



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Applicant Information Booklet

**INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY
SECRETARIAT AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE**

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (the Assembly Commission) is the body corporate of the Northern Ireland Assembly. It has the responsibility, under section 40(4) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to provide the Assembly, or ensure that the Assembly is provided, with the property, staff and services required for the Assembly to carry out its work.

The Assembly Commission, illustrated in Annex C, is headed by the Clerk/Chief Executive who is also the Accounting Officer. The Assembly Commission consists of 3 Directorates – Corporate Services, Legal, Governance and Research Services and Parliamentary Services – as well as a Corporate Support Unit. It currently has a staffing complement of around 390.

The main purpose of the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) is to support the Clerk/Chief Executive (in her role as Accounting Officer) and the Assembly Commission in monitoring their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance.

SARC consists of a member of the Assembly Commission, an independent Chairperson and an independent Member. SARC reviews the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the organisation's assurance needs and reviews the reliability and integrity of these assurances. Terms of Reference for SARC are provided in Annex A of this document.

The Assembly Commission is seeking to appoint an independent Member to SARC. It is anticipated that those applicants selected for interview will be invited to appear before a Selection Panel on **4 March 2022**. Whilst requests for alternative interview dates will be considered on the basis of their individual merit, it is not the preference of the Selection Panel to hold interviews on any other dates.

The merit list from this competition will remain in place for 18 months and may be used to fill vacancies, should they arise. Further details of the selection process are given at the end of this booklet.

This booklet provides information for applicants about the appointment process. It also contains important information on the role and eligibility criteria as well as details of how to apply for the positions. Prospective applicants should read this booklet carefully before completing an application form.

Application forms are available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website and should be completed online. Completed application forms demonstrating the skills and experience sought must be submitted by **4pm on 11 February 2022**.

Appointment Principles

The Assembly Commission is committed to providing equality of opportunity and is committed to the principle that recruitment should be solely on the basis of merit. We welcome applications from all suitably qualified applicants irrespective of religious belief, political opinion, race, age, gender, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or people with dependants or without.

Roles and Responsibilities

The appointment of an independent Member to SARC will facilitate an objective assessment of the assurances provided to the Accounting Officer on the risk management, control and governance arrangements within the Assembly Commission. These assurances include stewardship statements from operational management, financial statements and reports from both Internal and External Audit.

The information provided to SARC will enable the independent Chairperson to advise the Accounting Officer on the adequacy and effectiveness of the assurances and on how well the assurance received meets the assurance need.

SARC will meet at least four times per year, however the independent Chairperson of SARC may convene additional meetings as they deem necessary.

The SARC Chairperson is expected to attend meetings of the Assembly Commission as an observer. Should the Chairperson be unavailable to attend a Commission meeting, the independent Member will be expected to attend.

The time commitment for the independent Member is expected to be around four to six days per year and remuneration will be £347 (£173.50 per half day) per day. The independent Member is not an employee of the Assembly Commission.

Further information on the roles and responsibilities are available in the Terms of Reference for SARC (Annex A).

Term of Appointment

The term of the appointment will be for a period of three years with two optional one-year extensions.

Person Specification

The person appointed will require a combination of appropriate skill and experience and a successful track record built on relevant professional knowledge and experience, good judgement and effective communication.

Essential Criteria

This section sets out the essential knowledge, experience and personal competencies which are necessary to undertake the work of the independent Member of SARC. At the closing date for applications, applicants must demonstrate on their application form and at interview, the following:

- i) Experience of promoting, implementing and ensuring good corporate governance, at a senior level*, in either public or private sector including a thorough understanding of internal and external audit and risk management;
- ii) Experience of remaining objective and independent, challenging supportively and working well as part of a team;
- iii) Experience of effective communication and engagement at a senior level*; and
- iv) Experience of promoting, implementing and ensuring good financial management including the ability to competently analyse financial statements and understand good financial management disciplines.

