



Candidate Information Booklet

IRC280138

Discretionary Support Commissioner

Department for Communities

**Completed Application Forms
must be returned to HRConnect
no later than 12:00 noon
on
*Friday 8th July 2022.***

You are advised to download and keep a copy of this booklet for future reference - it will no longer be available online after the above date.

This information booklet is designed to help you provide the relevant information when completing the application form. It can be requested in alternative formats by contacting **HRConnect** on **0800 1 300 330** or via email to recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

This information booklet has been produced as a guide to help you provide the relevant information when completing the application form for the post of Discretionary Support Commissioner. These documents are only a memorandum and should not be taken as constituting conditions of appointment.

The qualities required and details of how to complete the application form are set out within this pack. It is recommended that you read this information carefully before completing the application form.

The competition to appoint the Discretionary Support Commissioner is being managed by HRConnect on behalf of the Department for Communities (DfC). HRConnect will issue electronically as many competition communications as possible should you provide your e-mail address as part of your application; you should therefore check your email account (including Junk 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.

Timeline

Position advertised in Belfast Telegraph, Newsletter, Irish News and the Guardian	20th June 2022
Closing date applications	8th July 2022
Application Short listing	21st July 2022
Interviews	3rd and 5th August 2022
Letter of appointment issued	mid August 2022
Appointment made	1 September 2022

Privacy Notice

DfC is committed to protecting your privacy. We will process the personal data you provide us for the purpose of recruiting members to the Discretionary Support Commissioner in line with the Commissioner for Public Appointments NI (CPANI) Code of Practice. For more information please see our Privacy Notice at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-privacy-notice>

CONTENTS

Introduction

Role Description

Person Specification

Selection Criteria

Selection Process

How to Apply

Annex A - Further Details on Selection Criteria

Annex B - Interview Guidance

Annex C - Probity and Conflicts of Interest – Guidance for Candidates

Annex D - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Welfare Reform Act, which received Royal Assent in Great Britain (GB) in 2012, introduced some of the most fundamental reforms to the social security system in 60 years. The Welfare Reform (NI) Order 2015 makes similar provision for Northern Ireland.

As part of the wider welfare reforms certain discretionary elements of Social Fund were abolished, namely Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans. Following the abolition of these elements of the Social Fund a new Northern Ireland specific Discretionary Support scheme was introduced. This provision provides assistance to those facing the most extreme, exceptional or crisis situation where no other means of support is available. Assistance is available in the form of non-repayable grants and interest free repayable loans with set criteria defined for each.

Discretionary Support is administered through the Department for Communities. The Department has completed internal reviews of the Discretionary Support policy, legislation and operational delivery of the scheme. To complement this work, Minister Hargey commissioned a strategic review of Discretionary Support by an independent panel. This review has been completed and the recommendations are currently under consideration. The final report can be viewed at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/discretionary-support-independent-review>

Statutory Framework

Should a customer disagree with the outcome of their Discretionary Support application they are, after an internal review, able to request a further review by an independent external review body.

The Discretionary Support Commissioner is an independent, statutory office holder appointed by the Department for Communities. The Office of the Discretionary Support Commissioner is a body which has been established to provide an independent review facility of decisions made in respect of applications for Discretionary Support.

The Office of the Discretionary Support Commissioner is located in Belfast. The Commissioner is supported by a team of Inspectors who are made available to the Commissioner by the Department. The Department pays the salaries of staff within the Office of the Discretionary Support Commissioner, remunerates the Commissioner and pays all expenses incurred in exercising his/her duties. and. The Commissioner is accountable to the Permanent Secretary in the Department for Communities for his/her financial and staffing arrangements. The Department for Communities is committed to the principles of public appointments based on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process. We are also committed to equality of opportunity and welcome application forms from all suitably qualified applicants irrespective of religious belief, gender, race, political opinion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or whether or not they have dependants.

We are operating the Guaranteed Interview Scheme for applicants with a disability.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is committed to ensuring that all eligible persons have equal opportunity for public appointments on the basis of their ability and aptitude for the role. Monitoring is carried out to help us ensure that our processes and procedures promote equality of opportunity as far as possible and therefore your help in completing and returning the monitoring form as part of your application would be appreciated. Please note the information you provide in the monitoring form will be detached from the information on the application form, held separately and will not be available to selection panels or to anyone else involved in the selection process. The information will be used for statistical purposes only and analysed independently by staff in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in the strictest confidence.

ROLE DESCRIPTION

Time Commitment

The Discretionary Support Commissioner will normally be required to devote 1 day per week to the appointment.

Remuneration

The Discretionary Support Commissioner receives £16,554 per annum payable monthly in arrears by credit transfer to a bank or building society. National Insurance contributions and income tax at the basic rate are deducted at source. If total income in any tax year would lead to a liability to pay income tax at any higher rate then such payments are the individual's responsibility. It should be noted this salary is currently the subject of a review.

Location

The post will be based at Great Northern Tower, Great Victoria Street, Belfast.

To build on our response to the Covid-19 pandemic and prepare for the future, a hybrid style of work which blends working at home (and remotely) with working in the office will be in the context of the Civil Service 'New Ways of Working' policy.

Travel and Subsistence

Any claims for travel and subsistence will be reimbursed, where appropriate, in accordance with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Travel and Subsistence policy.

Period of Appointment

The term of appointment will be for a period of 3 years or until such other date as the Department may determine, taking account of operational experience of the Discretionary Support scheme.. Re-appointment to the same post may be considered subject to an appropriate standard of performance having been achieved during the initial period in office.

Training

Successful applicants will be required to attend induction training..

Standards of Behaviour

The NICS expects that the conduct of those appointed will be above reproach. The Discretionary Support Commissioner will be expected to adhere to the NICS Code of Ethics.

Double Paying

Applicants who already work in the public sector need to be aware that:

- they may be ineligible for consideration for this appointment if in the Department's view there is a conflict of interest, the perception of a conflict or a potential conflict, between the appointment and their existing commitments (see page 13);
- they will be asked to confirm that they have permission from their employer to take up an appointment if one is offered and the Department will confirm this; and
- there is a general guiding principle that an individual should not be paid twice from the public purse for the same period of time. As a result applicants who already work in the public sector may not be entitled to claim remuneration including expenses for this position if the duties are undertaken during a period of time for which they are already paid by the public sector. If in doubt contact your employer for advice.

In the interests of minimising the potential for double paying to occur, the Department reserves the right to contact your employer regarding your candidature.

Performance Assessments

There will be annual assessments of the Discretionary Support Commissioner throughout the period of appointment.

Further Information

Any applicant seeking additional information about the Discretionary Support Commissioner should contact David Tarr by email to David.Tarr@communities-ni.gov.uk Any applicant wishing to raise a question about the competition process should contact HRConnect recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Discretionary Support Commissioner

Role

- It is the Commissioner's role to independently review decisions made in respect of applications to Discretionary Support;
- To arrange such training of Discretionary Support Inspectors as the Commissioner considers necessary;
- To monitor the quality of decisions of Discretionary Support Inspectors and give them such advice and assistance as the Commissioner thinks fit to improve the standard of their decisions;
- To report annually in writing to the Department on the standards of reviews by Discretionary Support Inspectors;
- To carry out such other functions in connection with the work of Discretionary Support Inspectors as the Department may require.

The Commissioner is expected to:

- Commit the time required to lead the organisation;
- Be committed to the principles and objectives of the Office of the Discretionary Support Commissioner;
- Act in good faith and in the best interests of the Office of the Discretionary Support Commissioner; and
- Not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political purposes, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

The person specification addresses the qualities, experience and background sought. A criteria-based selection procedure is employed for this competition

The application form is an essential element of the process and is designed to require applicants to give specific examples of past performance to demonstrate they can meet the requirements. The mere mention of a skill or attribute is insufficient. Neither can the selection panel make assumptions from the title of a post or the nature of an organisation as to the experience, qualities and skills gained.

There are five essential criteria. These describe what you need to be able to do in order to be effective in the role being filled.

Please take full advantage of the opportunity to provide practical evidence and examples of how and why you consider you are suitable for this appointment. These examples as provided will inform the selection process.

Note that examples can be provided from your professional experience, voluntary and/or community sector experience or from within your personal life.

We recommend applicants to read the 'Public Appointments Guide which provides an overview of Public Appointments in Northern Ireland and helpful information for those wishing to apply.

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/public-appointments-guide.pdf>

Essential Criteria

Qualifications

No specific qualifications are required for this appointment.

