

Candidate Information Booklet

IRC302111

**Member of Northern Ireland
Statistics Advisory Committee**

**Completed Application Forms
must be returned to HRConnect
no later than 12:00 noon (UK time)
on
*Friday 24th May 2024***

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 **HR Connect** on **0800 1 300 330** or via email to recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

The selection criteria and selection process are set out within this pack along with details of how to complete the application form. It is recommended that you read this information carefully.

The competition to appoint Members of SAC is being managed by HRConnect on behalf of the Department of Finance (DoF). HRConnect will issue competition communication electronically and you are asked to 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 information in relation to this competition. There may, however, still be a necessity to issue some correspondence by hard copy mail.

Privacy Notice

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

CONTENTS

Introduction

Role Description

Person Specification

Selection Criteria

Selection Process

How to Apply

Annex A - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Annex B - Further Details on Selection Criteria

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

Annex D - Interview Guidance

Annex E - CPA NI Leaflet

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

The Department of Finance (DoF) provides the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and other public bodies with funding, staff, professional services and business support systems, helping them to deliver excellent, value for money public services.

It does this by:

- Managing public money – effectively allocating resources to where they are most needed to support the delivery of public services;
- Supporting our people – recruiting, developing and supporting the best people for the NICS and providing opportunities for individuals to reach their full potential;
- Transforming and innovating – improving effectiveness across the public sector by transforming the way we work;
- Providing evidence and insights – supporting evidence-based policy and informing public debate, through high quality, trusted, meaningful data, evidence and research; and
- Delivering public services – collecting rates revenue to provide funding towards public services such as health, education and infrastructure, as well as council services.

ABOUT NISRA

The [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) (NISRA) is an Executive Agency of the Department of Finance. It is responsible for planning and undertaking a Census of Population and Housing; collecting and analysing data, producing statistics; providing civil registration services and undertaking research.

NISRA is Northern Ireland's largest producer of official statistics and government social research. Our role is to enhance understanding of Northern Ireland (and the UK) through the provision of trusted information. Our statistics and research provide evidence to assist resource allocation and policy making and we maintain data sources which are made available to accredited researchers.

The Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) and the Code of Practice for official statistics and protocols emanating from it, require the Agency to operate to the highest professional standards, be demonstrably independent of political influence and open to the direct scrutiny of the UK Statistics Authority.

ABOUT THE STATISTICS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Statistics Advisory Committee (SAC) is a non-departmental public body of DoF, established under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988. SAC's

function is to advise NISRA and thereby Northern Ireland Departments, on matters relating to the collection and disclosure of statistical information from businesses under the Statistics of Trade and Employment (NI) Order 1988; and to advise on statistical issues such as quality assurance, official statistics, and other similar matters referred to it by Departments.

The Committee, which comprises a Chair and not less than six other members, is appointed by the Head of the Department, the Minister of Finance. Appointments are for a five year period.

The composition of the Committee is aimed at providing an appropriate cross-section of experience from a variety of interests and backgrounds relevant to statistics users, including those who reflect the interests of the business sector, who may be involved in the completion of statistical surveys. Members will be required to provide expertise and specialist advice on statistical surveys of businesses and/or statistical issues more generally, reflecting the views of the wider statistics user community.

DoF is seeking to appoint up to 9 members to SAC, which is expected to meet no less than once a year. It is the Agency's intention that the new appointees will be in place by September 2024.

PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS

Appointments to SAC are regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments and examined by CPANI for compliance with the Commissioners' Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies.

DoF 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 particularly welcome applications from women, people with a disability, people under 30 years of age and those from ethnic minorities. We operate the Guaranteed Interview Scheme for applicants with a disability. Please refer to Annex A. This appointment process will be regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (CPANI) and the competition may be audited by the CPANI, for compliance with the Commissioner's Code of Practice.

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 NISRA in the strictest confidence.

ROLE DESCRIPTION

The members of SAC will:

- attend Committee meetings, participate in discussions and provide input to issues considered by the Committee, including business surveys and statistical matters more generally;
- participate in working groups relevant to the work of the Committee;
- act from time to time as a channel of communication between the Department and both statistics users and providers; and
- work in a collegiate way to ensure that the functions of the Committee are delivered in an efficient and effective manner.

Time Commitment and Remuneration

The appointments will be effective from September 2024, and the term of appointments will be for 5 years. A second term may be offered, subject to satisfactory performance.

