



Northern Ireland
Assembly

SECTION 1.07

EXTERNAL RECRUITMENT

Policy Statement

1. The Assembly Commission is committed to the principle that recruitment in the Assembly Secretariat should be solely on the basis of merit, and should provide equality of opportunity to all eligible applicants, irrespective of gender, marital or family status, religious belief, political opinion, disability, race, sexual orientation or age. The Appointment process should therefore be fair and applied consistently.

Procedure

2. These procedures provide detail on how external recruitment is administered.
3. On an on-going basis, the Clerk/Chief Executive or Directors (through meetings of the Secretariat Management Group (SMG)), determine what external recruitment competitions are required.
4. Before a post is advertised, Human Resources Office will consider the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Code for the post and whether a welcome statement is required in the advertisement.
5. 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);
 - iv) Selection Interview (where appropriate).

Essential Criteria

6. Essential criteria reflect the experience and knowledge that an applicant must possess in order to be able to undertake the role. In setting essential criteria, panels must also consider if a minimum period of experience is necessary.

Shortlisting Criteria

7. Shortlisting criteria reflect the competence or knowledge which has been agreed as being desirable for the successful applicant to possess. If the panel uses the shortlisting criteria, it will be applied in the order shown in the Job Specification.
8. Essential and shortlisting criteria must be justifiable against the duties and responsibilities of the post.

Stage 1: Pre-Advertisement

9. Following approval to advertise a vacancy externally, the Human Resources Office will liaise with the Chairperson of the selection panel to discuss:
 - The composition and training requirements of the selection panel. The selection panel will as far as possible have:
 - Criterion Based Interview training (completed within the previous 2 years from the date the notice is issued). If required, training and refresher training will be arranged by the Human Resources Office;
 - Gender balance;
 - Community background balance;
 - At least one panel member from outside of the business area; and
 - Panel members should normally be at least one grade above the grade of the advertised post
 - Main Duties/Responsibilities of the post;
 - Essential criteria and core competencies for the role;
 - Shortlisting criteria for the role including the minimum standard which candidates have to meet;
 - Details of any variances to normal working hours associated with the post (and payment of additional allowances in relation to these);
 - Any other specific requirements for the post e.g. requirement for additional vetting;
 - A contact point for applicants seeking further information once the post is advertised;
 - Training requirements e.g.- if it is deemed necessary for the successful applicant to complete a formal qualification following appointment, details will be provided regarding the nature of the qualification and the timetable within which it must be completed; and
 - The selection process to be undertaken, for example whether interviews will be undertaken and whether any testing will form part of the process.
10. On occasions, for example when recruiting for a technical post, it may be necessary to include a panel member from outside the organisation to ensure that the panel has the necessary expertise to select the best suited applicant. In this situation, the panel member will receive Criterion Based Interview training.
11. Draft documentation will be prepared by the Human Resources Office as a result of the discussions between the Chairperson and Human Resources Office.

Stage 2: Planning Meeting

12. A representative from the Human Resources Office will attend the meeting and will provide advice to the selection panel as required.
13. The selection panel will discuss and agree the documentation for the external recruitment including: the essential criteria, shortlisting criteria, core competencies and job specification.
14. The sift indicators, minimum standard (i.e. minimum score) for the shortlisting criteria, the interview questions, scoring scale and indicators for each lead question will normally be agreed at this meeting. If it is not possible, they must be agreed before the panel has sight of the applications.

15. The sift indicators will be used to determine if the evidence provided in the application form meets the essential criteria and the extent to which the shortlisting criteria have been met.
16. The interview questions will include a lead question which will be asked of all applicants and supplementary questions, which may be asked if necessary to elicit further detail on responses. All lead and supplementary questions must be objective, criteria based and relevant to the requirements of the role.
17. If the panel considers that certain criteria are more important in terms of experience and ability to carry out the job, they may apply a weighting mechanism to interview questions. The weighting mechanism is a multiplier and is usually x2 for the most important criterion. If all criteria are deemed to be equally important, no weighting mechanism will be applied.
18. The selection panel will also agree the timetable for the competition and discuss and agree how any requests for alternative interview dates will be dealt with.
19. The selection panel will consider the advertising media – where and when to advertise the post. The current policy is to advertise in the 3 Northern Ireland daily newspapers, appropriate recruitment websites and the Assembly's website. Consideration will be given to advertising in additional publications depending on the nature of the role. The key objective in advertising vacancies is to encourage applications and maximise the chances of appointing the best possible person.
20. Following discussion, the Chair or the panel will sign off the essential and shortlisting criteria prior to the advertisement being issued.

Stage 3: The Job Specification

21. The job specification will include all information about the post including the grade, title and salary of the role, background information including main duties and responsibilities, the main terms and conditions of the post, the essential criteria for the post, shortlisting criteria (if applicable), and the selection process e.g. interview and/or testing (if applicable).
22. A summary of the core competences for the grade which will be measured at interview will also be included.
23. Once the draft paperwork has been finalised, Human Resources Office will review to ensure that the essential/short-listing criteria hold no unjustifiable risk of an adverse impact on any section of the community protected by equality legislation.
24. The Human Resources Office will then inform Trade Union Side about the opportunity before it is issued.
25. Two calendar weeks will normally be given for the completion and return of application forms.

