



Northern Ireland Assembly

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

1. Equal Opportunities

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (the Commission) employs a Secretariat to serve the Assembly and is committed to the principle that recruitment to positions in the Secretariat is based on merit. It will seek to ensure that all job applicants and employees are treated fairly and with respect. The Commission's policy is to provide equality of employment to all, irrespective of gender, marital or family status, religious belief, political opinion, disability, age, race, nationality or sexual orientation.

All applications for employment will be considered on the basis of merit.

2. Core Competence Framework

The Core Competence Framework which applies to the grade of the post within the Assembly Secretariat can be found on the Northern Ireland Assembly website www.niassembly.gov.uk/jobs. You should read this before completing your application form and before attending for interview. The Core Competence Framework, which is grade specific, describes **what people need to do** in order to be effective at work.

3. Eligibility

Before completing an application, applicants should satisfy themselves that they are eligible to apply. Applicants may be allowed to proceed conditionally with their applications while their eligibility is being confirmed. Invitation to attend a test or interview should not therefore be taken to imply that they are eligible under the terms of the advertisement.

Appointment will always be based solely on merit. The process for applicants is likely to involve the following stages:

- i) Completion of an application form;
- ii) Sift process based on the information provided on the application form against the essential and, if appropriate, shortlisting criteria;
- iii) Testing (where appropriate); and
- iv) Selection Interview (where appropriate).

4. Application Forms

Applicants are reminded that the application form must be **fully** completed. Any supplementary material will not be accepted in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms.

Your application will be examined by a selection panel whose job it is to assess the content of your application against the essential and shortlisting criteria. It is therefore in your own interest that you provide a detailed and accurate account of your qualifications and experience, including relevant dates.

RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

The selection panel may decide to interview only those applicants who appear, from the information available, to be most suitable in terms of relevant experience and ability. It is therefore essential that applicants describe fully in the application form the extent to which they satisfy the specified criteria (giving length of experience, examples and **dates** as required). Panels will be interested in whom you reported to, what **you** did, how you did it and how successful **you** were. It is **not** sufficient to simply list your duties and responsibilities. The selection panel will not make assumptions from the title of the applicants' posts as to the skills and experience gained.

WHEN COMPLETING YOUR APPLICATION FORM

- Do not use acronyms, complex technical detail etc. Write for the reader who may not know your organisation or job. Include concise examples and dates and be sure you can expand on these at interview.
- Write down clearly your personal involvement in any experience you quote. Write 'I' statements e.g. I planned meetings, I managed a budget, I prepared a presentation. It is how you actually carried out the piece of work that the selection panel will be interested in.
- Identify relevant examples. This is very important, as you may need to be prepared to talk about these examples in detail if you are invited to interview. It is **your** unique role the panel is interested in, not that of your team or colleagues

Applications received by the Human Resources Office after the closing date will not be accepted. The onus for ensuring an application is received in the Human Resources Office on time rests with the applicant. The Human Resources Office will normally acknowledge receipt of application forms.

Once the time/date for receipt of applications has passed, the Human Resources Office will not, at any stage of the selection process, accept any additional information in support of an application.

5. Completion of Equal Opportunities Monitoring Information

The Commission monitors applications for employment in terms of Community Background, Sex, Disability, Race and Age. **Applicants should note that this information is regarded as part of the application and must be completed.** The use and confidentiality of Community Background information is protected by the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. It will be used only for monitoring, investigations or proceedings under the requirements of the 1998 Order.

*Please ensure you read this section of the application form carefully **before** completing.*

Guidance on the Definition of Disability

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines a disability as a “physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”.

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.

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 twelve months and the effect must be a detrimental one. A person with a life expectancy of less than twelve 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.

The person must be affected in at least one of the respects listed in the DDA:

- mobility;
- manual dexterity;
- physical coordination;
- continence;
- ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects;
- speech, hearing or eyesight;
- memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; or
- perception of risk of physical danger.

If the effects of the disability are reduced by medication or other treatment then the relevant effects are those that would be present if there was no medication or treatment taking place. There is an exception to this rule for people who wear spectacles or contact lenses, then the relevant effects are those that remain while the spectacles or contact lenses are being used.

Changes to the definition of disability were made by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order and came into effect on 31 October 2007. From that date, people who develop cancer, HIV or MS are protected from disability discrimination from the point of diagnosis (and not from the point where the condition affects their ability to carry out day to day activities).

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

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 who has now fully recovered. People who were registered disabled under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (Northern Ireland) 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 otherwise fall within the definition of the DDA.

The guidance which follows contains examples of conditions which might give rise to particular categories of disability. **Hearing impairment:** For example, being deaf or hard of hearing. If you wear a hearing aid which brings your level on a par with the average you are still considered to have a disability.