Applicants are expected to demonstrate, by the closing date, that they have the necessary skills, experience and competencies, by way of examples, to meet the following criteria;

1. Thinking strategically – experience of making a significant contribution to the strategic direction of an organisation;
2. Leadership – experience of managing an organisation and leading people to achieve a common goal in a set timeframe;
3. Analytical thinking – evidence based analysis and decision making;
4. Governance – a well developed understanding and experience of corporate governance, accounting and financial management;

5. Communication/Stakeholder Management - Excellent interpersonal, influencing and communication skills and experience of effective stakeholder engagement.

Please note that further details are attached in Annex A

Shortlisting

Applicants should be aware that, after an eligibility sift, should it be necessary to shortlist candidates to go forward to interview, this will be done by carrying out an objective evaluation of the information provided by candidates in response to essential criteria 3 and 5. This will be completed on a scored basis with only the higher scoring applicants progressing to interview.

SELECTION PROCESS

Eligibility Sift of Application Forms

Following the closing date for applications, the Panel will formally assess each application form against the selection criteria, listed on pages 9-10. **Only the Eligibility Section of your application form will be forwarded to the Panel.**

The Selection Panel will reach a decision as to whether or not an applicant meets each criterion on the basis of the evidence the applicant provides on the application form. Where it is necessary to prepare a shortlist for interview, the shortlisting process detailed on page 10 will be applied.

It is essential that you demonstrate in your application form how and to what extent your personal experience and skills are relevant to the post and the extent to which they satisfy the criterion specified.

Only those applicants assessed as meeting all essential criteria will be eligible to proceed to the next stage of the selection process.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

The aim of the Guaranteed Interview Scheme is to provide applicants with a disability the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities beyond the initial application stage. Applicants with a disability **who meet all of the essential criteria at the sift stage** will automatically be offered an interview. Their application will not be subjected to any short-listing which may take place. To be eligible for the Guaranteed Interview Scheme you must be considered as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which defines a person with a disability as someone who has, or has had in the past, a physical or mental impairment, which has had a substantial and long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (See **Annex D**). If you qualify and wish to apply for the Guaranteed Interview Scheme please complete the appropriate section of the application form. This section of the application form will not be provided to the selection panel

The eligibility sift and shortlisting (if required) are expected to take place on 21st July 2022.

Interview of Eligible Candidates

It is anticipated that interviews will take place in Causeway Exchange, Belfast on the 3rd and 5th August 2022. Candidates should make themselves available during this time. Requests for rescheduling interviews will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, and decisions to allow such reschedules will be at the discretion of the Selection Panel.

The Panel will design interview questions based on the job description and essential criteria listed in this document.

The selection panel will assess the information presented by the candidate at interview against each selection criterion. A score will then be allocated against each selection criterion and a total interview score derived accordingly. A minimum pass mark for the interview will apply.

Presentation of Results

A list of the applicants that the Selection Panel assesses as suitable for appointment will be provided in an unranked format to the Department for Communities Minister. The Minister will receive applicant summaries that provide an objective analysis of each applicant's skills and experience, based on the information provided by the applicant during the appointment process and the Selection Panel's assessment of that applicant.

The Minister will make the final decision regarding an appointment from this competition. This may be based on the objective analysis provided by the selection panel. However, the Minister may also decide to meet with the most suitable applicants.

If you are selected for appointment by the Minister, you will be formally notified in writing and you are required to confirm acceptance of the post and Terms of Appointment.

All other applicants whose names were presented to the Minister will be advised in writing of the outcome once the appointment process has been completed. This will include options for requesting further feedback.

Disqualification – Other

- (a) Individuals who are disqualified from holding Company Directorship either through an Order or an Undertaking, who are bankrupt or who are the subject of a Bankruptcy Restrictions Order are not eligible for consideration;
- (c) According to the CPA NI Code of Practice appointments for the same position are restricted to two terms. Those who have served two appointments, of whatever length, on a Board are ineligible to apply for the same position. Notwithstanding the length of individual appointment terms, the maximum period in a post must not exceed 10 years. **Applications received from applicants who have already served two terms or 10 years in this position will be discounted at the sift stage.**

Vetting

The level of vetting for the Commissioner 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.

Other acceptable documents are listed on www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk HRConnect 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

PLEASE NOTE: It is a criminal offence for anyone who is included on a barred list to work or seek work, in regulated activity. Individuals who are barred may be able to work in controlled activity.

For more information, the address of the AccessNI website is: <http://www.accessni.gov.uk>. Those applicants who are being considered for appointment will be contacted by HRConnect, normally after interview, and will be asked to complete the AccessNI application form. This can be downloaded from the AccessNI website. Guidance notes of the completion of the form are also included on the website. 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 above 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.

Nationality Requirements

There are no nationality restrictions on this post: however, before an offer of appointment can be made to an overseas candidate, the Department for Communities will need to ensure that all UK visa and immigration requirements are met.

Civil Servants – Rules on the acceptance of outside business appointments

Serving or former civil servants are not debarred from applying for public appointments. However, serving civil servants will require their Department's approval and former civil servants may require the approval of their last Department (depending on their grade and whether they left within the last two years) before taking up an appointment.

Probity and Conflicts of Interest

The Department must ensure that the individuals they appoint are committed to the principles and values of public service. These principles are: **Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership**. Further information is available at <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/>.

Departments must take account of actual, or perceived, conflict of interest. Therefore, applicants, in their application form, must disclose information or personal connections which, if they were to be appointed, could lead to a conflict of interest, or be perceived as such.

The Panel will determine, at interview stage, whether you are aware of the standards of behaviour required of public appointees and can demonstrate your understanding of the issue. You will also be asked to declare whether or not you are involved, or have been involved, in activities that could call into question your reputation and/or damage the reputation of the body to which you are applying. The Selection Panel will consider fully your answers and, if necessary, question further or challenge.

Conflicts of interest may not be a barrier to appointment but both real and perceived conflicts must be discussed with all candidates by the interview Panel. This is to ensure that the public can have confidence in the Board's independence and impartiality and the integrity of the potential appointee. Please refer to **Annex C** for further information on this subject.

Announcing the Appointment

If you are appointed some information on your completed application form will be made public in a press release. This will include your name, a brief summary of your career/experience; length of the appointment; details of any other Ministerial appointments held along with any related remuneration received.

Reserve List

The Department may agree that a reserve list will be held to be used to fill any future vacancies that arise within the 12 months following the **Minister's** decision.

HOW TO APPLY

This competition is being managed by HRConnect on behalf of DfC.

Application forms can be completed via the online application at www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk or by hard copy. Hard copy and alternative formats of the application form (Braille, Large Print, etc.) can be requested by contacting HRConnect on 0800 1 300 330 or via email to recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net. Reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the needs of applicants/candidates with a disability.

To ensure equality of opportunity for all applicants:

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.

Applicants must complete the application form in either typescript font size 12, or legible writing using black ink.

HRConnect will not examine applications until after the closing deadline.

Completed hard copy application forms can be returned by post or hand delivered to the address below:

HRConnect

PO Box 1089

Beacon House

27 Clarendon Road

Belfast

BT1 9EX

Completed application forms should be submitted to HRConnect before the closing date of 12 noon on Friday 8th July 2022. You will receive an acknowledgement following receipt of your application. **Late applications will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.** You should retain a copy of this booklet for your reference in the event that you are invited for interview.

Feedback

The Department is committed to ensuring that the processes used to recruit public appointments are fair and in accordance with the principles of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (NI) Code of Practice.

The Department is also committed to providing feedback in respect of decisions taken in determining eligibility/shortlisting as well as at interview. HRConnect will forward any

feedback requests to the Interview Panel, who will be responsible for 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.

Changes in Contact Details

Please ensure you inform HRConnect immediately of any changes in personal circumstances, such as name, address, email address or telephone number.

Accessibility Requirements

Please let HRConnect know if you require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability, to enable you to attend the interview. Any information provided will be used for this purpose only and will not form any part of the selection process.

If you are subsequently 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.

Complaints or Queries

Should you wish to make a complaint or a query about any stage of this process, you should first direct your concerns to:

**HRConnect,
PO BOX 1089
Beacon House
27 Clarendon Road
Belfast
BT1 9EX
Email: recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net**

Further details on Selection Criteria

Qualifications

No specific qualifications are required for this appointment.

1. Applicants are expected to demonstrate, by the closing date, that they have the necessary skills, experience and competencies, by way of examples, to meet the following criteria; Thinking strategically – experience of making a significant contribution to the strategic direction of an organisation;

This is about how you apply strategic thinking in the workplace. We are looking for examples which demonstrate the ability to make choices that will provide the most effective outcomes for customers. This includes the ability to set a clear and consistent long-term direction for the business area, while prioritising available resources and understanding the implications of decisions for both your work and that of the team. Identifying trends, anticipating problems and identifying solutions form part of this criteria.

2. Leadership – experience of managing an organisation and leading people to achieve a common goal in a set timeframe;

This criteria is about the ability to demonstrate a proven track record in leadership to establish a strong direction and a persuasive future vision, managing and engaging with people with honesty and integrity. It is about demonstrating personal leadership skills including leading from the front and communicating with clarity, conviction and enthusiasm while also taking responsibility for the effective delivery of a professional and effective service that meets the needs of service users.

Candidates will be expected to provide evidence which demonstrates their personal leadership skills and how they made a positive contribution to the performance of an organisation.

3. Analytical thinking – evidence based analysis and decision making;

This criteria is about the ability to identify and define problems, extract key information from data in order to test and verify the cause of the problem and develop solutions to resolve the problems identified. It is also about identifying actions that can contribute to preventing the problem from occurring again.

For the role of Discretionary Support Commissioner a candidate will be expected to demonstrate an ability to critically examine issues and to reach reasoned conclusions that take account of relevant legislation and departmental guidance.

4. Governance – a well developed understanding and experience of corporate governance, accounting and financial management;

Corporate governance is the way in which organisations are directed, controlled and led. It defines relationships and the distribution of rights and responsibilities among those who work with and in the organisation, determines the rules and procedures through which the organisation's objectives are set, and provides the means of attaining those objectives and monitoring performance. Good corporate governance is fundamental and is the hallmark of an effective, well-managed, organisation. Candidates will be expected to provide evidence of proper use of corporate governance procedures and practices in an organisation.

5. Communication/Stakeholder Management - Excellent interpersonal, influencing and communication skills and experience of effective stakeholder engagement.

This is about the ability to 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. It is about remaining open-minded and impartial in discussions, whilst respecting the diverse interests and opinions of others.

We will seek examples of how you communicate with others in a clear, honest and enthusiastic way, explain complex issues in a way that is easy to understand and how you monitor the effectiveness of your own and team communications while taking action to improve where necessary.

INTERVIEW GUIDANCE

If this is your first experience of a criteria-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 criterion the question is designed to test.

A Criteria-based interview does however require you to:

- Focus exclusively, in your responses, on your ability to fulfil the criteria required for effective performance in the role; and
- Provide specific examples of your experience in relation to the required criteria 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 in relation to each of the criteria. You should therefore come to the interview prepared to discuss in detail a range of examples which appointments made on merit illustrate your skills and abilities in each criterion area. You may draw examples from any area of your work / life experiences.

You are strongly advised to read the ‘Public Appointments Guide’ when preparing for interview - <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/public-appointments-guide-overview-public-appointments-northern-ireland-and-helpful-information>

PROBITY & CONFLICTS OF INTEREST – GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES

Standards of Behaviour

Ministers expect that the conduct of those they appoint to serve in public office will be above reproach. Everyone who puts themselves forward for a public appointment must be able to demonstrate their commitment to the maintenance of high standards in public life.

The Seven Principles Underpinning Public Life

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

- **Selflessness** – holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity** – holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity** – holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability** – holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness** – holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honesty** – holders of public office should be truthful.
- **Leadership** – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

As part of the selection process, you will be tested on your commitment to maintaining high standards in public life with particular emphasis on probity issues and conflicts of interest.

What is a conflict of interest?

Public appointments require the highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity, in relation to the stewardship of public funds and the oversight and management of all related activities. This means that any private, voluntary,

charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the body concerned should be declared.

There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.

No-one should use, or give the appearance of using, their public position to further their private interests. This is an area of particular importance, as it is of considerable concern to the public and receives a lot of media attention. It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for a public appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the individual that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a perceived conflict of interest on the part of an office holder can be extremely damaging to the body's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would be. The fact that an office holder acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form for you to complete. This asks you to consider and declare whether or not you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, in order to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

No, each case is considered individually. If you are short-listed for interview, the Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to contribute effectively and impartially and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed.

However, if, following the discussion with you, the Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the probity of the Office or the appointment they can withdraw your application from the competition. The summary of the outcome of the interview process, which is put to the Ministers, will include clear written reference to any probity issues or perceived or actual conflicts of interest connected to any candidate put forward as suitable for appointment. It will include sufficient information to ensure that the Ministers are fully aware of any of these matters and can make an informed decision.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Department after my appointment?