Stage 4: Issuing the Advertisement

26. External recruitment notices will be advertised on the Assembly website as well as the newspapers/publications as agreed by the panel. A postmaster will also be issued to advise Assembly Secretariat staff as well as agency staff placed within the Assembly Secretariat of the notice.
27. All external recruitment notices will be advertised in the English language. In addition, the title of the post and the sentence advising applicants on how to access more information on the post will also appear in the Irish language. All other documentation regarding the competition will be in the English language.
28. It will be the applicant's responsibility to ensure that their application form has been fully completed in respect of all information requested as well as the criteria set out in the job specification.
29. Application forms received after the closing date and time specified on the advertisement will not be accepted. The onus for ensuring that the application form is received by Human Resources Office on time rests with the applicant.
30. Applications can only be accepted on the agreed application form – CVs will not be accepted.

31. Further information on completing application forms is available at Appendix One "Guidance for Applicants".

Stage 5: The Sift Meeting

32. Following the closing date for applications, the Human Resources Office will collate and anonymise the applications. Only the information provided by applicants in response to the essential and shortlisting criteria will be provided to the panel in advance of the sift meeting once the sift indicators, scoring scale, minimum standards (i.e. scores) for the shortlisting criteria, the interview questions and weightings have all been drafted and agreed.
33. A representative from the Human Resources Office will attend the sift meeting to ensure all decisions reached are recorded. Where the decision is that a candidate has not demonstrated a criterion to the required standard, the reason for this must be recorded and communicated to the applicant. The responsibility for all decisions reached at the sift meeting rests with the selection panel.
34. All members of the selection panel must attend the sift meeting and sign the sift grid, initialling and dating any changes.
35. The selection panel must first consider the applications against all of the essential criteria and only applicants who demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria will proceed to the next stage of the selection process.
36. Human Resources Office will seek clarification from the appropriate authority where there are queries over the equivalences of academic or other qualifications.
37. Shortlisting may be used by the panel to reduce the field of applicants who will be invited to the next stage of the selection process by selecting applicants who best meet the shortlisting criteria.
38. It may not always be necessary to use all of the shortlisting criteria but where it is, they will be applied in the order listed in the job specification. The selection panel reserves the right to set a minimum standard for each shortlisting criteria which applicants must achieve in order to be invited to the next stage of the selection process.
39. If shortlisting is not necessary, all applicants who have demonstrated the essential criteria will proceed to the next stage of the selection process.
40. If an applicant has made Human Resources Office aware that they will be unable to attend the next stage of the selection process (e.g. due to a pre-arranged holiday) and would like an alternative date, Human Resources Office will advise the panel and ask if they are able to offer alternative dates. The panel should reconvene where at all possible and necessary arrangements made. If the panel considers that it is not appropriate to offer an alternative date, they should take advice from a senior HR manager before making a decision. They must then provide the reasons and rationale for their decision in writing to the Human Resources Office and these will be communicated to the applicant. The decision of the panel is final.
41. Following sift (and application of shortlisting criteria if necessary), each applicant will be contacted in writing by the Human Resources Office to inform them of the panel decision regarding their application.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

42. In line with the Equality Commission's [Positive Action for People who are Disabled guidance](#) the Assembly Secretariat 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. In instances where tests will be used as a shortlisting tool, **provided that the applicant has demonstrated in their application form that they meet the essential criteria for the post and score the minimum standard set for the test**, the applicant will be offered a guaranteed interview.
43. An applicant does not have to have a registered disability to apply under the GIS.

44. 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.
45. When considering applications made under GIS, the Human Resources Office reserves the right to request medical information from the applicant's own general practitioner (through the applicant and with their consent), refer the applicant to Occupational Health Services (OHS) or seek advice from Legal Services.
46. 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.
47. The Human Resources Office will monitor all applications made under the GIS for Equality Commission Northern Ireland reporting purposes.

Request to review Sift Meeting Decisions

48. Should an applicant wish to request a review of the decision of the selection panel regarding the fact that they did not progress to the next stage of the selection process (i.e. on the grounds that they did not meet the essential criteria or score highly enough in shortlisting criteria), they must write to the Human Resources Office within 5 working days of the date of the notification of the sift result. The request must be in writing and must include the reasons that they feel necessitate a review.
49. The Human Resources Office will convene a meeting of the selection panel to consider the review. All documents (i.e. the original application form and the letter requesting the review) will be anonymised. Only information contained in the original application form will be considered by the panel. No additional information will be considered.
50. Following the review by the selection panel, the Human Resources Office will notify the applicant of the outcome within 5 working days of the decision. If the review is successful, the applicant will move to the next stage of the selection process. The decision of the selection panel is final and there is no further right to request a review.