Visual impairment: For example, being registered blind or partially sighted. If your sight is corrected by the use of spectacles or contact lenses this is not considered a disability.

Speech impairment: For example, being unable to speak, or having difficulty in speaking.

Mobility impairment: For example, being able to walk only limited distances; having difficulty walking other than slowly or with unsteady or jerky movements; having difficulty sitting, standing, bending or reaching; having difficulty climbing stairs, or using a normal means of transport; needing to use a walking stick, crutches or wheelchair.

Physical co-ordination difficulties: This relates to balanced and effective interaction of body movement, including hand and eye co-ordination, and might

include, for example, problems of manual dexterity and of muscular control, e.g. incontinence, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease.

Reduced physical capacity: This includes debilitating pain and lack of strength, breath, energy or stamina, such as might arise, for example, from cardiovascular conditions, asthma, diabetes. It may also result from progressive conditions, e.g. muscular dystrophy, cancer, multiple sclerosis, HIV/AIDS. (The DDA provides for people with these progressive conditions to be regarded as having a disability from the point of diagnosis.)

Severe disfigurement: Examples of disfigurements include scars, birthmarks, limb or postural deformation or diseases of the skin. A tattoo is not considered as a severe disfigurement.

Learning difficulties: For example, reading or writing with difficulty.

Mental illness: For example, having schizophrenia, clinical depression, severe phobias. (There is no longer a requirement that a mental health condition is 'clinically well recognised' before it can count as an impairment under disability discrimination law.)

Manual Dexterity: For example loss of function in one or both hands.

Perception of the risk of physical danger: For example underestimating or overestimating physical danger.

6. Guaranteed Interview Scheme

In line with the Equality Commission's *Positive Action for People who are Disabled guidance* ([Equality Commission Link](#)) the Secretariat will operate a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS). The GIS has been developed for applicants with disabilities or those with a long term impairment or health condition, that is expected to last for at least 12 months and which means that they cannot meet all of the shortlisting criteria. In these instances, **provided that they have demonstrated in their application form that they meet the essential criteria for the post**, the applicant will be offered a guaranteed interview.

An applicant does not have to have a registered disability to apply under the GIS.

The application form will include a section on disability, and an applicant can indicate whether they wish to apply under the GIS for that particular role and the basis on which they qualify for the GIS. GIS will only apply if there are shortlisting criteria for the post.

When considering applications made under GIS, the Human Resources Office reserves the right to request medical information from the applicants own general practitioner (through the applicant and with their consent), refer the applicant to Occupational Health Services (OHS) or seek advice from Legal Services.

Applicants with a disability should also indicate on the application form if they feel they require any reasonable adjustments, and what those adjustments are, to enable them to participate in the selection process. A representative from the Human Resources Office will contact the applicant to discuss their requirements.

The Human Resources Office will monitor all applications made under the GIS for Equality Commission Northern Ireland reporting purposes.

7. Test/Interview Arrangements

Applicants will be asked if they require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability, to enable them to attend an aptitude test or interview. Any adjustments to assist disabled applicants will be arranged by Human Resources office.

8. Criteria Based Interviewing Guide for Applicants

Criterion-based interviewing tests applicants against a set of criteria/competences which have been drawn up and agreed as being appropriate to a specific post/grade. The Core Competence Framework (available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website www.niassembly.gov.uk), which is grade specific, describes **what people need to do** in order to be effective at work. The criterion based interviewing approach means that all questions asked by the panel will be linked to the essential criteria and the core competences for the post advertised. All candidates will be asked the same LEAD questions.

As an interviewee, you can best prepare yourself by:-

- Reading and thoroughly understanding the essential criteria and the core competencies for the post.
- Reminding yourself of the content of your application form.
- Rehearsing how you might relate your experiences in detail to the panel emphasising your own role and unique contribution.
- Be aware of the time it takes to deliver each answer – if necessary remove any information that doesn't add value to the example.

Set out below are some tips for answering the interview questions:-

- Listen carefully to the questions. If necessary, ask for a question to be repeated.
- Answer with good clear specific examples of your personal experiences. Don't be afraid of silence for a few seconds while you think through your answer.

- Be sure you answer the question that has been asked. Don't try to make an example fit just because you have prepared it and you really want to use it.
- Don't generalise e.g. "I always provide a good service..... / I always communicate well...." Give specific examples of actual occasions when you did so. Always back up every statement with an example.
- Listen carefully to the type of question being asked. In experience-based questions the panel is testing your aptitude and competences as evidenced by your past experiences. Answers may be work-related or other, but should be from real-life experiences. Prepare your answer – based on *your* actual experience in terms of the:

Context – *brief* background / scene setting information;

Action – what you actually did – this should form the main focus of your example;

Results – what happened as a result of your actions – both short term and long term, what feedback did you get?

