

# **DSO Solicitor Traineeship Programme 2026**

## **Candidate Information Booklet**

### **IRC328379**

**2 Year Solicitor Traineeship within the  
Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO)  
  
Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS)**

**Completed application forms must be returned to HRConnect no later  
than **12 noon (UK time) on Friday 10 July 2026****

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

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## FOREWORD

This competition is to fill three opportunities for a solicitor traineeship within the Department of Finance (DoF). The successful applicants will be based in the Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO) Litigation Divisions and Employment Division at our office in Lanyon Plaza, Lanyon Place, Belfast.

### The Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO)



Thank you for your interest in a traineeship position with the Departmental Solicitor's Office. We operate at the legal heart of devolved government, but we are also proud to play our part in the wider Northern Ireland legal profession.

Although you will be based in DSO, this is an exciting opportunity to get involved in the wider government legal profession.

We do some of the most interesting and difficult legal work in Northern Ireland. Our clients have extensive powers and duties, which are critical to the rule of law. This two-year Solicitor Traineeship will be challenging but rewarding.

I look forward to working with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Louise Crilly".

LOUISE CRILLY

**Departmental Solicitor and Head of Government Legal Service NI  
Departmental Solicitor's Office**

## **BACKGROUND**

### **About the Departmental Solicitor's Office ("DSO")**

The Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO) is a business area within the Department of Finance (DoF) that serves the work of government through the provision of high-quality, cost-effective legal advice and services.

The DSO assists and supports the Executive and Departments in the performance of their functions to best advantage, advising Departments across a wide range of serious and complex issues, assisting the development of departmental policies and legislation, human-rights proofing, and advising on substantial commercial activities, including some of the biggest property developments in Northern Ireland. It also defends Departments' interests in a wide range of litigation including judicial review and, where appropriate, initiates cases in the courts on their behalf. DSO also presently has policy responsibility for civil law reform.

It has eight legal Divisions which are together supported by a Corporate Services Division:

- Commercial and Property Division;
- 2 Litigation Divisions;
- 4 Advisory Divisions; and
- Employment Division

DSO assists and supports Northern Ireland Ministers and departments, their agencies and some non-departmental public bodies in the formation and delivery of the Executive's Programme for Government; and in the performance of their functions in the devolved sphere of government in Northern Ireland. It is responsible for advising departments across a huge range of serious and complex issues, for example:

- defending departments' interests in a wide range of litigation including judicial review, and initiating litigation on their behalf;
- advising on the development of departmental policies and legislation, and on the exercise of departmental functions;
- advising on departments' substantial property and commercial interests;
- advising on complex governmental issues such as human rights, the changing constitution, and Windsor Framework;
- advising on civil law reform.

DSO headquarters are currently located in Lanyon Plaza, Belfast. Staff are also located in Crown Buildings, Derry / Londonderry; and outposted to other departmental locations. There are currently 149 staff in DSO, of whom 125 are legal staff and it has a budget of £12.6m.

DSO is an integral business area within DoF and contributes to the delivery of legal services alongside DoF's provision of other professional and corporate services to the Northern Ireland Departments.

### **Litigation 1 & 2 Divisions**

The Litigation Divisions provide litigation services to all nine Departments and other public bodies, across a wide range of functions, including such matters as:

- judicial reviews, which can be high profile and sensitive;
- personal injury and other claims against government;
- commercial and procurement litigation and alternative dispute resolution; and
- regulatory appeals and Departmental prosecutions.
- Inquests

The Litigation teams work closely with the Government Legal Service for Northern Ireland (GLSNI) panel counsel and Senior and Junior Crown

Counsel to provide a fast service attuned to the political environment and advice which takes into account the wider needs and priorities of government. On average, Litigation Divisions carry a live caseload in excess of 3000 files, with an annual value of c£2.3m in DSO's professional fees.

DSO is one of the organisations participating in the GLSNI. DSO is an enthusiastic participant in the Northern Ireland Civil Service of the Future agenda.

### **Employment Division**

DSO's Employment Division provides expert legal advice to all NICS Departments, combining strategic advice, dispute resolution, and advocacy, including their agencies and other public bodies.

