

**Candidate
Information
Booklet**

**IRC237061
Personal Secretary
Department of Finance
Northern Ireland Civil Service**

**Completed Application Forms
must be submitted to
HRConnect no later than 12
noon (UK time) on
Friday 14th June 2019**

**Please retain a copy of this
booklet for your reference
throughout the selection
process.**

Department of Finance

Communication between HRConnect and you

HRConnect will issue electronically as many competition communications as possible, you should therefore check your email account, including junk mail folder, to make sure that you don't miss any important communications in relation to this competition. There may, however, still be a necessity to issue some correspondence by hard copy mail.

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FOREWORD

Thank you for your interest in this competition to fill Personal Secretary positions within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). This competition will be used to fill current and future vacancies which may arise at this grade in any NI Department or associated Agency.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) supports the Assembly, the Executive and the institutions of government. It works to develop and implement government policies and helps deliver services to the public. The work of the Northern Ireland Civil Service touches on most aspects of life for the citizens of Northern Ireland. We wish, therefore, to attract applications that are as representative as possible of the entire community we serve.

The NICS recognises that our people are our greatest asset and our terms and conditions reflect this. The generous terms and conditions offered to Civil Servants are aimed towards an effective work life balance. Benefits include generous salary and leave entitlement, flexible working hours in most locations and opportunities for advancement. New appointees also have the choice of an occupational pension scheme or a partnership pension account.

Please read through the information contained within this booklet and if you feel you have the skills and attributes to fulfil the requirements of the role, I would encourage you to submit an application.

Finally, very best wishes in your application.

BACKGROUND

As one of Northern Ireland's largest employers, the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) employs over 23,000 permanent staff across a wide range of disciplines and aspects of government that touch on everyone's day to day lives. Many provide services to the public such as:

- paying benefits and pensions
- helping people to find work
- staffing prisons
- vehicle testing
- providing services to industry and agriculture
- maintaining roads

The NICS comprises all 10 Government Departments which have the responsibility of supporting the Assembly. It works to develop and implement government policies and helps deliver services to the public.

Details of the role and areas of responsibility for the 9 ministerial NICS Departments are available [here](#)

JOB DESCRIPTION

The main purpose and objective of a Personal Secretary is to provide an efficient, effective and responsive secretarial support service to the senior officer to ensure that their time is managed and utilised in the most effective manner. This requires proactive planning and managing of tasks within a constantly changing environment, the utilisation of well-developed interpersonal skills and adapting when necessary to changing roles and working patterns.

Personal Secretaries will also ensure that appropriate cover arrangements are in place in times of absence so that a satisfactory level of service is maintained.

Key Responsibilities

Diary Management

- Accurately organising and monitoring the senior officer's diary on a daily basis. Meeting with the senior officer regularly to discuss, prioritise and action diary commitments, cancellations and rescheduling appointments.
- Liaising with attendees to determine times, durations and venues for meetings. Booking rooms and venues and arranging for or providing hospitality as necessary. Copying and collating papers and ensuring that the required briefing and equipment is available. Making the necessary security arrangements and meeting, greeting and escorting visitors.
- Making cost-effective travel and accommodation arrangements through internal branches or directly with service providers.

Information Management

- Answering and vetting all incoming telephone calls based on knowledge of caller or issue(s) raised. Whenever possible, responding to callers directly by providing information or redirecting to the appropriate departmental official. Taking messages and obtaining contact numbers.
- Proactively manage emails, correspondence, papers, faxes, etc on arrival and identifying those requiring urgent action, highlighting deadlines and action points, attaching related papers and passing to senior officer for action. Where appropriate, redirecting to a departmental official for action, either without recourse to senior officer or in senior officer's absence. Keeping senior officer's informed of actions. Bringing important target dates and issues to senior officer's attention on an ongoing basis, based on knowledge and experience of the subject matter.
- Logging the various information types received and issued into electronic postbook(s), tracking responses through BF systems and chasing up outstanding responses to ensure deadlines are met.

