



Department of  
**Finance**

An Roinn

**Airgeadais**

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# Northern Ireland Civil Service Competency Framework



## **About this framework**

The Competency Framework was introduced for performance management purposes from April 2014 as a result of a commitment in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) People Strategy (2013-16) and from April 2015, for recruitment and selection purposes. The framework replaced the Professional Skills for Government, which identified competencies for members of the Senior Civil Service, and the NICS Core Competence Framework, which set out competencies for staff at grades from Administrative Assistant to Grade 6. It brought together competencies for all levels within a single framework.

The Competency Framework supports a number of key initiatives in the People Strategy, including the implementation of the new performance management system, improved staff resourcing, leadership development and learning and development.

The Competency Framework sets out how all of us in the NICS should work. It puts our Civil Service values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality at the heart of everything we do, and it aligns to the three high-level leadership behaviours that every civil servant needs to model as appropriate to their role and level of responsibility: Set Direction; Engage People and Deliver Results. Civil servants work in a wide range of jobs, but one thing we have in common is that we are here to support the Northern Ireland Executive, providing advice to help shape its policies, and ensuring seamless and practical implementation in line with those policies.

Competencies are the skills, knowledge and behaviours that lead to successful performance. The framework outlines ten competencies, which are grouped into three clusters as set out above. For each competency there is a description of what it means in practice, and some examples of effective and ineffective behaviours at all levels. The competencies are intended to be discrete and cumulative, with each level building on the levels below i.e. a person demonstrating a competency at level 3 should be demonstrating levels 1 and 2 as a matter of course. These indicators of behaviour are not designed to be comprehensive, but provide a clear sense of, and greater understanding and consistency about, what is expected from individuals in the NICS.

## **What does it mean for me?**

The Competency Framework is used for recruitment and promotion, performance management and development discussions. In these arrangements your business objectives will set out 'what' you need to achieve over the year and this competency framework will set out 'how' you need to achieve those objectives.

Not all of the competencies set out within the framework will apply equally to every post. Most of us will need to focus on a number of competencies, usually around six, identified with our manager as being essential to our role. You are encouraged to discuss the framework with your line manager to identify the competencies that apply most to your job role/potential future development.

This Competency Framework is generic to everyone regardless of the discipline they work in, in that all staff are required to demonstrate the high level leadership behaviours: Set Direction; Engage People and Deliver Results. Therefore, regardless of whether you work in a general service, professional, technical, specialist or industrial grade, the competencies

within this framework will apply to you. There are no additional professional competencies within the Competency Framework.

The framework is made up of ten competencies. Below is a list of all of the competencies with a high-level summary of each one.

## **Strategic Cluster – Setting Direction**

### **1. Seeing the Big Picture**

Seeing the big picture is about having an in-depth understanding and knowledge of how your role fits with, and supports, organisational objectives and the wider public needs. For all staff, it is about focusing your contribution on the activities which will meet Departmental and Programme for Government goals and deliver the greatest value. At senior levels, it is about understanding the political context and taking account of wider impacts, including the broader legislative agenda, to develop long term implementation strategies that maximise opportunities to add value to the citizen, support economic, sustainable growth and help to deliver the Northern Ireland Executive's priorities.

### **2. Changing and Improving**

People who are effective in this area are responsive, innovative and seek out opportunities to create effective change. For all staff, it is about being open to change, suggesting ideas for improvements to the way things are done, and working in 'smarter', more focused ways. At senior levels, this is about creating and contributing to a culture of innovation and allowing people to consider and take managed risks. Doing this well means continuously seeking out ways to improve policy development and implementation and building a more flexible and responsive NICS. It also means making use of alternative delivery models including digital and shared service approaches where possible.

### **3. Making Effective Decisions**

Effectiveness in this area is about being objective, using sound judgement, evidence and knowledge to provide accurate, expert and professional advice. For all staff, it means showing clarity of thought, setting priorities, analysing and using evidence to evaluate options before arriving at well reasoned, justifiable decisions. At senior levels, leaders will be creating evidence based strategies, evaluating options, impacts, risks and solutions. They will aim to maximise return while minimising risk and to balance political, legislative, social, financial, economic and environmental considerations to provide sustainable outcomes.

## **People Cluster – Engaging People**

### **4. Leading and Communicating**

At all levels, effectiveness in this area is about leading from the front and communicating with clarity, conviction and enthusiasm. It is about supporting principles of fairness of opportunity for all and a dedication to a diverse range of citizens. At senior levels, it is about establishing a strong direction and a persuasive future vision, managing and engaging with people with honesty and integrity, and upholding the reputation of the

Department and the NICS.

## **5. Collaborating and Partnering**

People skilled in this area create and maintain positive, professional and trusting working relationships with a wide range of people within and outside the NICS, to help to achieve business objectives and goals. At all levels, it requires working collaboratively, sharing information and building supportive, responsive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, whilst having the confidence to challenge assumptions. At senior levels, it is about delivering business objectives through creating an inclusive environment, encouraging collaboration which may cut across departmental, organisational and wider boundaries. It requires the ability to build constructive partnerships and effective relationships with Ministers and their Special Advisers.

## **6. Building Capability for All**

Effectiveness in this area is having a strong focus on continuous learning for oneself, others and the organisation. For all staff, it is about being open to learning and keeping their knowledge and skill set current and evolving. At senior levels, it is about ensuring a diverse blend of capability and skills is identified and developed to meet current and future business needs. It is also about creating a learning and knowledge culture across all levels in the organisation to inform future plans and transformational change.

## **Performance Cluster – Delivering Results**

### **7. Delivering Value for Money**

Delivering value for money involves the efficient, effective and economic use of taxpayers' money in the delivery of public services. For all staff, it means seeking out and implementing solutions which achieve a good mix of quality and effectiveness for the least outlay, thus reducing the risk of fraud and error. People who do this well base their decisions on evidenced information and follow agreed processes and policies, challenging these appropriately where they appear to prevent good value for money. At senior levels, effective people embed a culture of value for money within their area/function. They work collaboratively across boundaries to ensure that the NICS maximises its strategic outcomes within the resources available.

### **8. Managing a Quality Service**

Effectiveness in this area is about being organised to deliver service objectives and striving to improve the quality of service, taking account of diverse customer needs and requirements. People who are effective plan, organise and manage their time and activities to deliver a high quality and efficient service, applying programme and project management approaches appropriately and effectively to support service delivery. At senior levels, it is about creating an environment to deliver operational excellence and creating the most appropriate and cost effective delivery models for public services.

## **9. Delivering at Pace**

Effectiveness in this area means focusing on delivering timely performance with energy and taking responsibility and accountability for quality outcomes. For all staff, it is about working to agreed goals and activities and dealing with challenges in a responsive and constructive way. At senior levels, it is about building a performance culture to deliver outcomes with a firm focus on prioritisation and addressing performance issues resolutely, fairly and promptly. It is also about leaders providing the focus and energy to drive activities forward through others and encourage staff to perform effectively during challenging and changing times.

## **10. Achieving Outcomes through Delivery Partners**

Being effective in this area is about maintaining an economic, long-term focus in all activities. For all, it is about having a commercial, financial and sustainable mindset to ensure all activities and services are delivering added value and working to stimulate economic growth. At senior levels, it is about identifying economic, market and customer issues and using these to promote innovative business models, delivery partnerships and agreements to deliver greatest value; and ensuring tight controls of finances, resources and contracts to meet strategic priorities.