**Senior level is defined as membership of a Board or a team at the highest level of organisational management who have the day-to-day responsibilities of managing an organisation or company.*

Shortlisting Criterion

The Selection Panel reserves the right to use shortlisting as part of the recruitment process for this appointment. Should shortlisting be required, the following shortlisting criteria will be applied:

- Detailed understanding of the public sector environment and the accountability structures within it.

Pre-appointment Checks

A basic Access NI check and financial check will be completed before appointment as well as references sought.

Conflicts of Interest

It is essential that the person appointed is able to maintain public confidence at all times.

Applicants are required to declare whether they are aware of anything in their private or professional life that would undermine their ability to maintain public confidence or which could be a source of embarrassment to themselves or the Assembly Commission.

Further guidance on probity and conflicts of interest is contained in Annex B of this booklet.

Members of the SARC will record in the SARC Register of Interests any issues on which they might have a conflict or perceived conflict of interest.

Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities

The Assembly Commission operates 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 invited to 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. When considering applications made under GIS, the Human Resources Office reserves the right to request medical information from the applicant's general practitioner (through the applicant and with their consent).

We will also consider reasonable adjustments during all stages of the recruitment process as well as any reasonable adjustments required in order for a successful applicant with a disability to undertake the role. If you feel that you require any adjustments to the application stage, please contact us at recruitment@niassembly.gov.uk.

Commissioner for Public Appointments – Code of Practice

Although the appointments to SARC do not fall within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, in the interests of good practice the appointment competition is being managed in accordance with the principles set out in the Code of Practice of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The code can be viewed online at www.publicappointmentsni.org

Making an Application

Application forms are available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website (www.niassembly.gov.uk/sarc) and should be completed online. Completed application forms must be submitted by **4pm on 11 February 2022**. **Late applications will not be accepted.**

Further information is available in the [Guidance on Recruitment and Selection for Applicants](#) document.

Selection Process

There are five elements within the Recruitment and Selection Framework which may be assessed during the selection process:

Experience – the knowledge or mastery of an activity or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it.

Ability – the aptitude or potential to perform to the required standard.

Technical – the demonstration of specific professional skills, knowledge or qualifications.

Assembly Skills and Behaviours – the actions and activities that people do which result in effective performance in a job.

Strengths – the things we do regularly, do well and that motivate us.

The elements which will be assessed for this role will be Experience, Technical and Assembly Skills and Behaviours and will be assessed through the application form and interview. Further information is available in the [Recruitment and Selection Framework](#) document.

Applicants must use only the application forms provided and must not submit additional material in support of their application forms. **No supplementary documents will be accepted.**

After the closing date for receipt of applications, the selection panel will consider applications against the essential criteria and only applicants who demonstrate that they meet the essential criteria will proceed to the next stage of the selection process. If it is deemed necessary to shortlist, the shortlisting criteria will be used to decide who appear, based on the information available, to be most suitable in terms of relevant experience and skills to undertake the role and those applicants will be invited to interview.

Final selection of applicants will be based on performance at an interview(s) structured around the essential criteria section of the Person Specification listed above and using the Recruitment and Selection Framework. All applicants will be expected to meet an acceptable level of competence, both in the assessment centre and in each of the essential criterion during the interview.

At interview, applicants should also be prepared to discuss any real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest which might impair their ability to perform the duties of SARC with integrity and objectivity.

The selection panel reserves the right to hold a further interview stage if deemed necessary.

It is planned that interviews will be held on 4 March 2022, following which the panel will prepare a recommendation, based on assessment of the applicants and in order of merit, of those deemed most suitable for appointment.

Communication during the Recruitment Process

The Human Resources Office will issue most communication electronically. Applicants are advised to regularly check their email account to make sure that they do not miss any important communication. Please note, sometimes the Human Resources Office emails are automatically filtered as spam by email providers.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY SECRETARIAT AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (Assembly Commission) has established the Secretariat Audit and Risk Committee (SARC) to support the Clerk/Chief Executive (in his/her role as Accounting Officer), the Assembly Commission and Secretariat Management Group in their responsibilities for issues of risk, control and governance by reviewing the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the organisation's assurance needs and reviewing the reliability and integrity of these assurances.