- Be prepared for supplementary questions which may be used to gather more information about your example – e.g. *What went well for you? What would you do differently?* Don't give one word answers – explain with an example.
- Use the first person singular – "I" (not "we") when giving examples.
- Clarify your role in the examples you give

A panel member or Chairperson may have to interrupt during your answer if they need to manage the time or if they need to get you back on track. Please do not let this put you off.

At the end of the interview if you have time remaining in your interview time the Chairperson will ask if you have anything to add to your answers. If you have no time remaining you will only be asked if you have any questions in relation to the process/ job. If you have nothing to add, do not talk simply because you feel you must.

The selection panel will assess all applicants based on performance at interview and award each with a unique score. All applicants will be listed in order of merit with the highest scoring applicant ranked first. The merit list will remain 'live' for 12 months from the date it is signed but may be extended in exceptional circumstances.

9. Pre-appointment checks

Pre-employment checks are an integral part of the recruitment and selection process. Pre-appointment checks will be undertaken for the successful applicant(s) based on the merit list and number of vacancies.

Human Resources Office will carry out a final check to ensure all identification documents have been received.

A basic Access NI check will be carried out prior to an applicant being made a final offer of employment. For some posts, a higher level of vetting may be required and this will be advised to applicants in the job specification.

Access NI is unable to obtain overseas criminal records or other relevant information as part of the Disclosure service. Many countries, including most EU countries, allow their citizens to obtain certificates of good conduct or extracts from their criminal records. Human Resources Office will consider if it is appropriate to request this from an applicant who has recently moved to the UK.

Confirmation of information provided by applicants is required to cover the last three years of an applicant's employment / education / non employment. A reference from an external applicant's current employer (or previous, if not currently employed) must be sought as part of the pre-appointment checks. Confirmation of employment dates must be sought from previous employers if current employment has lasted less than three years. Where there has been no employment history, a personal reference from someone (not a family member) who has known the applicant for the last 3 years must be sought.

A reference or Access NI basic disclosure check is not required where the applicant is currently a direct recruit to the Secretariat.

Where permission to seek a reference from the current employer has not been given, all other checks must be completed before the applicant is contacted and asked to give permission for a reference to be sought before an offer of appointment can be made.

Any outstanding cases where it has not been possible to validate essential qualifications must be completed prior to an offer being made.

Applicants who have indicated on their application form that they have a disability and may require reasonable adjustments when taking up post will be contacted by Human Resources Office to discuss any requirements for adjustments. Letters of offer of appointment will remind applicants that they must advise Human Resources Office of any reasonable adjustments they consider necessary to take up their appointment.

Human Resources Office will obtain the necessary documentation from the applicant to ensure the applicant has the right to work in the UK.

Applicants must be assessed as to their suitability for acceptance into the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (NI) as well as the likelihood of them being able to provide regular and effective service. Health requirements may vary depending on the position being filled. A health questionnaire will be issued to the successful applicant for completion and returned to the Human Resources Office

For some applicants there may be a need for a medical assessment to be carried out by the Occupational Health Service. This is to determine fitness for work and in

some cases, whether any adjustments to the workplace are required, and applicants will be notified accordingly.

10. Canvassing

Any attempt on the part of applicants to enlist support during the recruitment process could result in their disqualification.

11. Appointments

Placements within the Secretariat will be determined mainly by the business requirements of the Commission and appointees may be required to serve in any of the Directorates.

12. Pension

The NI Assembly offers all new employees an attractive pension package. Further details can be found on the Principal Civil Service Pensions Scheme (Northern Ireland) website at:

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/civilservicepensions-ni/index/new-members.htm>

If you are unable to access the website or require the information in another format please contact:

The Pensions Manager
Human Resources Office
Room 402
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BT4 3XX
Tel: 028 9052 1685

Please note that the NI Assembly does not use HR Connect.

13. Feedback

Applicants may obtain a copy of their interview question booklet, which will include all panel notes on each answer and the scores achieved for each lead question. On some occasions, the questions will not be provided if it is possible that further interviews for the same post will be required. Panel members will not provide informal feedback. All requests for feedback should be made in writing to Human Resources Office who will manage the process.

Any requests for information will be considered by Human Resources Office in light of Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation.

14. Travelling Expenses for Attendance at Interviews and Medical Examinations

A refund will only be made if the total allowable expenses amount to £3.00 or more. Amounts of £2.99 or less will not be refunded. Expenses for meals/refreshments will not be paid. All claims for expenses **MUST** be accompanied by receipts/tickets. Expenses will only be reimbursed from point of entry to Northern Ireland. Travel expenses to Northern Ireland will **not** be refunded unless the vacancy was advertised in the UK, Irish National Press or a professional journal which is available outside as well as inside Northern Ireland.