- Typing, compiling and issuing emails, letters, acknowledgements, minutes, memos, faxes, tables, presentations, charts, slides and reports. Signing and circulating documents on senior officer's behalf. Typing and formatting documents from audio tapes and manuscripts.
- Co-ordinating inputs and drafting co-ordinated responses.
- Scanning, reformatting and updating documents, standardising layouts and creating templates and databases. Keeping knowledge and skills in this area up-to-date.
- Managing all emails, documents, correspondence, papers and files, in both paper and electronic filing systems – copying, cataloguing, filing, retrieving, archiving, reviewing and deleting/destroying in accordance with guidelines or protocol. Opening and maintaining registered files.
- Researching information sources such as the intranet/internet, Hansard or press articles for items such as publications, records, press releases, contact details and travel information.

Staff Supervision

- Providing a supervisory role for administrative or typing staff located within the office environment. Providing a supervisory role in relation to administrative, typing or agency staff providing cover within the office environment. Providing advice and guidance on systems and procedural issues, particularly to staff providing cover. Providing dedicated secretarial cover as required and secretarial back-up within the office environment.

Communciation

- Establish a close working relationship with their senior officer and secretarial/administrative colleagues and communicate effectively in order to meet targets and deadlines.

Miscellaneous

- Maintaining expenditure records, for example in relation to hospitality, stationery, training and mobile phones and processing creditor payments. Preparing expense claims.
- Monitoring the level of stationery supplies and office consumables and reordering as required.
- Secretariat of meetings including recording, producing and issuing minutes.
- Collating, recording and issuing various registers and returns. Proof reading and other tasks as delegated by the senior officer.

Knowledge and Skills

- Effective communication skills to engage with colleagues, often at a senior level in order to meet tight timescales.
- Well-developed organisational skills, for example being able to prioritise effectively and adapt to new situations as they arise.

- Ability to work flexibly on one's own initiative without direct supervision, to work under pressure, frequently to tight deadlines and to recognise when to delegate, or seek assistance, as required.
- Ability to interpret and analyse information including anticipating and managing problems;
- Ability to work collaboratively; share information, build supportive responsive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders thereby establishing good working relationships;
- Knowledge of management principles and administrative processes, in accordance with GDPR;
- Sound working knowledge in the use of Windows applications including Word, PowerPoint, Project and Excel.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

There are a number of permanent, full time vacancies across the NICS Departments. Alternative Working Patterns will be considered.

Further appointments may be made from this competition should NICS positions become vacant which require the same eligibility criteria and have similar duties and responsibilities.

Location

Location will be determined by the employing department. However, it is expected that the majority of posts will be in the Greater Belfast area with a small number of future vacancies throughout NI including the North West.

Salary

Salary will be within the range £24,429 - £25,225 (under review) within which pay progression will be performance related.

Starting salary will be at the minimum of the scale. If the successful candidate is an existing civil servant, normal pay on promotion/re-grading arrangements will apply.

Allowances

Depending on posting, an audio typing allowance may be payable.

Pensions

The NICS offers all employees an attractive pension package. Further details can be found on the Principal Civil Service Pensions Scheme (Northern Ireland) website at www.finance-ni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni

Holidays

In addition to public and privilege holidays, currently 12 days, the annual leave allowance will be 25 days, rising to 30 days after 5 years' service.

Hours of Work

The normal conditioned hours of work are full-time: 37 hours per week Monday to Friday. Most offices work flexi-time.

Vetting

An appointment will be dependent on the individual satisfying the vetting requirements for the post. The level of vetting required for this post is basic clearance. Some posts may require CTC clearance.

Probation

Confirmation of appointment will be dependent upon the satisfactory completion of a probationary period of one year. If performance, conduct or attendance during this period is not satisfactory the appointment may be terminated.

Career Development

The NICS is committed to career development and offers attractive career prospects across a wide variety of roles and professions. Career development is an integral part of the performance management system. Personal Development Plans identify learning and development needs with a view to enhancing skills and capabilities. NI Civil Servants have access to a wide range of internal job opportunities, including secondments with external organisations and are encouraged and supported in proactively managing their career.

Conflict of Interest

It is a basic requirement of all Civil Servants that their private activities should not bring them in to conflict with their official duties.

Conflict of Interest is not limited to the individual's own private, financial or other interests, as family, friends and associates may also have dealings which affect the Department's business directly or indirectly. Therefore to avoid any conflict or potential conflict and to demonstrate impartiality to the public at all times, an officer must not, without prior approval, engage in any activity which could be considered to be in conflict with official business.

As such, to protect employees and the Department from public criticism, it will be mandatory for the successful candidate to complete a Conflict of Interest declaration on appointment.

Further Information

Applicants wishing to learn more about the post before deciding to apply may telephone Joanne McCarthy on 028 90 251613 or email Joanne.McCarthy@finance-ni.gsi.gov.uk

If you have any questions about the competition process, or require any documentation in an alternative format, you should contact HRConnect on 0800 1 300 330 or email: recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Applicants must, by the closing date for applications have:

1. (a) 4 GCSEs (including English)

OR

- (b) Level 2 diploma in Secretarial Administration

OR

- (c) BTEC Level 2 Extended Certificate in Business Administration

AND

2. At least 1 year's secretarial experience*

AND

3. At least 1 years' experience using Microsoft Office including Outlook, Powerpoint, Excel and Word.

*Secretarial experience is defined as experience in an office based environment to include diary management, dealing with enquiries, word processing, planning and prioritising work, co-ordinating and drafting responses and secretariat to meetings

Applications will also be considered from applicants with relevant formal qualifications considered by the selection panel to be of an equivalent or higher standard to those stated.

Relevant or **equivalent** qualifications: give the type of qualification and date awarded (the date awarded is the date on which you were notified of your result by the official awarding body). If you believe your qualification is equivalent to the one required, the onus is on you to provide the panel with details of modules studied etc so that a well-informed decision can be made.

You will be required to provide documentary evidence of your qualifications at interview so please ensure you have these readily available.

SHORTLISTING CRITERION

In addition applicants should be aware that after an eligibility sift, should it be necessary to shortlist candidates to go forward to interview, the following shortlisting criteria will be used.

1. At least 1 year's audio typing experience.

Please note:

- You should ensure that you provide evidence of your experience in your application form, giving length of experience, examples and dates as required.
- It is not sufficient to simply list your duties and responsibilities.
- The selection panel will not make assumptions from the title of the applicant's post or the nature of the organisation as to the skills and experience gained.
- If you do not provide sufficient detail, including the appropriate dates needed to meet the eligibility criteria, the selection panel will reject your application.
- The examples you provide should be concise and relevant to the criteria. This is very important as the examples which you provide may be explored at interview and you may need to be prepared to talk about these in detail if you are invited to interview. It is your unique role the panel are interested in, not that of your team or division.
- Write down clearly your personal involvement in any experience you quote. Write "I" statements e.g. I planned meetings, I managed a budget, I prepared a presentation. It is how you actually carried out a piece of work that the panel will be interested in.
- ONLY the details provided by you in your application form (the employment history and eligibility criteria) will be provided to the selection panel for the purpose of determining your eligibility for the post. Please do not include your name in the employment history or eligibility criteria sections.
- The NICS Competency framework can be accessed via www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk

INTERVIEW CRITERIA

1. 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.

Marks available: 25

2. 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.

Marks available: 25

3. 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.

Marks available: 25

4. 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.

Marks available: 25

Interview marks available: 100

Interview pass mark: 60

COMPETENCE BASED INTERVIEWS

Selection panels will design questions to test the applicant's knowledge and experience in each of the above areas and award marks accordingly.

No notes or personal documentation or mobile personal devices may be brought into the interview room.

INTERVIEWS

It is intended that interviews for this post will take place in Belfast during July 2019.

NICS COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Personal Secretary is analogous to EOII. The selection process will assess candidates against the NICS competency framework at level 2.

The NICS competency framework sets out how all NICS employees should work. It puts the Civil Service values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality at the heart of everything they 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.

