



Candidate Information Booklet

IRC285026

Plant Pathologist Post Doctoral Researcher – 36 Month Fixed Term Contract

**Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute Northern
Ireland (AFBI)**

Completed Application Forms must be returned to HRConnect no later than 12 noon (UK time) on Friday 2nd December 2022

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Communication between HRConnect and you

HRConnect will issue electronically as many competition communications as possible, you should therefore check your email account 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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ABOUT THE AGRI-FOOD AND BIOSCIENCES INSTITUTE

As the Northern Ireland Government's main research and science provider in the areas of agri-food, fisheries and the environment, AFBI's science plays a crucial role in providing the underpinning statutory and analytical testing, research and development work, emergency response and expert scientific advice required to support the work of the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the wider agri-food industry.

In line with AFBI's vision of "Advancing the local and global agri-food sectors through scientific excellence" the Institute seeks to be an influential, internationally recognised, centre for research and scientific services in the agri-food and marine sectors. AFBI's science is outcome-driven and aimed at solving important practical problems for a wide range of local, national and international funders in the public and private sectors. Our staff carry out world class research, surveillance, and analytic and diagnostic testing for a wide range of funders in the fields of animal health and welfare, sustainable agricultural systems, plant science, food innovation and safety, environmental protection, fisheries and aquatic ecosystems, and agricultural and rural economics.

AFBI's current Corporate Plan outlines our strategy and ambitions for the period 2018 to 2022. It sets out the 3 strategic outcomes we aim to deliver for society, the economy and the environment, as well as industry and customers in an ever more efficient and effective manner. The plan demonstrates the unique multidisciplinary strength of AFBI and how we will work with partners from science, government, industry and farmers to provide a positive impact. These achievements will be underpinned by attracting and developing excellent staff and building fit for purpose physical infrastructure.

AFBI's 'Science Impacts 2020' publication outlines key outcomes from AFBI science. Notably over the past 5 years AFBI have delivered approximately four million animal, plant and food safety tests to support sales from the NI agri-food industry to the value of £3.2 billion. A key drive within AFBI is to produce high quality peer review publications while also ensuring the research conducted has impact through an active dissemination programme. Over the past 5 years, AFBI have delivered over 90 evidence and innovation projects for DAERA, approximately 400 peer review scientific publications and have secured £44m of external research grants and contracts working with partners from across 35 countries. We are also actively developing strategic alliances with other research organisation and dissemination partners to facilitate a pipeline of research from fundamental to applied and onward application to ensure the impact of AFBI Science.

In order to fulfil these outcomes for our funders and stakeholders across society, the economy and the environment, AFBI enjoys access to highly instrumented laboratory, field and ship based scientific platforms. Furthermore, we are working closely with our sponsor department to take forward an ambitious programme of capital investment in AFBI's infrastructure including a new animal health sciences building at AFBI Stormont, enhanced research

farm facilities at AFBI Hillsborough and a replacement sea-going research vessel.

AFBI SITES

AFBI is located on seven sites across Northern Ireland with its Headquarters at Newforge Lane, Belfast.

In addition, AFBI has a dedicated marine research vessel, the RV Corystes, based in Port of Belfast.



1. Newforge Lane (Headquarters)
2. VSD Stormont
3. Hillsborough
4. Crossnacreevy
5. Loughgall
6. Omagh
7. Bushmills

DIVISION BACKGROUND

SUSTAINABLE AGRI-FOOD SCIENCES DIVISION (SAFSD)

SAFSD currently employs approximately 200 scientific, technical and support staff across its five scientific based branches.

As such SAFSD is a highly multi-disciplinary division with a key focus on livestock, plant and in general agriculture production and their interactions with the environment. This multi-disciplinary team can explore all aspects of the food supply chain taking research from the soil through to the plant to the animal and the resultant food quality and nutritional value, while also working with colleagues at VSD to ensure animal health and food safety is optimised and modelling market impacts as a result of policy decisions.

SAFSD utilises a highly instrumented platform across livestock and land management to service its main deliverables of research and innovation and monitoring and surveillance. SAFSD also collaborates extensively with other research organisations, industry and government departments locally, nationally and internationally. A key drive within SAFSD is to produce high quality peer review publications while also ensuring the research conducted has impact through an active dissemination programme.

Key actors within SAFSD represent:

The **Economics Research Branch** undertake quantitative and qualitative socio-economic research to inform agri-food and rural policy development and industry decision making, regionally and nationally.

Livestock Production Sciences Branch which links fundamental livestock science to systems level research to deliver innovations for the agri-food sector and advance scientific knowledge.