The Employment Division is responsible for:

- defending all employment related litigation initiated against the NICS Departments.
- representing Departments in Industrial Tribunal cases and, on occasion, the civil courts to include issues such as unfair dismissal, discrimination, harassment, whistleblowing, wage disputes, breach of contract and other employment related claims;
- advising the NICS Departments on all aspects of employment law.

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The Departmental Solicitor's Office is offering a 2-year solicitor traineeship commencing on **Tuesday 1 September 2026**. There are three vacancies. The successful candidates will be based in the Departmental Solicitor's Office Litigation Divisions and Employment Division.

These are temporary fixed term positions for trainee solicitors participating in the Trainee Solicitor programme in Northern Ireland run by the Institute of Professional Legal Studies (IPLS) in conjunction with the Law Society.

Successful candidates shall be ranked in order of merit and allocated to a vacancy in the order listed. No further vacancies will be filled from this competition.

### Location

The posts are based in our office at Lanyon Plaza, Belfast.

### Salary

Your salary during the traineeship will be £24,454 per annum.

### Institute Fees

The Departmental Solicitor will pay 50% of the Institute fees. The successful candidates will be required to repay DSO these fees in the event that they do not complete the training contract.

### Appointment

The successful candidates will be contracted to undertake a 2 year training contract within DSO with a starting date of **Tuesday 1 September 2026**. A permanent position will not be offered at the end of the training programme.

## **Pensions**

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

## **Training**

A solicitor in DSO will be appointed as a Master for each of the successful candidates. As part of the training contract the trainees will be required to comply with all aspects of the agreed training schedule at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies.

Performance will be monitored, and continuation of the traineeship will be dependent on satisfactory completion of all aspects of the training programme.

## **Holidays**

Annual leave allowance will be 28 days (inclusive of public and privilege holidays).

## **Hours of Work**

During the periods of in-office training, normal hours of work are full-time: 42 hours per week, which includes a 1 hour daily meal break (37 hours net) Monday to Friday. The trainee solicitors shall be expected to work 5 days a week in the office and report for work in DSO when not attending the IPLS.

## **Vetting**

An appointment will be dependent on the individual satisfying the vetting requirements for the posts. The level of vetting required is a Basic AccessNI check. Candidates will be required to provide their certificate of disclosure when completed. Failure to provide a copy of the certificate of disclosure will result in withdrawal from the traineeship programme.

**Further Information**

If you wish to learn more about the training contract with DSO before deciding to apply, you may contact Katie Hughes by email at [Katie.Hughes@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Katie.Hughes@finance-ni.gov.uk) or Lorcan McGurk at [Lorcan.McGurk@finance-ni.gov.uk](mailto:Lorcan.McGurk@finance-ni.gov.uk). Finally, if you have any questions about the competition process, please contact HR Connect at [recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net](mailto:recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net)

# ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

## ESSENTIAL CRITERION

At the time of closing date of applications (**12 noon (UK time) on Friday 10 July 2026**), the applicant must hold an offer from the Institute of Professional Legal Studies of a confirmed place on the Solicitor's course subject only to obtaining a Master. **A copy of the letter must be emailed when submitting the application and prior to the closing date.** The email with your cover letter must be marked with the competition reference number IRC328379 together with the candidate's full name and emailed to **orgcharts@hrconnect.nigov.net**. If the letter for this criterion is not provided by the closing date to orgcharts@hrconnect.nigov.net, the application form will be treated as incomplete (and it will therefore not be forwarded to the panel for consideration).

## SHORTLISTING CRITERION

In addition, applicants should be aware that after an eligibility sift, should it be necessary to shortlist candidates to go forward for interview, the Panel will carry out an objective evaluation of the essay. This will be completed on a scored basis with only the top scoring candidates proceeding to interview.

In the shortlisting section of the application form, you will write an essay of **not more than 3,700 characters** to demonstrate how you meet the following question, which will be tested against the Leading and Communicating competence:

**“Describe a time when you used your communication skills effectively resulting in a positive outcome. Explain how you decided on the best method of communication and how you knew you were successful.”**

**Please note:** Candidates should familiarise themselves with **Level 2** within the NICS Competency Framework which can be accessed via [www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk](http://www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk).

## **Disability Requirements and Reasonable Adjustment Requests**

We wish to ensure all applicants have the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability. If you require any form of reasonable adjustment to participate in the selection process, please note this in the box provided on your application form and include details of your disability and the specific adjustment you need. We will consider all requests for reasonable adjustments for any stage of this recruitment process.

To ensure you are fully supported in the process, you may provide relevant supporting information regarding your adjustment request – for example, an Occupational Psychologist report or a GP's medical statement.

Information to support your request should be sent to HRConnect at [recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net](mailto:recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net) as soon as possible following submission of your application but no later than the competition closing date (**Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2026**). Please mark your correspondence with the competition reference number **IRC328379** and title it 'Supporting information for reasonable adjustment request'.

### **Please note:**

- It is not sufficient to simply list your duties and responsibilities.
- The selection panel will not make assumptions from the title of the applicant's post or the nature of the organisation as to the skills and experience gained.
- The examples you provide should be concise and relevant to the criteria. This is very important as the examples which you provide may be explored at interview and you may need to be prepared to talk about these in detail if you are invited to interview. It is your unique role the panel are interested in, not that of your team or division.
- 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.

- ONLY the details provided by you in your application form (the study details, essential and shortlisting criteria) will be provided to the selection panel for the purpose of determining your eligibility for the post. Please do not include your name in the employment history or eligibility criteria sections.
- **No additional information or evidence provided in support of your experience will be considered at any time after the closing date for applications.**

# ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The selection process will include a **competence-based interview**. A selection panel will design questions to test the applicant's work or life knowledge and experience in each of the areas below and award marks accordingly. These questions will be based on the **NICS Competency Framework**.

No notes or personal documents may be brought to the interview. In addition to satisfying the eligibility criteria applicants will also be expected to display the following qualities and skills at interview based on the Level 2 indicators for each competency:

## 1. Making Effective Decisions

Effectiveness in this area is about being objective, using sound judgement, evidence and knowledge to provide accurate, expert and professional advice. For all staff, it means showing clarity of thought, setting priorities, analysing and using evidence to evaluate options before arriving at well reasoned, justifiable decisions.

**Marks available: 25**

**Minimum standard: 15**

## 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. It requires working collaboratively, sharing information and building supportive, responsive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, whilst having the confidence to challenge assumptions.

**Marks available: 25**

### **3. 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: 25**

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

People who are effective in this area lead from the front and communicate with clarity, conviction and enthusiasm – supporting fairness of opportunity and diversity.

**Marks available: 25**

**Total Marks Available: 100**

**Pass Mark: 60**

### **Interviews**

It is intended that interviews for this post will take place in Lanyon Plaza, Belfast during **Monday 27 July 2026 to Wednesday 29 July 2026 (inclusive)**. It will not be possible to re-arrange interviews outside of these dates. Candidates should note if shortlisted they will be notified of the interview date and time by email by **Tuesday 21 July 2026** – using the email address provided on the application form. You should therefore check your email account to make sure that you don't miss any important communications in relation to this programme. Please make sure you also check your email spam and junk folder.

## **NICS Competency Framework**

The selection process will assess candidates against the NICS Competency Framework at **Level 2**. It is recommended that applicants consider the NICS Competency Framework which can be accessed via [www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk](http://www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk).

The NICS Competency Framework sets out how all NICS employees should work. It puts the Civil Service values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality at the heart of everything they do, and it aligns to the three high-level leadership behaviours that every civil servant needs to model as appropriate to their role and level of responsibility: Set Direction, Engage People and Deliver Results.

Competencies are the skills, knowledge and behaviours that lead to successful performance. The framework outlines ten competencies, which are grouped into three clusters. The competencies are intended to be discrete and cumulative, with each level building on the levels below i.e., a person demonstrating a competency at Level 2 should be demonstrating levels 1 and 2 as a matter of course. **It is important that all candidates familiarise themselves with the competency framework as this forms the basis of selection process.**

# GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

## Application Form

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

## Please note:

- We will not accept CVs, letters, additional pages or any other supplementary material in place of or in addition to completed application forms, unless it is specifically requested in the application form and candidate information booklet.
- Applicants are encouraged to submit electronic applications using the template available by email. However, hard copy application packs are available on request. All applications will be treated equally regardless of whether they are hard copy or online.
- All applications must be received by the advertised closing date and time.
- Information in support of your application will not be accepted after the closing date for receipt of applications.
- DSO 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 the background to such terminology.
- 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 interest in, not that of your team or division.