MEMBERSHIP

The members of the SARC include:

- One member of the Assembly Commission; and
- Two independent external members.

The SARC will be chaired by an independent external member.

The SARC will be provided with a secretariat function by the Directorate of Legal, Governance and Research Services.

REPORTING

After each SARC meeting, all Assembly Commission members, SARC members and attendees will be provided with the minutes and action points

arising from the meeting.

The SARC will provide the Assembly Commission, Accounting Officer and the Secretariat Management Group with an Annual Report, timed to support the finalisation of accounts and the Governance Statement, summarising its conclusions from the work it has done during the year.

The report will summarise the SARC opinion regarding:

- the effectiveness of governance, risk management and control;
- the comprehensiveness of assurances in meeting the Assembly Commission's and Accounting Officer's needs;
- the reliability and integrity of these assurances;
- whether the assurance available is sufficient to support the Assembly Commission and Accounting Officer in their decision taking and their accountability obligations;
- the implication of these assurances for the overall management of risk;
- any issues the SARC considers pertinent to the Governance Statement and any long-term issues the Committee thinks the Assembly Commission and/or Accounting Officer should give attention to;
- financial reporting for the year;
- the quality of both Internal and External Audit and their approach to their responsibilities;
- the SARC view of its own effectiveness, including advice on ways in which it considers it needs to be strengthened or developed; and

- the manner in which issues involving best use of resources/value for money have been addressed.

The Chair of the SARC should attend at least one meeting of the Assembly Commission each year to report in private, without the presence of members of the Secretariat.

The Independent Chair and Member of the SARC will undergo an annual appraisal.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The SARC will advise the Assembly Commission, the Accounting Officer and the Secretariat Management Group on:

- the strategic processes for risk, control and governance and the Governance Statement;
- the accounting policies, the accounts and the annual report of the Assembly Secretariat, including the process for review of the accounts prior to submission for audit, levels of error identified and management's letter of representation to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO);
- the planned activity and results of both internal and external audit;
- the adequacy of management response to issues identified by audit activity, including the Report to those charged with Governance from the NIAO;
- assurances relating to the management of risk and corporate governance requirements for the Assembly Secretariat;

- proposals for tendering for either Internal or External Audit services¹ or for purchase of non-audit services from contractors who provide audit services;
- anti-fraud policies, whistle-blowing processes and arrangements for special investigations;
- the SARC will annually review its own effectiveness by way of a self-assessment exercise and report the results to the Assembly Commission;
- the commissioning of specific audits;
- advising the Accounting Officer on the skills, experience and competency requirements for the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) post;
- the SARC Chair having the opportunity to comment in relation to any review of the grading of the HIA post; and
- the SARC Chair having the opportunity to provide input into the performance appraisal of the HIA.

RIGHTS

The SARC may:

- co-opt additional members for a period not exceeding a year to provide specialist skills, knowledge and experience; and
- procure specialist ad-hoc advice at the expense of the Assembly, subject to budgets agreed by the Assembly Commission.

¹ Where appropriate and with due regard to NIAO's statutory role to carry out the external audit of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.

ACCESS

The Chair of the SARC should have right of access to the Speaker in his role as Chair of the Assembly Commission.

The Head of Internal Audit and the representative of the Northern Ireland Audit Office will have free and confidential access to the Chair of the SARC.

MEETINGS

The SARC will meet at least four times a year. The Chair of the SARC may convene additional meetings, as he/she deems necessary.

A minimum of two Members of the SARC will be present for the meeting to be deemed quorate. In the absence of the Chair, the Independent Member will preside. The SARC Member nominated to represent the Assembly Commission may nominate another Member of the Assembly Commission to attend on his or her behalf.

SARC meetings will normally be attended by the Accounting Officer, the Director of Corporate Services, the Director of Legal, Governance and Research Services, the Director of Parliamentary Services, the Head of Internal Audit, and a representative from the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

The SARC may ask any other officials of the Assembly Secretariat to attend to assist it with its discussions on any particular matter.