Food Research Branch who deliver research in the areas of optimising eating quality and nutritional quality in meat, dairy and other food products, together with evaluating novel processes for extending shelf-life and increasing safety.

Grassland and Plant Science Branch who underpin DAERA's policy development on plant health and deliver scientific advances in areas such as grass breeding, testing and agronomy, Plant Health and land management.

Statistical Services Branch which provide a Statistical Analyses and Consultation Services in support of Scientific Research Projects and Statutory work carried out by AFBI

BRANCH BACKGROUND

GRASSLAND AND PLANT SCIENCE BRANCH

Grassland and Plant Sciences (GPS) Branch is one of five scientific branches within SAFSD and provides internationally important research, scientific analysis and knowledge transfer activities across a wide range of agricultural disciplines.

The core aim of the Branch is to support programmes focussed on plant health, crop protection, grass breeding, plant testing and agronomy and horticulture. The work of Grassland and Plant Sciences (GPS) aligns closely with DAERA's four Strategic Goals: (1) Sustainable agri-food, fisheries, forestry and industrial sectors. (2) A clean, healthy environment benefiting people, nature and the economy. (3) A thriving rural economy, contributing to prosperity and wellbeing. (4) A well led, high performing organization focusing on outcomes. The branch has over 80 staff located at 3 sites (Newforge, Crossnacreevy and Loughgall) and a platform which includes land for field based grass and arable science, laboratories and specialised greenhouses.

Key outputs from GPS include the provision of evidence for governmental policy development, a proactive service to protect plant health in Northern Ireland, production of new grass varieties, peer reviewed scientific papers, technical reports for industry and stakeholders, conference papers and the delivery of seminars as well as an emergency response function for DAERA. The GPS team are also actively involved in national and international professional networks and expert committees. The GPS team collaborate nationally and internationally with a range of partners including, Queen's University Belfast, University College Dublin, Teagasc, and Ulster University.

Plant health and protection: AFBI is the Official Laboratory for plant health testing in Northern Ireland. It helps DAERA comply with 'plant health regulations and official controls' by providing statutory testing and surveillance of plants and their pests and pathogens. AFBI staff also provide guidance to DAERA on planning for, monitoring and reacting to plant health threats, as well as conducting plant pest and pathogen horizon scanning, integrated pest management, and the sustainable use of pesticides. The unit is organised into two closely working teams specialising on plant health surveillance and plant health diagnostics. Current and future research covers the study and control of plant pests and pathogens (fungal, bacterial, nematodes) as well as using environmental DNA and next generation sequencing as a diagnostics and surveillance tool for the early detection of pests and pathogens of plants. AFBI Plant Health is accredited to international standards ISO9001 and ISO17025.

JOB DESCRIPTION

There is currently one full time 36 month fixed term position. A reserve list will exist and will be held for a period of 12 months from the date of interview, to cover any further vacancies which may arise.

Salary

Salary will be within the range £32,328 - £33,459 (under review), pay increases will be on an incremental basis provided staff performance reports are satisfactory.

Starting salary will normally be at the minimum of the scale.

Annual Leave

In addition to the usual public and privilege holidays, there is an annual leave allowance of 25 days.

Working Hours

The successful candidate will normally be required to work 5 days each week, totalling 37 hours. On occasions the duties will require some evening and weekend working. AFBI operates a flexi working system.

Location

The successful candidate will be based at AFBI Newforge, 18a Newforge Lane, Belfast BT9 5PX, however, they may, on occasion, also be expected to work at other sites in Northern Ireland and collaborating partner's institutions as required.

Hybrid Working

AFBI is currently finalising its hybrid working policy which will provide staff with the opportunity to work on a hybrid basis for those posts where it is appropriate to do so.

Travel

The post will entail travel locally, nationally and internationally and for this reason the successful applicant will require a driving license to be obtained to meet the requirements of the post in full.

Probation

The post holder will serve 12 months probation in the new post. This will commence from the date of appointment.

Further Information

Applicants wishing to learn more about the post before deciding to apply may telephone Workforce Planning on 028 9025 5588 or email workforceplanning@afbini.gov.uk

If you have any questions about the competition process, you should contact HRConnect on 0800 1 300 330 or email recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

AFBI have secured funding from DAFM and DAERA to conduct research into adaptation, mitigation and protection strategies to improve the resilience of Irish forests to address the impacts of climate change. This project will deploy new surveillance approaches for the early detection of pests and pathogens of trees using environmental DNA (eDNA) and Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) to monitor forest health. Rainwater run-off from trees canopies will be collected at set intervals from forests sites across the island of Ireland over a three-year period with the eDNA in the canopy rainwater analysed by NGS. These sequence datasets will underpin a spatio-temporal map of canopy biodiversity, including crucial information on pest / pathogen presence and spread. It is hoped that these advanced surveillance approach can help protect Ireland's forests from pests and pathogens.

The post is within the Plant Health Diagnostic Section of Grassland & Plant Science Branch and will report to the Senior Scientist and Principal Science leader in diagnostics and surveillance. The successful candidate must have skills in microbiology, molecular biology, and next generation sequencing. The post-holder will be expected to deliver against the objectives of the research project, manage the finances of grant, collect data and perform any analysis, as well as write reports / publications and present findings to stakeholders. They will be expected to liaise with colleagues in AFBI and collaborators and to identify or develop solutions that would help protect plants from pests and pathogens. This includes significant travel throughout the Island of Ireland and regular attendance and significant periods of working at partner's institutions. The post-holder must be adaptable, a problem-solver and be able to respond to a broad range of issues, both ongoing and unforeseen.

The specific duties are listed below.

- Act as the lead scientist and deliver on the objectives of the research project.
- Provision and plan experiments, organise time, purchase consumables, and manage finances to ensure that experimental work is adequately resourced and within budget.
- Work with collaborators and meet regularly to discuss progress and planned work. This includes significant travel throughout the Island of Ireland and regular attendance and significant periods of working at partner's institutions.
- Prepare samples and perform next generation sequencing selecting appropriate downstream bioinformatic tools and statistical methods.
- Lead in establishing whether next generation sequencing methods can be used in the advanced surveillance and diagnostics of pests and pathogens of plants.
- Assist in developing a roadmap to incorporate next generation sequencing into the statutory programmes of Official Laboratories.
- Publish research results in high impact scientific journals, R&D project report writing, knowledge transfer activities and press articles.

- Present work to funders and stakeholders.
- Apply for follow on research projects.
- To assist the Senior Scientific Officer and Principal Scientific Officer in managing and delivering the research proposal.
- Drive to collect samples, to attend meetings or work in other institutes as required.

This list is not exhaustive and the successful candidate will be required to carry out other duties as allocated by management.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Applicants **must** demonstrate that they possess the following criteria, by the closing date for applications:

- 1a. A PhD in plant science, plant pathology, microbiology, molecular biology, or a closely related subject;

OR

- 1b. A primary degree in biological sciences or a closely related subject and at least three years postgraduate experience in plant science, plant pathology, microbiology, molecular biology or a closely related subject;

AND

2. Demonstrable experience of microbial culture and molecular biology techniques;
3. Demonstrable experience of using next generation sequencing and bioinformatic analysis;
4. Demonstrable experience of successfully managing teams and resources;
5. Be an author on at least one scientific paper in a biological science*;
6. Must have a valid driving license to undertake the duties of the post.

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.

*Candidates must provide evidence of eligibility criteria 5 by submitting a fully cited bibliography of all publications. Candidates can provide this information within the application form itself, or if necessary, it can be sent by the closing date for applications as a separate attachment to: recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

SHORTLISTING

In addition, applicants should be aware that should it be necessary to shortlist candidates further to go forward to interview, the Panel will carry out an objective evaluation of the breadth and depth of information provided by candidates in response to eligibility criterion 2 - 5. This will be completed on a scored basis. Only the highest scoring applicants will proceed to interview.

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 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.**
- **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.**
- **Further information on the Core Competences for this grade can be accessed through www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk**

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Candidates will be expected to demonstrate the skills and competencies set out in the eligibility criteria and shortlisting criteria. In addition, they will also be required to demonstrate the skills and competencies set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) competency framework at Level 3 for the purposes of personal and professional development.

Senior Scientific Officer is analogous to Deputy Principal in the NICS.

What is the NICS competency framework?

The 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 through www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk

It is important that all candidates familiarise themselves with the competency framework as this forms the basis of the assessment / interview criteria as outlined below.

INTERVIEW CRITERIA

The selection process will include a competence based interview. In addition to satisfying the eligibility criteria and shortlisting criteria (*if applicable*) applicants will also be expected to display the following qualities and skills at interview:

1. Professional Knowledge and Skills

- Develops and updates professional/specialist/technical knowledge and skills to meet objectives and improve performance; demonstrates an in-depth knowledge and understanding of current developments in the area.
- Applies knowledge and skills in the collection, collation, manipulation, analysis and interpretation of scientific data.
- Applies knowledge and skills in writing scientific and technical reports

Marks available: 60

Minimum standard: 36

2. 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: 10

Minimum standard: 6

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.