- Only the 3<sup>rd</sup> level study, eligibility and shortlisting sections will be made available to the panel.

### **Help with making your application**

You can get advice or assistance with making an application from the Employability, Careers and Skills teams within your University. In addition, The Careers Service provides an impartial, all-age careers information, advice and guidance service, to help young people and adults make informed choices about their future career paths. You can contact one of The Careers Service's professionally qualified Careers Advisors at Careers Service.

You can also get advice or assistance from local disability employment organisations. To find out more about local disability employment organisations contact Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment (NIUSE), an umbrella group for individuals and organisations promoting opportunities for people with disabilities to access and maintain employment.

E: [info@niuse.org.uk](mailto:info@niuse.org.uk)

T: 0044 (0)28 71 377709

Text: 0044 (0)28 71 3720

### **USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)**

Artificial Intelligence can be a useful tool to support your application, however, all examples and statements provided must be truthful, factually accurate and taken directly from your own experience. Where plagiarism has been identified (presenting the ideas and experiences of others, or generated by artificial intelligence, as your own) applications may be withdrawn.

Please see our [candidate guidance on the use of AI](#) for more information on appropriate and inappropriate use.

## **Interview Preparation**

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

- Talk through previous work/life experiences 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 fulfil the competences required for effective performance in the role; and
- Provide specific examples of your work/life 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, using the STAR approach:**

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

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

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### **The Merit Principle**

In accordance with the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code, appointments to the NICS are made under the 'merit principle', where the best person for any given post is selected in fair and open competition. Following interview candidates will be ranked in order of merit and posts offered in the order listed.

Further information on the Civil Service Commissioners can be found at [www.nicscommissioners.org](http://www.nicscommissioners.org).

### **NICSHR Privacy Notice**

NICSHR are committed to protecting your privacy. DSO manages job applications in line with the NICSHR privacy notice available via [www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk](http://www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk).

### **Offers of Employment**

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

### **Changes in personal circumstances and contact details**

Please ensure HRConnect is informed immediately of any changes in personal circumstances. It is important that HRConnect has up to date contact details for you. **If your email address changes, then it is your responsibility to inform HRConnect.**

### **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 HR Connect at [recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net](mailto:recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net). Details of this will only be used for this purpose and do not form any part of the selection process.

### **Disability Requirements**

We will ask on the application form if you require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability or underlying condition, 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 HR Connect at [recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net](mailto:recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net)

### **Documentation**

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

You should ensure that the required documents are readily available. Failure to provide the appropriate documentation when requested will result in your application being rejected.

### **Right to Work and Nationality Requirements**

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

### **Security**

For the post of trainee solicitor in the DSO, the NICS level of vetting is a Baseline Personnel Security Standard. For this check you will be required to provide the following:

- a. Your passport OR

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

Further information regarding the Baseline Personnel Security Standard including other acceptable documents is available via [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

Successful candidates will be required to complete a Criminal Record Check to be carried out by AccessNI. The category of AccessNI check required for this post is; Basic Disclosure Certificate.

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

Security Policy for AccessNI Disclosure Information is available at [www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk](http://www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk) under Useful Information.

The AccessNI code of practice can be accessed via [www.nidirect.gov.uk/accessni](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/accessni)

The applicants who are being considered for appointment will be contacted by HRConnect, normally after interview, and will be asked to complete the AccessNI application form. **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.

### **Equal Opportunity Monitoring Form**

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

For guidance on completing the Monitoring Form and to read the NICS Equal Opportunities Policy Statement please refer DoF website [www.finance-ni.gov.uk](http://www.finance-ni.gov.uk).

**The Northern Ireland Civil Service is an Equal Opportunities Employer.**  
All applications for employment are considered strictly on the basis of merit.

### **Feedback**

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

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