Appointments for this position are restricted to two terms. Accordingly, those who have already served two appointment terms on SAC, of whatever length, are ineligible to apply for the same position.

The SAC convenes a half day meeting on approximately two to three occasions each year. Members may also periodically be required to attend working groups formed to take forward specific issues. Meetings are held inside normal working hours. By applying for the post, it is assumed that you can meet this time commitment.

Committee meetings are usually held at the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Head Quarters, Colby House, Stranmillis Court, Belfast.

Appointments to SAC are on a non-remunerated basis. Following appointment, travel and subsistence expenses are payable at Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) rates.

Code of Conduct

To ensure that public service values remain at the heart of the Committee the Chair and Committee Members are required, on appointment, to demonstrate high standards of corporate and personal conduct and to subscribe to the [Code of Practice for Board Members](#).

Any applicant seeking additional information about these positions should contact Brian Green Director of Economic Statistics, NISRA at Brian.Green@nisra.gov.uk.

Any applicant wishing to raise a question about the competition process should contact HRConnect recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

PERSON SPECIFICATION

The person specification addresses the qualities, experience and background that a member of the SAC will be expected to have. To select suitable appointees a criteria-based selection procedure will be employed in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland Code of Practice.

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 simple mention of a skill or attribute will be insufficient. The selection panel cannot make assumptions from the title of a post or the nature of an organisation, as to the experience, qualities and skills gained by an applicant: specific evidence must be provided.

There are 3 criteria which are considered essential in order to be an effective member of SAC. You are expected to demonstrate your ability, by way of examples, to meet each of the following:

Further details and guidance on the selection criteria is available at Annex B.

1. An understanding of statistics and how they can be used to inform decision making.

As a member of SAC, you will be required to provide expertise and specialist advice on statistical surveys of businesses in Northern Ireland and/or statistical issues more generally pertaining to the work of NI Departments that may be referred to the committee.

2. Effective communication skills.

As a member of SAC, you will be required to communicate clearly with others and to consider other points of view, constructively challenging where necessary, putting across rational arguments and seeking to positively influence other members.

3. Ability to work effectively as part of a committee or board at a senior level*.

As a member of SAC you will be part of a team. You will be expected to attend SAC meetings and both contribute and commit to the decisions taken by the committee, develop effective working relationships with your fellow committee members and abide by the principles and values of public service. See Annex C for more information on the 'Seven Principles Underpinning Public Life'.

** experience at senior level includes taking decisions affecting the corporate body or organisation within which an individual is working, or providing detailed advice at Board level on such issues.*

SHORTLISTING

In addition, 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 assessing the strength and quality of the evidence provided in the candidate's application form against essential criterion 1.

This will be done on a scored basis with only those applicants deemed most suitable for appointment proceeding to the Interview Stage.

The Selection Panel will complete this assessment against the information provided by applicants in response to the essential criteria.

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 read the [Public Appointments Guide](#) which provides an overview of Public Appointments in Northern Ireland and helpful information for those wishing to apply.

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 page 9.

Only the Commitments and Appointments and 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 their application form. Where it is necessary to prepare a shortlist of suitable candidates 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 A**). 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 currently scheduled to take place on 5th June 2024.

Interview of Eligible Candidates

It is anticipated that interviews will take place in Belfast during week commencing 24th June 2024 with the successful candidates confirmed by end July 2024.

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.

Candidates invited for interview are eligible for reimbursement of reasonable travelling expenses incurred within Northern Ireland.

The selection panel will ask questions on each of the essential criteria as listed on page 9 and further outlined in **Annex B** of this pack.

The selection panel will assess the information presented by you at interview against each selection criterion. A score will then be allocated against each selection criterion. A minimum pass mark will apply for each criterion, and a total interview score derived. All the selection criteria will be equally weighted.

Presentation of Results to the Appointer.

The Minister has chosen to be presented with the list of those judged suitable for appointment in an unranked order, i.e. the Panel members will score candidates at interview against an agreed pass mark and those found to be above the line will be recommended to the Minister. A 'candidate summary' will be provided to the Minister with an objective analysis of each candidate's skills and experience, based on the information provided by each candidate during the appointment round and the Panel's assessment of that candidate. The Minister will decide who should be appointed and may decide to meet the candidates prior to making his/her decision.

Pre-appointments Checks

Before the names of suitable candidates are presented to the Minister, a cross-departmental check will be carried out on the probity and performance of those candidates who currently hold or have held public appointment roles. The recorded performance and attendance in other public appointment roles will not form part of the candidate assessment by the panel, but may be taken into account in selecting candidates for appointment.

Disqualification – Statutory Disqualification

Under the terms of the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975, and the NI Assembly Disqualification Act 1975, existing MPs, and MLAs cease to hold their elected office if they take up an appointment as a SAC member.

If an individual holding a public appointment decides to stand for election as an MP, or MLA, they must immediately notify the department of their intentions. If they have not resigned their public appointment before submitting their nomination as a candidate and are subsequently elected as an MP, or MLA, their election will be void.

Disqualification – Other

According to the CPANI 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 or Committee 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.**

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 any 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 D** for further information on this subject.

Successful candidates will be asked to complete a **Political Activity Questionnaire form**. The Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended that all candidates for public appointments be asked to declare any significant political activity (including office holding, public speaking and standing for election) that they may have

undertaken in the previous five years. The question only asks for information that is already in the public domain.

Appointment

The candidates, whose applications are successful and who are appointed, will have their appointment formally confirmed in writing. Unsuccessful interviewees will also be advised in writing of the outcome of their interview. Before appointment, a cross-departmental check will be carried out on the probity and performance of candidates who currently hold or have held public appointment roles.

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; and your response to the Political Activity Questionnaire.

Reserve List

The Minister may agree that a reserve list will be held to be used to fill any future vacancies that arise within 12 months of the date of the decision to appoint.

HOW TO APPLY

The competition to fill membership of the Statistics Advisory Committee is being managed by HRConnect on behalf of DoF. 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 form;
- applicants must complete the application form in either typescript font size 12, or legible writing using black ink;
- Applicants are limited to a maximum of 3,700 characters including spaces per criterion; and
- 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 (UK time) on Friday 24th May 2024. 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. Please be aware that the Department may decide to extend the closing date for this competition. If this is the case, all applicants who have submitted an application by the original closing date/time will be informed.

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

If after receiving a response you are still concerned, you can send your complaint, in writing, to the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

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 carry out 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 as 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.

Further details on Selection Criteria

Essential Criteria

An understanding of statistics and how they can be used to inform decision making.

Using expertise and specialist knowledge to provide advice on statistical issues affecting the performance of an organisation or sector.

We are looking for an example (or examples) that will demonstrate your ability to review statistical information or collection methods to inform and guide the work of an organisation or sector in which you have worked or have been involved.

Examples of the type of evidence that would demonstrate your suitability are outlined below. The answer(s) you provide in your application and at interview does not have to describe activities which meet each and every one of these bullet points.

- Provides constructive challenge to the producer(s) of statistics, analysis and research to ensure quality and accuracy.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the role of official statistics and the sources of statistical information.
- Is aware of the strategic context in which statistics are collected.
- Makes reasoned evidence based and sound decisions based on analytical review.
- Applies the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics to ensure statistics are trustworthy, good quality and are of value to society.

Effective Communication skills

Ability to communicate clearly with others in a committee or board context and to listen to what others say to help achieve consensus.

We are looking for an example (or examples) that will demonstrate your ability to constructively challenge and positively influence others, both internal and external to an organisation or sector in which you have worked or have been involved, using rational argument to help reach a shared and beneficial position.

Examples of the type of evidence that would demonstrate your suitability are outlined below. The answer(s) you provide in your application and at interview does not have to describe activities which meet each and every one of these bullet points.

- Communicates effectively with colleagues, senior leaders and the public, constructively challenging others when necessary.
- Ability to identify and deploy suitably tailored communication methods depending on the audience and the situation.
- Using persuasive and compelling arguments, deploying clear and concise language, to get others to understand and accept a different perspective.
- Facilitate effective communication by maintaining an open mind and be willing to compromise.

Ability to work effectively as part of a committee or board at a senior level*

Able to develop effective working relationships and contribute to the work of the committee, ensuring collective goals and objectives are achieved and promote its decisions acting at all times in keeping with the 7 principles of public life, (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership).

We are looking for an example (or examples) that will demonstrate how you have worked effectively as part of a senior committee or board to deliver results, acting as a role model for appropriate behaviour in your dealings with others, both internal and external to an organisation or sector in which you have worked or have been involved.