Marks available: 10

Minimum standard: 6

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.

Marks Available: 10

5. 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.

Marks Available: 10

Total Marks Available: 100

Overall Pass Mark: 60 (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.

INTERVIEWS

It is intended that interviews for this post will take place in AFBI Newforge, Belfast during week commencing Monday 12th December 2022.

INTERVIEW GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

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 in relation to each of the competences. 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.

SELECTION PROCESS

The Merit Principle

Appointments to AFBI are made under the 'merit principle', where the best person for any given post is selected in fair and open competition.

Making your application

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.

Guidance for Applicants

- We will not accept CVs, letters, additional pages or any other supplementary material in place of or in addition to completed application forms.
- 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.
- State clearly your personal involvement in any experience you quote. State "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.
- The examples you provide should be concise and relevant to the criteria. This is very important as the examples which you provide may be checked out 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.

Application Form Submission

You can apply online at www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk.

- Please refer to the Candidate Information Booklet before completing an application.
- **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.
- 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.

- Please note - 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.
- Please do not attempt to reformat application forms as this will result in disqualification.

Changes in personal circumstances

Please ensure HRConnect are informed immediately of any changes in personal circumstances.

Communication between HRConnect and you

HRConnect will issue electronically as many competition communications as possible, you should therefore check your email account 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.

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.

Further appointments from this competition

Where a further position in AFBI is identified which is considered broadly similar to that outlined in this candidate information booklet, consideration will be given to filling the position from this competition. The merit list resulting from this competition will be valid for a period of up to one year.

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.

Equal Opportunity Monitoring Form

Please note, this form is regarded as part of your application and failure to complete and return it will result in disqualification.

For guidance on completing the Monitoring Form and to read the NICS Equal Opportunities Policy Statement to which AFBI adheres please refer to page 24.

Applications are particularly welcomed from Roman Catholics and Females as these groups are currently under-represented within AFBI.

AFBI is an Equal Opportunities Employer.

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

Assessment Information

It is HRConnect policy that all candidates invited to attend for assessment bring sufficient documentation to satisfy the eligibility/shortlisting criteria and the Nationality and Vetting requirements. Further details regarding acceptable documentation will be issued with an invitation to attend for assessment.

You should ensure that these documents are readily available.

Employment Requirements

HRConnect must ensure that you are legally entitled to work in the United Kingdom.

Entry to the United Kingdom is controlled under the Immigration Act 1971. Everyone who does not have the right of abode is subject to immigration control. You should check whether there are any restrictions on your stay or your freedom to take or change employment before you apply for a post. If you are invited to interview we will ask you to provide documentation confirming that you are entitled to work in the UK, under the terms of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996.

Advice on entitlement to work may be obtained from the Home Office website, www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk.

Nationality Requirements

There are no nationality requirements for AFBI posts.

Vetting Procedures

1. Baseline Personnel Security Standard

For this post 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) Other acceptable documents are listed on www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk.
- d) A specimen signature at any assessment event and have this validated against passport, driving licence, application form etc.

We will organise a Criminal Record Check on all applicants to be carried out by AccessNI through Experian. HRConnect will provide your details to Experian who will undertake this check. 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. Further information regarding policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders and the vetting process is available at www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk in Recruitment Policy and Procedures manual.

Security Policy for AccessNI Disclosure Information is available at www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk under Useful Information.

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

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/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.

Order of Merit

The selection panel will assess candidates against the interview criteria. Those candidates who meet the required standard(s) and pass mark will be deemed suitable for appointment. The selection panel will then list those suitable for appointment in order of merit with the highest scoring applicant ranked first. HRConnect will allocate a candidate (or candidates) to a vacancy (or vacancies) in the order listed. The order of merit is valid for one year.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Pensions

New entrants who join the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) are eligible to join the NICS pension scheme.

Further details can be found on the Civil Service Pensions (Northern Ireland) website at:

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/landing-pages/civil-service-pensions-ni>

or

if you are unable to access the website please contact Civil Service Pensions as follows:

Civil Service Pensions
Waterside House
75 Duke Street
Londonderry
BT47 6FP
Tel: 02871 319000
Email: cspensions.cpg@dfpni.gov.uk

Feedback

AFBI is committed to ensuring that the processes used to recruit and select staff are fair. 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

Contact details:

If you have any queries regarding the competition process please contact HRConnect by;

Email: Recruitment@HRConnect.nigov.net

Tel: 0800 1 300 330

Fax: 028 9024 1665

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Policy Statement

The Northern Ireland Civil Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy statement to which AFBI adheres is set out below:

“The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) has a strong and clear commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. It is our policy that all eligible persons shall have equal opportunity for employment and advancement in the NICS on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work. Everyone has a right to equality of opportunity and to a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere where they are treated with dignity and respect. We aim to provide opportunities for all sections of the community and continue to strive to create an inclusive working environment in which difference is recognised and valued. Bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and giving each person the opportunity to contribute their skills and experience will help us to respond more effectively to the needs of the people we serve”.

We all want to work in an harmonious workplace where we feel valued, respected and included, irrespective of gender, including gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, race/ethnic origin, religious belief or political opinion, disability, having or not having dependants, sexual orientation and age.

In order to provide a high quality service to the people of Northern Ireland the NICS needs to attract, recruit, develop and retain the very best people at all levels. Our approach is based on three key principles:-

Equality – we promote equality of opportunity by seeking to remove barriers, eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for all groups of people.

Diversity – we accept each person as an individual. Our success is built on our ability to embrace diversity – and we believe that everyone should feel valued for their contributions. By working together we will deliver the best possible service for our staff, customers and stakeholders.

Inclusion – we create a working culture where differences are not merely accepted, but valued; where everyone has the opportunity to develop in a way that is consistent with, and adheres to NICS values of impartiality, honesty, integrity and objectivity. Our aim is to be an organisation where people feel involved, respected and connected to our success.

It is the responsibility of all staff to be aware of and to apply this policy. Both Management and Trade Union Side are fully committed to the policy and will endeavour to ensure its full implementation.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

Equality monitoring is the process of collecting, storing and analysing information that is relevant to and necessary for the purpose of promoting equality of opportunity between different categories of persons. This section sets out what information is collected, the reasons for doing so and what it is used for.

You should note that the Monitoring Form is regarded as part of your application and failure to fully complete and return it will result in disqualification. The Monitoring Form will be processed separately and neither the form nor the details contained in it will be available to those considering your application.

Monitoring equality and diversity in the workforce enables the NICS to examine how our employment policies and processes are working and to identify areas where these appear to be impacting disproportionately on certain groups of staff.

Legislative Context

This section explains the reasons for gathering this information by setting out the legislative background.

Gender

The Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended) makes it unlawful to discriminate against an individual on the grounds of his or her sex. Information on gender is also provided in the annual statutory monitoring return, as required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998. 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 men and women generally.

Age

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006 make it unlawful for employers and others to discriminate on grounds of age. 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 of different ages and age groups.

Community Background

The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 outlaws discrimination on the basis of religious belief or political opinion. The Order also requires the NICS to submit an annual monitoring return to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. This takes the form of a statistical return, providing information on the gender and community background composition of all people working in the NICS at the 1st January each year.

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 of different religious belief and political opinion. Following guidance issued in July 2007 by the Equality Commission for NI the NICS has decided to use “community background” information as a proxy for political opinion.

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.

Race

The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 makes it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origin. 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 of different racial group(s).

Sexual Orientation

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) Order 2003 makes it unlawful for employers and others to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation. In order to monitor the effectiveness of NICS policies information is gathered on sexual orientation. 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 of different sexual orientation.

Marital Status

The Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended), makes it unlawful to discriminate against married persons and civil partners in employment. 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 of different marital status.

Dependants Status

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 dependants and persons without.

Confidentiality of Monitoring Information

The following general principles will be applied to all individual monitoring information:-

- individual monitoring information will be afforded a high degree of confidentiality;
- misuse of monitoring information will be viewed as a disciplinary offence; and
- individual monitoring information will only be disclosed to members of staff or officials of a trade union, members of which are employed in the NICS, if it is necessary to do so for the appropriate discharge of their duties and responsibilities.

In addition to the above internal safeguards on the protection of equality monitoring information generally, the confidentiality of community background monitoring information is protected through Regulations made under the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (FETO). These make it a criminal offence, subject to specific exceptions, for an employer or employee to disclose information on the community background of an individual which has been obtained, or is used, for the purpose of monitoring under FETO.

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). Monitoring information is held on computer and is protected by a high level of security. Access to this data is restricted to those NICS staff, employees of HRConnect and Trade Union officials whose duties make it necessary for them to have it. Misuse of monitoring information is viewed as a disciplinary offence.