Competencies are the skills, knowledge and behaviours that lead to successful performance. The framework outlines ten competencies, which are grouped into three clusters. 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.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service competency framework can be accessed via www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk

It is important that all candidates familiarise themselves with the competency framework as this forms the basis of selection process. Should you require assistance in accessing the competency framework please contact HRConnect.

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

APPLICATION FORM

Please refer to the Candidate Information Booklet before making your application and retain a copy for your reference. The application form is designed to ensure that applicants provide the necessary information to determine how they meet the competition requirements and the eligibility/shortlisting criteria. **All** parts of the application form **must** be completed by the applicant before this application can be considered. Failure to do so may result in disqualification.

Please note:

- Applicants are encouraged to submit online applications wherever possible. However, hard copy application packs are available on request. All applications will be treated equally regardless of whether they are hard copy or online.
- The space available on the application form is the same for all applicants and must not be altered.
- We will not accept CVs, letters, additional pages or any other supplementary material in place of or in addition to completed application forms, unless it is specifically requested in the application form and candidate information booklet.
- All applications must be received by the advertised closing date and time.
- Information in support of your application will not be accepted after the closing date for receipt of applications.
- HRConnect will not examine applications until after the closing deadline;
- Do not use acronyms, complex technical detail etc. Write for the reader who may not know your employer, your branch or your job.
- Only the employment history, eligibility and shortlisting sections will be made available to the panel.
- When completing the online application, your information is saved as you move through the pages. You may leave the application at any time, providing you have clicked on the 'Save & Continue' button. Once your application has been submitted the option to edit will no longer be available.
- The session timeout for the online application is 40 minutes, if you do not save or change page within this time you will automatically be logged out and any unsaved work will be lost.
- You must click SUBMIT once you have finished your online application. You will receive an acknowledgement email. Please contact HRConnect if you do not receive an acknowledgement email within 24 hrs.

Help with making your application

You can get advice or assistance with making an application from your local Jobs and Benefits Office - contact details are available on NIDirect: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/jobs-benefits-offices-jobcentres-and-social-security-offices>

You can also get advice or assistance from local disability employment organisations. To find out more about local disability employment organisations contact Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE), an umbrella group for individuals and organisations promoting opportunities for people with disabilities to access and maintain employment, email info@niuse.org.uk, tel. 0044 (0)28 71 377709, text phone 0044 (0) 28 71 372077

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

If this is your first experience of a competence-based interview, bear in mind that it does not require you to:

- Talk through previous jobs or appointments from start to finish;
- Provide generalised information as to your background and experience; or
- Provide information that is not specifically relevant to the competence the question is designed to test.

A competence-based interview does however require you to:

- Focus exclusively, in your responses, on your ability to fulfill the competences required for effective performance in the role; and
- Provide specific examples of your experience in relation to the required competence areas.

In preparation for the interview you may wish to think about having a clear structure for each of your examples, such as:

- Situation – briefly outline the situation;
- Task – what was your objective, what were you trying to achieve;
- Action – what did you actually do, what was your unique contribution;
- Result – what happened, what was the outcome, what did you learn.

The panel will ask you to provide specific examples from your past experience to demonstrate the range of behaviours associated with the competences being assessed. You should therefore come to the interview prepared to discuss in detail a range of examples which best illustrate your skills and abilities in each competence area. You may draw examples from any area of your work / life experiences.

For professional and technical posts, questions may be framed in the context of professional elements of the post.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Merit Principle

In accordance with the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code, appointments to the NICS are made under the 'merit principle', where the best person for any given post is selected in fair and open competition.

Further information on the Civil Service Commissioners can be found at www.nicscommissioners.org.

NICSHR Privacy Notice

NICSHR are committed to protecting your privacy. HRConnect manage job applications on behalf of NICSHR, in line with the NICSHR privacy notice available via www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk

Offers of Employment

Candidates will only receive one offer of appointment which, if not accepted, will generally result in withdrawal from the competition.

Changes in personal circumstances and contact details

Please ensure HRConnect are informed immediately of any changes in personal circumstances. It is important that HRConnect have up to date contact details.