Stage 6: Interviews

51. Interviews questions are based on the essential criteria and core competencies detailed on the job specification.
52. Applicants will be notified of the time, date, length of the interview, location and the names of panel members normally ten working days before the date of the interview. Applicants will also be advised of any documentation they are required to bring to the interview; for example, proof of identity, original qualifications, etc. Should a presentation/test be part of the selection process, applicants will normally receive relevant details ten working days before the presentation/test is due to take place. Further information on preparing for interviews is available at Appendix One "Guidance for Applicants".
53. If an applicant is unable to attend the interview and would like an alternative date / time, they must notify the Human Resources Office within 5 working days of the date of their invite with the reason they are unable to attend. The Human Resources Office will contact the panel to ask if they are able to reconvene to interview on an alternative date. The panel should reconvene where possible. The decision of the panel is final and will be communicated to the applicant.
54. Human Resources Office will arrange a pre-interview meeting on behalf of the selection panel. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure all panel members are aware of their responsibilities and the interview process and format. Further information is available at Appendix Two "Guidance for Panel Members".
55. Every effort will be made to ensure that applicants are seen within 15 minutes of the time stated on their invite to interview letter. Should an applicant arrive late for their interview the panel may decide:
 - To see the applicant immediately, providing this does not impact on the interview time of the next applicant;

- To re-schedule the interview; or
 - Not to see the applicant.
56. All interview assessments are criteria based. This means that applicants are required to demonstrate their ability or competence in a structured interview. The same lead questions will be asked of all applicants and the Chairperson will ensure that approximately the same time is allocated to each applicant. Lead questions are based on the essential criteria and the competencies included on the job specification and are designed to test the applicant's ability to perform against the requirements of the post.
 57. Applicants will not be permitted to use any notes that they have prepared in responding to questions during the interview.
 58. Failure to obtain a minimum standard in any criterion will result in the applicant being unsuccessful in the selection process.
 59. Once the interviews have been completed, the panel will agree and sign a merit list based on the overall score of each applicant interviewed. Each applicant will have a unique score. Should two or more applicants obtain an identical overall performance mark and a differentiation has to be made between those applicants, the reasons justifying the decisions must be clearly stated in the 'Justification for Overall Performance Mark' section on the Chairperson's copy of the Applicant Assessment Form. When differentiating between applicants numerical data must be used i.e. 0.5.
 60. The merit list will remain "live" for 12 months from the date it is signed. A merit list may be extended in exceptional circumstances but such decisions will be subject to Senior Management Group approval.
 61. There may be occasions when a number of panels will be required to manage a large number of interviews. It is essential that all panel members involved in interviewing for the same competition are briefed by Human Resources Office in the management of the interviews. The panels will all use the same lead questions and score applicants from the same performance indicators. The responsibility for compiling any overall "order of merit" will rest with Human Resources Office.

Stage 7: Post interview

62. All applicants who have been interviewed will be notified in writing by the Human Resources Office of the result of their interview within 5 working days of the merit list being signed.
63. If an Assembly Secretariat staff member is successful in their application and has obtained a promotion as a result of an external recruitment competition, line management will be required to facilitate the staff member's release within a reasonable timescale, not normally exceeding four weeks.

Stage 8: Pre-appointment checks

64. 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.
65. Human Resources Office will carry out a final check to ensure all identification documents have been received.
66. 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 applicants will be advised of this in the job specification.
67. 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 whether it is appropriate to request this from an applicant who has recently moved to the UK.
68. 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.

69. A reference or Access NI basic disclosure check is not required where the applicant is currently a direct recruit to the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat.
70. 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.
71. Any outstanding cases where it has not been possible to validate essential qualifications must be completed prior to an offer being made.
72. 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.
73. Human Resources Office will obtain the necessary documentation from the applicant to ensure the applicant has the right to work in the UK.
74. 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 to be filled. A health questionnaire will be issued to the successful applicant for completion and return to the Human Resources Office.

Stage 9: Offer Letters

75. Once the pre-appointment checks are completed, an offer of appointment letter will be issued to the successful applicant(s).
76. The offer letter will include the terms and conditions of the appointment including the probationary period.
77. Applicants should be asked to complete and return their acceptance slip within 10 working days of the date of the offer letter.
78. Successful applicants will only receive one offer of appointment from a competition merit list which, if not accepted, will result in the applicant being removed from the merit list except in exceptional circumstances.

Feedback

79. 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 must not provide informal feedback and applicants should not approach panel members for feedback. All requests for feedback should be made in writing and will be managed by the Human Resources Office.
80. Any requests for information will be considered by Human Resources Office in light of Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation.

Travel Expenses

81. 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.
82. Expenses for meals/refreshments will not be paid.
83. All claims for expenses MUST be accompanied by receipts/tickets.

84. 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.

Monitoring

85. The Human Resources Office will monitor equality information for all applicants at each stage of the process.

Further Information

86. Please click on the following link to access the guidance for applicants – [Appendix 1 – Guidance for Applicants](#)
87. Please click on the following link to access the guidance for panel members – [Appendix 2 – Guidance for Panel Members](#)