The SARC may ask any or all of those who normally attend but who are not members to withdraw to facilitate open and frank discussion of particular matters.

The Assembly Commission, the Accounting Officer or Secretariat Management Group may ask the SARC to convene further meetings to discuss particular issues on which they want the Committee's advice.

At the discretion of the Chair, minor matters which require attention between scheduled meetings of SARC may be dealt with by correspondence and reported to the next scheduled meeting.

INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

For each meeting the SARC will be provided with:

- A report summarising any significant changes to the Assembly Secretariat's strategic risks and a copy of the Corporate Risk Register;
- A progress report from the Head of Internal Audit summarising:
 - Work performed (and a comparison with work planned);
 - Key issues emerging from the work of Internal Audit;
 - Management response to audit recommendations;
 - Changes to the agreed Internal Audit Plan; and
 - Any resourcing issues affecting the delivery of the objectives of Internal Audit.
- A progress report (written/verbal) from the NIAO representative summarising work done and emerging findings;
- Copies of all Internal Audit Reports.

As and when appropriate, the SARC will also be provided with:

- Proposals for the Terms of Reference of Internal Audit / the Internal Audit Charter;
- The Internal Audit Strategy;
- The Head of Internal Audit's Annual Opinion and Report;
- Quality Assurance reports on the Internal Audit function;
- The draft accounts of the Assembly Commission;
- The draft Governance Statement;
- A report on any changes to accounting policies;
- The NIAO's Report to those charged with Governance;
- A report on any proposals to tender for audit functions;
- A report on co-operation between Internal and External Audit;
- The NIAO audit strategy;
- Management assurance reports;
- Reports on the management of major incidents, "near misses" and lessons learned; and
- The Assembly Secretariat's Risk Management Strategy; and
- Stewardship Statements.

REGISTER OF INTERESTS

Members of the SARC will record in the SARC Register of Interests any issues on which they might have a conflict or perceived conflict of interest. The SARC as a whole should consider how matters on which a member may have a conflict of interest will be handled.

SECRETARIAT

The Directorate of Legal, Governance and Research Services will provide secretariat services to the SARC. The secretariat will be responsible for ensuring compliance with procedures and maintenance of a Register of Interests. An agenda and papers will be circulated one week in advance of each meeting. Draft minutes and a summary of action points will be sent to the Chairperson within five working days of the meeting. The formal minutes will be posted on the Assembly website within three working days of their approval. Approved action points will be issued to relevant staff within one working day of receipt.

The secretariat will prepare an induction pack for new members.

REVIEW

The SARC Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually.

INTEGRITY AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST INFORMATION

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:

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| Selflessness | Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends. |
| Integrity | Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties. |
| Objectivity | In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit. |
| Accountability | Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office. |
| Openness | Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the |

wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by example.

All successful candidates must uphold the principles and values of public service.

What is a conflict of interest?

The highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity are required of the committee. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the committee 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.

It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for 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 committee that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a

perceived conflict of interest on the part a committee member can be extremely damaging to the committee'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 the committee member 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 the Application Form entitled '*Integrity and Conflicts of Interest*' for you to complete. This section of the form requires 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 selected for interview, the Selection Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to carry out the functions of the committee effectively and impartially and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. However, if, following the discussion with you, the Selection Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the integrity of the appointment they can withdraw your application from the competition.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Assembly Commission after my appointment?

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Assembly Commission may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would have 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.

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 on the committee becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the committee, 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 Chairperson of the committee and the Clerk/Chief Executive 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 on the committee, if they would have to withdraw from a considerable amount of the committee's routine business. In such cases, the member may be asked to stand down from the committee.

Areas where a conflict could arise

There are a number of issues, which could lead to real, or apparent, conflicts of interest. These include:

- Relevant pecuniary or other interests outside the organisation
- Relationships with other individuals/parties/organisations which could lead to perceived or real split loyalties
- Perception of rewards for past contributions or favours
- Membership of some societies or organisations

The above list of issues is not exhaustive, so you should consider carefully your own circumstances to gauge whether or not a real, or perceived, conflict might exist.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission