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Department may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would be deemed to have breached the seven principles of conduct underpinning public life and may terminate your appointment.

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

This situation may arise where the applicant is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the Panel, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a

potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the candidate in the application form. They will then explore this at interview with the candidate.

What happens if a conflict of interest arises after an appointment is made?

This could arise for two main reasons. The first is that the member's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in doing so, a conflict with their work becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the body, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.

In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Sponsoring Department to decide whether or not the member can continue to carry out their role in an appropriate manner and each case is considered individually.

It may be that the conflict is such that it would be impractical for the member to continue in their role,

You may be asked to sign a declaration of commitment to the above principles as a condition of your appointment.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is committed to ensuring that all eligible persons have equal opportunity for public appointments on the basis of their ability and aptitude for the role. Monitoring is carried out to help us ensure that our processes and procedures promote equality of opportunity as far as possible.

This section provides an explanation of the definition of disability.

Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (the DDA) provides protection for disabled persons against discrimination on the grounds of disability.

The DDA defines disability as a “physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

This definition is interpreted as follows:-

Physical Impairment: this includes, for instance, a weakening of part of the body (eyes, ears, limbs, internal organs etc) caused through illness by accident or from birth. Examples would be blindness, deafness, paralysis of a leg or heart disease.

Mental Impairment: this includes mental ill health and what is commonly known as learning disability, and social functioning.

Substantial: put simply, this means the effect of the physical or mental impairment on ability to carryout normal day to day activities is more than minor or trivial. It does not have to be a severe effect.

Long-term adverse effect: the effect has to have lasted or be likely to last overall for at least 12 months and the effect must be a detrimental one. A person with a life expectancy of less than 12 months is of course covered if the effect is likely to last for the whole of that time.

A normal day to day activity: this is something which is carried out by most people on a fairly regular and frequent basis such as washing, eating, catching a bus or turning on a television. It does not mean something so individual as playing a musical instrument to a professional standard or doing everything involved in a particular job.

What sort of effect must there be?

The person must be affected in at least one of the respects listed in the DDA: mobility; manual dexterity; physical co-ordination; continence; ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects; speech; hearing or eyesight; memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; ability to take part in normal social interaction and form social relationships; or perception of risk of physical danger.

What happens if the effects are reduced by medication or other treatment?

Broadly speaking, the effects that matter are those that would be present if there was no medication or treatment taking place. The exception is people who wear spectacles or contact lenses when what matters is the effect that remain while the spectacles or contact lenses are being used.

Are there any types of condition covered by special provisions in the DDA?

Yes, because some people with particular conditions might not otherwise be counted as disabled. These are provisions covering:

Recurring or fluctuating conditions such as arthritis, where the effects can sometimes be less than substantial, which are treated as continuing to have a substantial adverse effect so long as that effect is likely to recur;

Conditions which progressively deteriorate, such as motor neuron disease, which count as having a substantial effect from the first time they have any effect at all on ability to carry out normal day to day activities even if it is not substantial, so long as there is eventually likely to be a substantial adverse effect; and

People with cancer, HIV, or multiple sclerosis are deemed to be disabled people from the point of diagnosis, regardless of whether or not they have any symptoms.

Are any conditions not covered?

Yes, the following conditions specifically do not count as impairments:

Addiction to or dependency on alcohol, nicotine or any other substance (unless resulting from the substance being medically prescribed);

Seasonal allergic rhinitis (e.g. hay fever) unless it aggravates the effect of another condition;

Tendency to set fires, or steal, or physically or sexually abuse other persons;

Exhibitionism and voyeurism;

Severe disfigurements consisting of tattoos, non-medical body piercing or attachments to such piercing are not treated as having substantial adverse effects.

What if someone has recovered from a disability?

Much of the DDA also applies to people who have had a disability in the past (for example, someone who was disabled by mental ill health) but have now fully recovered. People who were registered disabled under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (NI) 1945 both on 12 January 1995 and 2 December 1996 will be regarded as having had a disability in the past if they do not in any case fall within the definition of the DDA.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities in carrying out their functions in NI to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons with a disability and persons without.

As with other forms of personal data, the obtaining, use, storage and disclosure of monitoring information is covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA). Access to

this data is restricted and misuse of monitoring information is viewed as a disciplinary offence.