have outlined each step below together with our findings.

Auditors Suitability and Qualifications

This internal audit has been compiled by senior members of the RED C team. To bring as much independence as possible, a team that have not been intimately involved in the project have conducted the audit.

Sinead Mooney is Managing Director of RED C and Ciara Clarke is Associate Director and a Social & Political Research specialist. Both of these staff members have not been intimately involved in this project, and have therefore been tasked with completing the audit.

Sinead Mooney

With 25 years' experience in the market research industry Sinead brings a wealth of knowledge to all research projects and analysis. Sinead co-founded RED C Research in 2003 prior to which she was a director in Lansdowne Market Research. An award winning researcher, Sinead incorporates the latest techniques and statistical analysis to provide the greatest level of insight and clarity on each project. A graduate of the College of Marketing and Design, Sinead is a member of the Marketing Institute and is a regular guest lecturer at The Smurfit Business School and has guest lectured at DIT. Sinead started her career working in the field department of market research agency AGB, this coupled with her extensive experience of all types of research projects from both an operational and research perspective make her the ideal candidate to complete this audit.

Ciara Clarke

Ciara graduated with a Bachelor of Business Studies from Sligo IT, and went on to complete a Master in Marketing at Smurfit Business School. During her Masters she conducted a range of qualitative and quantitative research projects for blue chip companies in Ireland. Prior to, this she received her primary honours degree in Business, specialising in Marketing, from Sligo Institute of Technology.

She has been working with RED C since 2008 and works extensively on public sector and polling. Ciara's experience spans a wealth of industries and clients including Dublin Airport Authority, Irish Distillers, Three, Bank of Ireland and all aspects of RED C political polling.

Ciara has a detailed understanding of the research processes and measures used to perform the highest quality research.

Understanding of Recruitment Process & Review Parameters

The auditors started the audit process by reviewing all documentation in the project file. This included the original proposal, subsequent methodology and briefing documents, internal field briefing documents, and all saved and important correspondence.

Following this detailed examination of the documentation, a briefing on the project by the project team was held, where the proposals and process was explained in detail to the audit team. This briefing session included a detailed question and answer session.

The audit team then examined the details of the approach used in design, set up, allocation, checking and verification of recruitment. To do this, they completed the following tasks

- a) reviewed the design of the sampling procedure in order to ensure that this approach best met the needs of the Assembly
- b) reviewed the instructions provided to each interviewer to ensure that the strict instructions for recruitment were clearly set out in both documentation and the questionnaires
- c) reviewed the completed questionnaires across the interviewers to determine if they had been completed correctly
- d) reviewed the geographic location of completed interviews to determine if the interviewing had been carried out as requested
- e) reviewed the process of checking completed questionnaires by the field team before the information was passed to the verification team
- f) reviewed the level of verification, the verification process, and that the questions asked were appropriate in order to provide re-assurance that members have been correctly recruited and fitted the requirements as set out by the Assembly
- g) fully reviewed the details individually of all members recruited, with particular emphasis on the seven people that were irregularly recruited by an interviewer, in order to understand, for each, what factors impacted on this irregular recruitment.

In reviewing all of these different parts of the process, the audit team were conscious throughout of understanding and reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes.

The Review Findings

Overall Summary

The audit team found that the irregular recruitment of replacement members for the 13th/14th January 2018 meeting is isolated to this one incident only and to one interviewer.

The audit confirmed that the methodology, sampling, recruitment procedures and the verification processes were enforced at all times and were significantly ahead of best practice in the industry.

The audit team concluded that apart from this isolated incidence, all other recruitment completed was conducted to very high-quality standards and in line with the agreed methodology.

1. Overview of Project and Method Recommendations of the Project Team.

The audit team have reviewed the project specifications and the proposal written by RED C. It is clear that the task in hand is a difficult one. The brief summary of the key task that RED C were contracted to supply are shown below.

The Customer is seeking a representative sample of 99 Members of the public and substitutes who are willing to act as Members, of the Citizens' Assembly.

The Members should be chosen at random and be broadly representative of demographic variables as reflected in the Census including age, gender, social class, regional spread etc. They should also be on the electoral register to vote in a referendum.

The services under this Contract will include:

- / Identification of 99 Members of the public who fit the criteria above and who are willing to become Members of the Citizens' Assembly to participate in up to 10 weekend meetings during the course of a year;*
- / Identification of 99 "shadow" Members who will be available to substitute for Members who are unable to participate in up to 10 weekend meetings during the course of a year;*
- / During the course of the expected duration of the Assembly identification of further specific substitute Members if the previous 2 categories are unavailable.*

Expectations of attendees were as follows

- 1. To attend as many as possible of the 10 planned weekends that the Assembly will convene throughout the year, from October 2016 onwards.*
- 2. Attend from Saturday morning to Sunday Lunchtime.*
- 3. Attendees will not be paid for attendance, but subsistence and overnight accommodation will be provided for those that require it.*
- 4. The location of the weekend meetings will be within a 20km radius of Dublin*

Within the proposal RED C did make clear that it was extremely difficult to ensure that a sample of 99 people, however well recruited, could be representative.

The small number of attendees limits exactly how representative the sample can be, as the margin for error with a sample of 99 people is as high as + or -10%, even if it is recruited to exactly match the population.

However, within this, there are things we can do in order to at least ensure that the sample is as representative as possible. We will control the demographic breakdown of the sample by demographics such as age, gender, social class and region. By recruiting our attendees based on these criteria, we can aim to replicate the population as a whole who are eligible to vote in referendum in Ireland.

Within the proposal RED C also recommend the use of incentive to make the process easier. *There is no intention at present by the Department to incentivise people to take part in the process, and this will make recruitment more difficult, as it is a relatively significant expectation on people's time with no recompense apart from the interest in being part of the assembly. Normally when conducting market research for our industry and political clients, it would be standard to offer an incentive. Even to take part in 1 x 1.5 hour focus groups we would offer at least €50 to those attending, to cover their time, travel and subsistence.*

If possible we would recommend that some incentive was introduced to make recruitment easier, and to ensure that we are able to recruit all different types of people – not just those that have a strong interest in the process. An incentive of €100 or €200 to attend at least 5 weekends would potentially allow us to recruit a somewhat more representative sample of people, rather than just those who are interested in political debate and discourse.

The following policies and exclusions were decided upon by the Assembly

- / A financial incentive will not be offered to encourage participation. It is acknowledged that this may result in a group that have a stronger civic interest than a truly representative sample.
- / As the Assembly will be discussing five separate predefined topics, it was agreed that members of advocacy groups on these topics (should they be randomly approached), will be excluded from membership of the Assembly. The rationale for this decision is based on the fact that interest groups will be invited to make presentations/submissions on the matters concerning them. All members of advocacy groups representing areas not covered in the Assembly will be included.
- / With regard to the inclusion of politicians (should they be randomly approached), it was agreed that T.D.s and Senators should be excluded as they will have an opportunity to debate the issues when the Assembly reports to the Houses of the Oireachtas. All other politicians and elected officials will be included.
- / Those working in market research were excluded on the basis that they will have a high familiarity with the process and therefore this could potentially bias their position in the Assembly. Journalists were also excluded to ensure the confidentiality of the Assembly and to make sure no undue influence could be exerted either directly or indirectly on other potential Assembly members.

The initial recruitment of members was for a period of 10 meetings. On completion of the 10 initial meetings, a further two weekend meetings were added for January and March 2018, as the process had taken longer than originally anticipated. The auditors reviewed correspondence from this time to assess the level of drop out and it was clear the drop off rate of members had increased significantly due to the fact that members had initially committed to a total of 10 meetings.

The original methodology for recruitment remained in place for replacements. The audit team found that the RED C project team did approach the Assembly about trying different ways to improve recruitment, as there were very specific criteria required for replacements at this time; e.g.

younger males who would be willing to attend. However, the Assembly confirmed that the same approach should be used.

While the auditors understand the rationale for keeping the same approach, as it provides the purest means of random recruitment, there is an argument to be made that perhaps the RED C team should have pushed harder to agree an alternative methodology due to the very specific sub-set of the population being required at this stage of the process.

Further to this, there is documentation to suggest interviewers were struggling to find these specific demographics willing and able to take part, particularly for the last phase of recruitment. It is understood that in the end, prior to the replacement members being recruited for the January 2018 meeting, that RED C did again suggest changes to the recruitment procedure, including the need to incentivise members.

In the end an agreement was reached to increase payment to interviewers for recruitment, in order to encourage interviewers to engage with the project again. It is the auditor's opinion that while this often assists when projects prove difficult and was well received by recruiters, the difficulties which they were facing in finding this specific sub-set of the population remained.

2. Methodology and Sampling Review

Overview of Approach

RED C recommended recruiting the members to take part in the Citizens Assembly using a team of face to face focus group recruiters located throughout the country, as this would provide the purest means of recruitment. RED C Interviewers recruited participants by cold calling door-to-door to households in their allocated DED area which was issued to them by RED C.

A detailed random multi-level approach was used for development of a representative sample frame that could be used for the recruitment of both original members and replacements to the Assembly. In order to ensure a good regional spread in recruitment, interviewers were given the task of identifying a maximum of 10 respondents, 5 for the main list, and up to 5 people for the reserve list. RED C allocated people across a total of 24 locations across the country. As such, a team of 20 highly professional recruiters were used to find the representative sample of attendees to take part. The 15 broad regional areas used are standard for conducting larger surveys across the country. The number of sampling points was based on the need for interviewers to conduct a number of recruitment interviews in each sampling point and to keep within a reasonable budget.

Audit response

The Audit team have reviewed the methodology suggested and are satisfied that this approach was in line with industry standards, and best practice face to face market research sampling techniques.

- a) The broad regional areas used are in line with standards set for face to face random quota-based surveys conducted by the industry in Ireland
- b) The sample points were selected as agreed at random within the full list of DED's in each of the 15 broad regional areas.
- c) The quotas set to try and provide a representative sample were correct and in line with the latest census and QNHS data, and the start points chosen for interviewers were correctly picked in line with the population across all DED's within each regional area.

The auditors have noted that there is little documentation regarding the recruitment of replacements and how this should differ, if at all, from the initial recruitment procedures. Therefore, the very strict guidelines outlined at the outset implicitly remained in place throughout, even when interviewers were looking for very specific replacement criteria.

3. Interviewer Instructions

Interviewers were provided with a written set of instructions and all received a one on one briefing by the fieldwork management team. This is further reinforced on the recruitment questionnaire used by interviewers on the project.

Audit response

The Audit team have reviewed the interviewer instructions and are happy that they were clear and unambiguous. Recruiters were told that the project is to be conducted face-to-face with specific sample selection procedures to follow, these instructions were reinforced at different stages.

It was noted that there were provisions over and above industry standards within the instructions.

- a) There was strong reference to the fact that the process must be adhered to and that anyone in the general public approaching interviewers should not be recruited.
- b) The instructions also made clear that the members recruited would be contacted separately to confirm their details, how they were recruited, and whether they were happy to attend.
- c) It was noted by the audit team that provision was given for any interviewer working on the project to contact the field team even outside of normal working hours, which is over and above industry standards.

In a question and answer session with the fieldwork management team working on this project, it was clear that all interviewers were briefed individually by phone and that the instructions were reiterated in this manner.

As this approach was perhaps more stringent than for most projects, it is clear that several interviewers contacted the fieldwork team for clarification and were informed that the project must be completed in the specific manner as outlined. This process remained in place throughout the entire project.

The same recruitment guidelines for the original panel and replacements remained in place.

4. The Questionnaire & Handbook

A number of paper questionnaires were provided to recruiters in order to complete recruitment, and a handbook on the Assembly to provide more information to those they were aiming to recruit.

Audit response

The Audit team have reviewed the questionnaire and are happy that it provided a clear and fixed approach for interviewing to ensure all members were recruited in the same way to the standards agreed.

- a) The questions asked about membership of specific advocacy groups were clear and unambiguous, and the questionnaire clearly detailed that anyone belonging to these groups be excluded.
- b) The questions also clearly asked potential members if they were eligible and registered to vote, and if not that they should be excluded.
- c) The details collected were at a standard required to ensure that those recruited could easily be identified.
- d) The survey also clearly demanded that the interviewer sign the form to accept that the interview had been carried out in accordance with the instruction.
- e) There is an argument that the respondent could also have been asked to sign the questionnaire to declare details gathered are correct, to provide further reassurance.

The handbook clearly explained what was required of those members the company was trying to recruit.

5. Review of completed questionnaires

A full review of all completed questionnaires has been completed by the audit team. This involves each individual paper questionnaire being reviewed for completeness and accuracy, and that the data in the questionnaires matches the database. The database was also updated for all past and current members with any relevant information that may provide further verification of the quality of interviewing of all other members. This included adding the location of each member by recruiter and day of recruitment. This enables the audit team to check that the regional spread of members recruited by each interviewer on a given day does not suggest any anomalies in how the recruitment was undertaken. The number of interviews being completed by each interviewer was also checked, particularly toward the end of the process when it was clear that it was even more difficult to recruit any member to attend. (For the full spreadsheet please see Appendix A)

Audit Response

- a) All of the questionnaires passed on for verification by the field management team have been correctly completed.
- b) A full review of geographical location of each person that has ever been a member has shown anomalies for the seven-people recruited as replacement members by one interviewer for the Assembly weekend in January 2018. The audit found that once put side by side, the seven members irregularly recruited came from such a wide range of regions, in such a short timeframe, that they could not possibly have been recruited face to face by one interviewer in the manner that was specified. This was not noticed by the field department, as all questionnaires were not returned in one go and were fed back individually to the office. One anomaly was noted, and was checked, but a plausible reason was provided. As the respondent was being contacted at the next stage of verification no further action was taken at this point.
- c) The review concluded that no further regional anomalies existed, thus verifying that all other members recruited, at all stages of the process, had been completed correctly. This review and conclusion also included those members recruited earlier in the process by the interviewer in question.
- d) The review has shown that the members recruited are spread across 20 interviewers, and that no interviewer has a very disproportionate level of recruitment, although it has also shown that only 2-3 interviewers were able to recruit members in the final phase. As a result the audit conducted a more detailed evaluation about each individual that was recruited in the Dec'17/Jan'18 phase of recruitment (Appendix C).

6. Checking of completed questionnaires on arrival

All completed questionnaires sent in by interviewers were checked by the field management team, and the data uploaded to a spreadsheet that was then sent to the telephone centre for verification.

Audit Response

The audit team reviewed this process and checked all rejected questionnaires, against those that were allowed to be sent for verification.

- a) The audit team found that this process had been properly completed across all questionnaires – checks included that the answers were all correct, that the quotas had been correctly applied, (including age, gender, social class and region), and that there were no obvious anomalies.
- b) A number of potential members that had been recruited were rejected at this stage, when the completed questionnaire did not match the guidelines set out. If there was any evidence from the questionnaire that the regularity of recruitment was in doubt, the interviewer was contacted for verification that the correct processes had been undertaken.
- c) Any interviewer that provided members that had not strictly followed the guidelines and method agreed, were contacted and told that they needed to follow the strict instructions provided.

The audit team found that checks on regional distribution were an important part of the process in the initial phase of recruitment, in order to ensure that the final sample matched the regional spread required.

Attrition among members was not focused on a regional basis, but rather more focused on age, gender and economic status. As such, when recruiting replacement members, in light of the fact that overall membership remained broadly regionally representative, the recruitment at that point was to focus on other demographic attributes used to control the sample including age, gender and economic status.

7. Verification and checks

During the process, all recruited members that had passed through the first stage of checks by the field team, were uploaded onto a database and sent to RED C's telephone centre based in Dundalk for independent verification. 100% of these were contacted by phone from the call centre by trained telephone interviewers. This verification process happened throughout the lifecycle of the project. This was used as a secondary validation screening process to double check that those who had been recruited were

- a. definitely happy to take part and
- b. were recruited as prescribed and
- c. were definitely eligible to take part.

The audit team reviewed the extent of verification versus industry standards, and whether the questions asked were adequate or could have been improved.

Audit Response

During the audit an up to date review of current industry standard was undertaken as benchmark.

IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme) standards cover the recruitment, training and appraisal of fieldwork staff, and the implementation of various administrative and validation procedures to maintain the quality and accuracy of data collected across the UK. The IQCS Council comprises elected members working in the industry and representing not only the various types of market research fieldwork undertaken, but also clients and various other industry bodies, including the MRS (market research Society), AQR (Association of Qualitative Research), MRQSA (Market Research Quality Standards Authority) and AURA (Association of Users of Research Agencies). IQCS standards for back checking of recruitment is for a minimum of 10% to be verified.

The Market Research Quality Standards Advisory Board (MRQSAB) is an all-industry body which brings together a number of trade and professional bodies, under the umbrella of MRS. MRQSAB's role is to develop and maintain minimum standards for market, social and opinion research, data collection and data processing. ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) 20252 standard for market research also requires a minimum of 10% back check verification.

In relation to this specific project the audit team found;

- a) The audit team noted that the 100% verification and back check process was well in excess of industry standards, and also in excess of the RED C usual project standard of 20% verification.
- b) The audit team reviewed the questions asked at the verification stage and found that they were a fair reflection of expected verification.
- c) The auditors can confirm that 100% verification was completed and no recruit passed through the process without this stage of the verification process being completed.

The audit team were fully satisfied that that the verification met industry standards for any normal project, and in fact, far exceeded the industry standard for scale of verification.

8. Detailed Review of All Members Recruited Irregularly

Immediately prior to the January 2018 meeting, a concerted phase of recruitment took place for replacement members, as several had fallen off due to the extension of the process at this stage past the originally agreed 10 meetings. In this phase 13 new members were recruited, 7 of which were irregularly recruited and 6 others. The audit team took special care to evaluate all the circumstances surrounding the 7 members recruited irregularly, and also the verification process of those members.

The audit process in each case was to

- a) evaluate the hard copy questionnaire provided for each of these members,
- b) review any geographical anomalies found among these members
- c) re-contact the interviewer that recruited these members to determine how they were recruited
- d) review all other members recruited by this interviewer in terms of
 - i) when they were recruited, and
 - ii) what the recruiter recalled if anything about that particular recruit
- e) review the decision for this interviewer to be included for work on this project
- f) call each of the seven members recruited irregularly to review their recruitment

It was noted by the audit team on review, that due to the difficulty in recruiting the specific subset of members required at this stage of the process, the RED C project team were asked if there was any way to make a last push for members. The RED C team did suggest an incentive was really the only way to really help recruitment, while maintaining the same method. This was acknowledged by the Assembly, but it was felt could not be included at this stage. Instead, it was agreed that offering an increase in the pay rate (the only other option available) could be included in order to persuade interviewers to recruit more replacements at this late stage of the process.

Audit response

A detailed spreadsheet of information for each member recruited by this interviewer is provided in Appendix B.

This review audit found the following findings.

- a) The field team were having extreme difficulty in persuading interviewers to take on any further recruitment at this stage of these specific sub set of the population, within the agreed original methodology, and in turn had to persuade interviewers to take on any further recruitment for the project to recruit these members.
- b) The interviewer in question, on contact stated that the recruitment of the irregularly recruited batch had been completed without following the strict guidelines agreed, and has provided a full description of what occurred. During this discussion the audit team were informed by the recruiter that family and friends had been asked if they knew of people who fit the criteria that may take part, and the interviewer then completed the survey over the phone with those people suggested by friends and family, instead of as required at random face to face.
- c) The field team were not informed that the interviewer had completed the recruitment irregularly at any stage.
- d) The field team focus on checking recruits at this stage was on their age, gender and social economic status, rather than region; which is why any regional anomalies did not flag this irregular recruitment at this stage.
- e) The interviewer sent in the completed interviews over a period of time, so that they were not checked all at the same time, and some anomalies were therefore missed.

- f) The verification staff performed all the checks as agreed between the Citizens Assembly and RED C at the time of project set up. These back checks were found to be significantly ahead of industry standards.
- g) The verification documents show that a full and proper verification procedure was initiated and completed with each of the seven members, but the responses given by each did not point to the irregularity of recruitment which has since been identified.

The interviewer in question was evaluated by the audit team. It found that the interviewer was a well-established member of the interviewing team having worked consistently with RED C for over five years. A review of the past work of the interviewer in question shows that quality has never been an issue for this interviewer prior to this project. It also found that the interviewer has been regularly back checked and passed all quality checks. There was no prior evidence that this interviewer would ever not follow instructions as agreed, and the first batch of work undertaken has been found to be completed within the strict guidelines agreed.

The audit team found that the checks in place for these recruited members exceeded industry norms, and the circumstances around the way they were sent in and the manner they were checked meant other possible signs of irregular recruitment were not seen.

However, the team also found that there were flags within the irregularly recruited members, including their locations and the number of recruits that one interviewer was able to provide, that could have been identified before they became members.

9. Detailed Review of All OTHER Members Recruited Dec17/Jan 18

The audit team took special care to also evaluate all the circumstances surrounding ALL members recruited most recently for replacement to the assembly between December 2017 and January 2018.

The audit process in each case was to

- a) ascertain how many people each interviewer managed to recruit (given the difficulty in doing so at this stage of the process)
- b) re-contact each interviewer that recruited members at this stage and firstly verify that they were recruited correctly
- c) secondly review with each interviewer
 - i) when each substitute was recruited, and
 - ii) what the recruiter recalled if anything about that particular substitute

Audit response

A detailed spreadsheet of information for each member recruited at this stage is provided in Appendix C.

This review audit found the following findings.

- a) The other 6 members recruited at this time were done so by 3 interviewers.
- b) The geographical location of these other members, in tandem with interviewing the recruiters and the processes followed, does not raise any potential anomalies.

10. Detailed Review of All Other Members

Full details of a review carried out of all previous members can be found in Appendix A.

Overall Summary of Findings

The audit team found that, the irregular recruitment of replacement members for the 13th/14th January 2018 meeting, is isolated to this one incident only and to one interviewer.

The audit confirmed that the methodology, sampling, recruitment procedures and the verification processes were enforced at all times and were significantly ahead of best practice in the industry.

The audit team concluded that apart from this isolated incidence, all other recruitment completed was conducted to very high-quality standards and in line with the agreed methodology.

Signed:



Sinead Mooney
Managing Director



Ciara Clarke
Associate Director

Appendix A - Audit Check Review of All Previous Members

Appendix B – Detailed Review of Members Recruited by the Interviewer Under Review

Appendix C – Detailed Review of Replacement Members Recruited for Jan 2018 Meeting in accordance with agreed methodology

Please note that Appendices B and C have been redacted to protect personal details of the Members of the Citizens' Assembly in line with Data protection requirements.