Examples of the type of evidence that would demonstrate your suitability are outlined below. The answer(s) you provide in your application and at interview does not have to describe activities which meet each and every one of these bullet points.

- Uses effective interpersonal skills to develop and maintain constructive working relationships.
- Recognises the value and strength of the diversity of the team and seeks to harness this to deliver results.
- Seeks to resolve conflict whilst maintaining positive relationships, treating everyone with courtesy and respect
- Demonstrates personal attributes that are consistent with role and responsibilities.
- Consistently makes decisions in an open and transparent manner and on a sound ethical basis.

**** experience at senior level includes taking decisions affecting the corporate body or organisation within which an individual is working, or providing detailed advice at Board level on such issues.***

PROBITY & CONFLICTS OF INTEREST – GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the information contained in the leaflet “CPA NI Guidance on Conflicts of Interest, Integrity and how to raise a complaint” which provides examples of the types of issues that may give rise to conflicts of interests – please see **Annex E**.

Standards of Behaviour

Departments 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.

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 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>

Guidance on Conflicts of Interest, Integrity and How to raise a complaint

CPANI

The Commissioner
for Public Appointments
Northern Ireland

Thank you for your interest in this appointment

Public bodies have an important role to play in the lives of everyone. Among other things, they help run our health and social care services, arrange our education services and provide a wide range of social, economic, cultural and environmental services. Appointments to boards of public bodies are commonly known as public appointments.

Public appointments are made by individual Government Ministers. If you decide to apply for a public appointment the administration of your application will be handled by civil servants in the relevant Department. The Commissioner regulates the selection process but is not involved in individual competitions.

Departments must follow the 'Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Northern Ireland', to ensure that appointments are made on merit, after fair and open competition. The Code of Practice covers Ministerial appointments to a wide range of boards and public bodies. A full list can be found on the CPANI website at www.publicappointmentsni.org. The Code of Practice is also there.

Making a Complaint

If you apply for a public appointment, and you feel you have not been treated correctly, you may make a complaint.

The Commissioner is responsible for investigating complaints about public appointments. The Commissioner will look at the process used to make an appointment and the way an application was handled.

You should first raise your concerns with the relevant Department. If, after you have received a reply, you still feel you have not been treated correctly, you should contact CPANI using the contact details below.

Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (CPANI)

Stormont Castle - Interim

Stormont Estate

Upper Newtownards Road

Belfast

BT4 3XX

Tel: 028 905 24820

Email: info@publicappointmentsni.org

Guidance on Conflicts of Interest and Integrity

As part of the assessment process for a public appointment, you will be asked if you know of any possible conflicts of interest in connection with that appointment. Conflicts of interest are not always a barrier to appointment. However, all perceived, potential and real conflicts must be explored by the selection panel to ensure that the public can have confidence in the Board's independence and impartiality and in your position on that Board.

To give you an idea of what might constitute a conflict of interest here are a few examples of areas which could lead to a conflict of interest.

- You are the director of a building firm and the Board to which you are seeking appointment conducts regular procurement exercises for building materials. You could benefit personally from decisions taken by the Board.
- You are a manager in a voluntary organisation, whose funding applications are considered by the Board to which you are seeking appointment. The body for which you work could benefit financially from decisions taken by the Board.
- You have, in the past, contributed or lent significant funds to the political party to which the appointing Minister belongs. Your appointment could be viewed as a reward for past favours.

These are examples only. Please remember that identifying a conflict will not necessarily stop you being appointed. You should consider carefully your own circumstances to decide whether or not a perceived, potential or real conflict exists and be ready to discuss it with the Selection Panel at interview.

Even if you have not identified any conflicts of interest when applying for the post, you will still be asked about the issue if you are interviewed.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) has produced a good practice guide to conflicts of interest. This can be found on the NIAO website at www.niauditoffice.gov.uk.

Integrity

Anyone applying for a public appointment must understand and be committed to the principle of integrity. You will be asked about this at interview.

Feedback

You may request feedback on the outcome of your application from the Department running this public appointment competition. This application pack contains relevant contact details. Feedback can be delivered in writing, by e-mail or by phone. It is up to you. It should be useful, jargon-free and based on the assessment of the selection panel. Please see paragraphs 3.48 and 3.49 of the Code of Practice.