Transgender Requirements

Should you currently be going through a phase of transition in respect of gender and wish this to be taken into consideration, in confidence, to enable you to attend any part of the assessment process please contact HRConnect. Details of this will only be used for this purpose and do not form any part of the selection process.

Merit List

HRConnect will allocate a candidate (or candidates) to a vacancy (or vacancies) in the order listed. It is presently intended that the merit list for this competition should remain extant for a period of one year. However you should be aware that circumstances may arise in the future where it will be necessary to extend the currency of the merit list for a further period. The merit list will only be extended where cogent practical reasons for doing so arise.

Disability Requirements

We will ask on the application form if you require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability, to enable you to attend any part of the assessment process. Details of any disability are only used for this purpose and do not form any part of the selection process. If you have indicated on your application that you have a disability and are successful in the selection process and are being considered for appointment, you may be required to outline any adjustments you consider necessary in order for you to take up an appointment. If you wish to discuss your disability requirements further, please contact HRConnect.

Documentation

Identification documents to satisfy the Nationality and Security requirements of the post will be required. Further details regarding acceptable documentation will be issued with an invitation to attend for assessment.

You will be required to bring documentary evidence of your qualifications / professional membership to assessment.

You should ensure that the required documents are readily available.

Right to Work and Nationality Requirements

HRConnect must ensure that you are legally entitled to work in the United Kingdom and satisfy the Nationality requirements for appointment to the NICS. Applicants must be either:

- (i) A UK national; or
- (ii) A Commonwealth citizen; or
- (iii) A British Protected Person; or
- (iv) An EEA national; or
- (v) A Swiss National; or
- (vi) A person who is not an EEA or Swiss national, but is a family member of an EEA national who has moved to the UK from another EEA Member State for an approved purpose.

Further guidance on Nationality requirements is available via www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk.

Security

1. Baseline Personnel Security Standard

For this post in the NICS the level of vetting is a Baseline Standard. For this check you will be required to provide the following:

- a) Your passport OR
- b) A document verifying your permanent National Insurance number (e.g. P45, P60 or National Insurance card) AND your birth certificate which includes the names of your parents (long version).
- c) A specimen signature at any assessment event and have this validated against passport, driving licence, application form etc.

Further information regarding the Baseline Personnel Security Standard, including other acceptable documents is available via www.gov.uk.

We will organise a Criminal Record Check on all applicants to be carried out by AccessNI. The category of AccessNI check required for this post is;

Basic Disclosure Certificate

You should not put off applying for a post because you have a conviction. We deal with all criminal record information in a confidential manner, and information relating to convictions is destroyed after a decision is made.

The AccessNI code of practice can be accessed via www.nidirect.gov.uk/accessni.

Those applicants who are being considered for appointment will be contacted by HRConnect, normally after interview/test, and will be asked to complete the AccessNI application form. Please note that a request to complete this form should not be seen as a guarantee of an offer of appointment.

Failure to complete the application form and return it within the specified time will be regarded as 'no longer interested in the position' and your application will be withdrawn.

Criminal Record information is subject to the provisions of the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978.

Some posts may also require:

- 2. Counter Terrorist Check (CTC): as point 1 plus check of Security Service records.

Equal Opportunity Monitoring Form

Please note the Equal Opportunities monitoring section of the application form is mandatory in order to submit an application.

For guidance on completing the Monitoring Form and to read the NICS Equal Opportunities Policy Statement please refer to the DoF website www.finance-ni.gov.uk.

As men are currently known to be under represented in this occupation across Northern Ireland, applications from men would be particularly welcome.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service is an Equal Opportunities Employer.

All applications for employment are considered strictly on the basis of merit

Feedback

The Northern Ireland Civil Service is committed to ensuring that the processes used to recruit and select staff are fair and in accordance with the principles of the Civil Service Commissioners Code. We are consequently committed to providing feedback in respect of decisions taken in determining eligibility/shortlisting as well as at interview. Feedback in respect of eligibility/shortlisting will be communicated automatically to those candidates who fail to satisfy any criteria. All requests for feedback are welcome.

**THIS INFORMATION PACK DOES NOT FORM PART OF
CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT**