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18 November 2025
AQW 34526/22-27

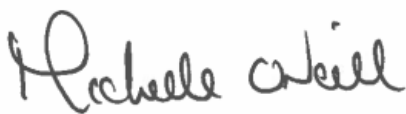
Mr T Gaston (North Antrim): To ask the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the recruitment process used for the appointment of the Irish Language Commissioner, including (i) the criteria applied; (ii) who approved the criteria; and (iii) how merit was assessed.

ANSWER

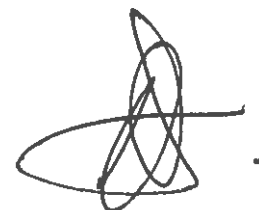
Information regarding the selection process for the Irish Language Commissioner was included in the competition Candidate Information Booklet (CIB). The selection process included screening and a sift of applications, an Irish Language proficiency assessment, a presentation and interview. Suitable appointees then provided presentations to us.

The CIB was approved by us.

The information sought in this question, at parts (i) and (ii), is contained in the CIB for the appointment of the Irish Language Commissioner, a copy of which has been placed in the Assembly Library.



Michelle O'Neill MLA
First Minister



Emma Little-Pengelly MLA
deputy First Minister

Candidate Information Booklet

IRC307750

Irish Language Commissioner

**Completed Application Forms must be
returned to HRConnect no later than
12:00 noon on **28th March 2025****

You are advised to download and keep a copy of this booklet for future reference - it will no longer be available online after the above date.

This information booklet is designed to help you provide the relevant information when completing the application form. It can be requested in alternative formats by contacting **HRConnect** on **0800 1 300 330** or via email to recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net

A copy of this Information Booklet is also available in Irish.

This information booklet has been produced as a guide to help you provide the relevant information when completing the application form for the post of the Irish Language Commissioner. These documents are only a memorandum and should not be taken as constituting conditions of appointment.

The qualities required and details of how to complete the application form are set out within this pack. It is recommended that you read this information carefully before completing the application form.

This competition is being administered by HRConnect on behalf of The Executive Office (TEO). HRConnect will issue electronically as many of the necessary competition communications as possible should you provide your e-mail address as part of your application; you should therefore check your email account (including Junk folder) to make sure that you don't miss any important communications in relation to this competition. There may, however, still be a necessity to issue some correspondence by hard copy mail.

Equal Opportunities Commitment

The Department is committed to the principles of public appointments based on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process. We are also committed to equality of opportunity and welcome application forms from all suitably qualified applicants irrespective of religious belief, gender, race, political opinion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or whether or not they have dependants.

Privacy Notice

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

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FOREWORD

Thank you for your interest in the post of the Irish Language Commissioner.

The Irish Language Commissioner is one of three new identity and language authorities provided for in the [*Identity and Language \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2022*](#)¹ (the Act).

We are looking for an inspirational individual who is passionate about making the most of this unique opportunity to protect and enhance the development of the use of the Irish language by public authorities. The role will require an individual who possesses a deep understanding of language policy, a strong commitment to the role and a track record of successful delivery.

The successful applicant will have the opportunity to bring their skills and experience to fulfil this role to maximum impact. They will collaborate with a range of stakeholders including government departments, public authorities and community groups to create an inclusive environment and deliver the aims of the role.

If you have the personality, commitment, and energy to make a real difference in this area we would be delighted to receive your application.

Michelle O'Neill
First Minister

Emma Little-Pengelly
deputy First Minister

¹ [*Identity and Language \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2022*](#) (legislation.gov.uk)

Section 1 - INTRODUCTION

The Executive Office

The First Minister and the deputy First Minister hold joint office within The Executive Office (TEO).

TEO is a department of the Northern Ireland Executive with a wide range of responsibilities. It has approximately 400 staff with the majority, when office working, based in Castle Buildings on the Stormont Estate, Belfast.

The overall aim of the Department is to contribute to and oversee the co-ordination of Executive policies and programmes to deliver a peaceful, fair, equal and prosperous society. The Department supports this aim through its Business Plan which reflects the commitments and key milestones in the Programme for Government for which the Department has responsibility.

The Department will provide the formal sponsorship role for the Irish Language Commissioner. The Department is responsible for ensuring the discharge of the Irish Language Commissioner's responsibilities in respect of the governing legislation and is the primary point of contact for the Irish Language Commissioner in terms of day-to-day operational delivery as well as its strategic functions.

The Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022

The UK Government brought forward the Act along with [Explanatory Notes](#)² giving an overview, policy and legal background, together with commentary on the provisions of the Act.

The Act makes provisions for the establishment of an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression, an Irish Language Commissioner and a Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British tradition.

The Irish Language Commissioner

The Act makes provision for the establishment of a Corporation Sole known as the Irish Language Commissioner (the Commissioner). The Commissioner will be appointed by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly.

² [220142en.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

Functions of the Commissioner

The principal aim of the Commissioner in exercising its statutory functions is “to *enhance and protect the use of the Irish language by public authorities in the provision of services to the public or a section of the public in Northern Ireland*”.

The Commissioner will be required to publish, monitor and promote best practice standards on the use of the Irish language in the provision of services, and public authorities will be required to have due regard to those standards.

The Act also makes provision for a complaints procedure, meaning that the Commissioner must investigate complaints to the effect that a public authority has failed to comply with its obligations to have due regard to the best practice standards.

Appointment of the Commissioner

The Department is taking forward the process to enable the appointment of the Commissioner to be made.

While the Commissioner is not a regulated body under CPANI legislation, the appointment process will run in the spirit of the [Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland’s \(CPANI\) Code of Practice³](#).

We are operating the [Guaranteed Interview Scheme](#) for applicants with a disability.

³ [Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland | The Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland \(publicappointmentsni.org\)](#)

Section 2 - ROLE DESCRIPTION

The Commissioner has responsibility for ensuring the fulfilment of the relevant aims and functions as set out in the Act as outlined in Section 1 above.

The Commissioner will be the Accounting Officer, overseeing the performance and strategic direction of the body and will also be responsible for ensuring the highest standards of corporate governance, efficiency and propriety in the use of public funds, including compliance with statutory and administrative requirements.

The Commissioner will be expected to engage at very senior levels in a complex environment, including with public representatives, senior government officials and the media. As well as excellent leadership qualities the Commissioner will require exemplary interpersonal skills, sound judgement and an ability to work with people, especially those at a senior level.

Responsibilities of the Commissioner

Responsibilities of the Commissioner include:

- developing best practice standards relating to the use of Irish by public authorities;
- monitoring and promoting compliance with the best practice standards;
- reviewing the operation of best practice standards, and revising or withdrawing standards if necessary or desirable to do so;
- providing assistance and guidance to Public Authorities in relation to the statutory duty to have due regard to the best practice standards

Specific Powers

- preparing and publishing best practice standards relating to the use of Irish by public authorities;
- investigating complaints to the effect that a public authority has failed to comply with its duty to have due regard to best practice standards;
- providing written statement of reasons for not investigating a complaint to complainants where applicable

General Powers

- setting the strategic direction for the Office of the Commissioner in accordance with the Act and within the policy, priorities and resources framework determined by Ministers and the Department;
- agreeing and overseeing the implementation of the Office of the Commissioner's corporate and business plans, and monitoring performance against budgets and targets;
- constructively challenging the Commissioner's executive team in their planning, target setting and delivery of performance;
- line Management responsibility for senior staff;
- developing, promoting and overseeing the implementation of policies and programmes in line with the strategic direction

In addition, as Accounting Officer, the Commissioner will be expected to:

- agree annual budgets, based on the allocations made by the Department, and review financial information on a regular basis to ensure that financial targets are met;
- operate within the limits of their statutory authority and any delegated authority agreed with the Department and in accordance with any other conditions relating to the use of public funds; and, in reaching decisions, ensure that all relevant guidance issued by the Department of Finance and the Department is taken into account;
- ensure compliance with statutory and administrative requirements for the use of public funds;
- oversee the implementation of corporate governance arrangements including risk management; and
- prepare and submit the Annual Report and accounts for the Office of the Commissioner.

**The above list of responsibilities is not exhaustive.*

Time Commitment and Remuneration

- The Commissioner role is offered on a full-time basis (37 hours per week). However, as with posts generally at this level, the Commissioner will need to work flexibly at such hours and times as may be necessary to discharge their duties effectively. This

may require occasional working outside normal working hours including evenings and weekends.

- The annual leave allowance for the Commissioner will be 30 days in addition to the 12 public and privilege holidays.
- Remuneration for the Commissioner will be on the Senior Civil Service Grade 5 scale, i.e. £79,237 - £88,908 (under review), with pay progression subject to satisfactory performance. The successful applicant can expect to be placed at the minimum point of the pay scale. The appointment is pensionable.
- Following appointment, travel and subsistence expenses are payable at Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) rates.
- All remuneration and expenses are subject to deduction of income tax and national insurance.
- The term of appointment for the Commissioner will be 5 years. A person may be eligible for reappointment for a second term of office, subject to satisfactory performance.
- The appointment will be made by the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly.

Location

To be determined but likely to be in the Greater Belfast area. It is anticipated that the Commissioner and their staff will be based in temporary office accommodation to begin with, until such times as permanent office accommodation is secured. The Commissioner may wish to consider operating a Hybrid Working Policy which allows staff to work between the office and remote working locations/home based on business needs.

Travel

As the post requires the applicant to travel on official duty, the successful applicant must have access to a form of transport which will enable them to fulfil their responsibilities. The Commissioner will be required to travel within this jurisdiction regularly, and occasionally across the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Europe and further afield.

Training

The Commissioner will be required to attend training where necessary. The Commissioner will be supported with additional development needs or training as necessary.

Code of Conduct

Although not an employee of the Department and therefore not a Civil Servant, the general principles of the Civil Service Code⁴ will apply to the Commissioner and they will be expected to subscribe to the Nolan Principles⁵ of public life as well as the Commissioner's relevant policies and procedures. The high standards of corporate and personal conduct required are described more fully in the Code.

Double Paying

Applicants who already work in the public sector may not, depending on the circumstances, be entitled to claim remuneration or expenses. Each case will be examined on its own merits but the key consideration is to obtain clarity so that individuals are reimbursed once and not twice from the public purse. In the interests of minimising the potential for double paying, the Department reserves the right to contact an employer regarding an individual's candidature.

Performance Assessments

Assessment of the Commissioner's performance will be carried out by the Department's Senior Sponsor (Deputy Secretary, Good Relations & Inclusion Directorate).

Further Information

Any applicant seeking additional information about the role of the Commissioner should contact the Rights, Language and Identity team at RLIEnquiries@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk.

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

⁴ [NICS Code of Ethics \(HTML version\) | Department of Finance \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵ [The Seven Principles of Public Life - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Section 3 - PERSON SPECIFICATION

The person specification addresses the qualities, experience, background and competence sought for the position of the Commissioner. A criteria-based selection process is employed by TEO in accordance with the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland Code of Practice.⁶ Applicants are limited to a maximum of 3700 characters **per criterion**. As the application form will be assessed by the panel in English, applicants are required to complete the application form in English.

The application form is an essential element of the process and is designed to enable applicants to give specific examples of past performance to demonstrate they can meet the requirements of the post. This process requires applicants to provide evidence which demonstrates that they can meet the requirements in their application form and at interview. The mere mention of a skill or attribute is insufficient. Neither will the selection panel make assumptions from the title of a post or the nature of an organisation as to the experience, qualities and skills gained.

There are 4 essential criteria and an essential Irish Language Proficiency assessment. The criteria describe what you need to be able to do in order to be effective in the role being filled. **Please note that guidance for the application form and interview is attached at Annex A.**

Please take full advantage of the opportunity to provide practical evidence and examples of how and why you consider you are suitable for this appointment. These examples as provided will inform the selection process. Examples can be drawn from experience gained in your personal life or in business, voluntary, community or public sector organisations. The examples of evidence provided below are not exhaustive.

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

⁶ [Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments in Northern Ireland | The Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland \(publicappointmentsni.org\)](#)

Essential Criteria

Applicants must demonstrate evidence of competency against the essential criteria 1-4. All criteria carry equal weight. Applicants who successfully demonstrate that they meet the four essential criteria will subsequently be invited to the assessment.

As the selection panel will consider the strength and depth of the evidence provided it is the applicant's responsibility to make sure they provide sufficient detail to meet the criteria. Examples of the type of evidence the selection panel will be looking for are given below each criterion. You do not need to describe activities which meet each of these bullet points. The examples listed are not exhaustive.

Definition:

***Senior Level** - Working at a senior level is defined as providing detailed advice on or taking decisions personally or being party to decisions affecting strategic issues concerning the corporate body or organisation with which an individual is working either as an employee, volunteer, advisor or director.

Criterion 1 – Enhancing and protecting the use of the Irish Language

The Act gives official recognition of the status of the Irish language here and places a duty on the Commissioner to enhance and protect the use of the Irish language by public authorities in the provision of services to the public. The Commissioner requires an understanding of the context in which they will operate including current challenges and issues within and affecting the sector, and of the wider issues relevant to enhancing and protecting the use of the language in accessing public services through the medium of Irish. The Commissioner will also have an understanding of the process of language planning, as this will be essential to assist in the preparation, publishing and promotion of Irish language best practice standards.

Please demonstrate, by way of practical example(s), your experience of enhancing and protecting the use of the Irish language including managing any challenges encountered.

Examples of evidence could include:

- How you have enhanced and protected the Irish language, either in a work or voluntary capacity.
- Your understanding of the language-planning process to enhance and protect a minority language.
- Understanding of the complex environment in which this area of work sits and of the opportunities and challenges which exist.
- Awareness of the issues and challenges facing Irish speakers when accessing public services through the medium of Irish.
- Current challenges and issues within the sector and your involvement in addressing them.

Criterion 2 - Organisational Leadership

The Commissioner will be responsible for setting the strategic direction of the newly established identity and language authority within the scope of its statutory responsibilities, taking account of the internal and external environment. The Commissioner will require strong leadership skills to motivate and inspire staff and delivery partners towards a shared purpose and vision in support of the aims of the Commissioner, while operating in a complex environment.

Please demonstrate, by way of practical example(s), your experience of effective leadership at a senior level* (see page 11)

Examples of evidence could include:

- Leading and setting an organisation's strategic vision.
- Preparing strategic plans for an organisation and measuring their effectiveness.
- Working collaboratively with stakeholders to define strategic priorities and deliver objectives.
- Employing and monitoring corporate business strategies including the effective mitigation of risks.
- Creating the culture to deliver an organisation's aims and objectives.
- Oversight of a range of complex programmes or projects.
- Understanding the political landscape and experience in garnering and fostering cross party-political support for sensitive projects.
- Understanding legislative, financial and practical boundaries in difficult or complex situations.
- Directly influencing strategic issues and decisions.
- Analysing issues and forecasting potential future scenarios that will impact on an organisation.
- Constructively managing challenges and conflict to maintain focus and momentum.

Criterion 3 - Governance and Finance

The Commissioner will act as the Accounting Officer for the new body. The Commissioner will have a governance and financial oversight role and will be required to determine how the body is run. This will include how objectives are set, monitored and assessed, agreeing on how resources are allocated, determining how performance and risks are monitored and assessed, and ascertaining how finances are managed. The Commissioner will be expected to ensure that high standards of corporate governance and accountability are upheld and will therefore possess strong financial and governance skills.

Please demonstrate, by way of practical example(s), your experience of applying good governance and management principles including ensuring accountability at a senior level*(see page 11).

Examples of evidence could include:

- Ensuring effective governance and internal control systems are in place to support achievement of policies, aims and objectives.
- Ensuring governance requirements are clearly communicated and understood throughout the organisation.
- Identifying, evaluating and managing risks which may have an effect on an organisation's ability to achieve its objectives.
- Monitoring, understanding and interpreting financial and budgetary information, ensuring compliance and value for money and identification of areas of concern.
- Developing and analysing corporate business plans.

Criterion 4 - Communication and Engagement

The Commissioner will be responsible for forging relationships with the Body's new staff team, as well as a range of external stakeholders, including senior civil servants, the Department's Ministers, senior officials of public bodies, sectoral groups, the media and members of the public. The Commissioner will have the ability to collaborate and influence at a senior level across disciplines and sectors, in both English and Irish. They will be an effective communicator who has good interpersonal skills and who will promote compliance with the Irish language best practice guidelines, and promote any other activities of the Commissioner.

Please demonstrate, by way of practical example(s), your experience of working at a senior level* (see page 11) using effective communication and engagement skills to achieve a successful outcome.

Examples of evidence could include:

- Creating and developing relationships with senior leaders and key stakeholders.
- Using persuasive and compelling arguments to influence others.
- Understanding and accepting different approaches and perspectives.
- Using partnerships to deliver shared objectives and outcomes by gaining trust and building rapport quickly.
- Taking account of different views and opinions and securing buy-in.
- Dealing effectively with challenges and conflict, including taking and explaining unpopular decisions.
- Tailoring communications for different audiences, both internal and external.
- Identifying and applying relevant collaboration techniques.
- Developing positive and productive partnerships leading to effective collaboration.

The Irish Language Proficiency Assessment (speaking, listening, reading and writing)

The principal aim of the Commissioner, in exercising their statutory functions, is to enhance and protect the use of the Irish language by public authorities in the provision of services to the public. It is therefore a requirement of the post to have the ability to communicate effectively with public authorities and other stakeholders in the medium of Irish.

Applicants who successfully demonstrate they meet essential criteria 1-4 will be invited to the Irish Language Proficiency assessment (the assessment). The assessment will be used to assess an applicant's ability in the use of the Irish language (speaking, listening, reading and writing) to the required level for this post.

Applicants who are successful at the assessment stage, and any subsequent shortlisting (if necessary), will be invited to an interview. More information on the assessment is provided in section 4.

Section 4 - SELECTION PROCESS

Applications provided to the selection panel will be anonymised, which means that they will not include your name or personal details. The selection process will include a sift exercise to assess how the skills, knowledge, experience and other qualities presented in your application meet the essential criteria. If a high number of applications are received, shortlisting may be required. Applicants who meet the essential criteria 1-4 will be invited to an Irish Language proficiency assessment (speaking, listening, reading and writing). The assessment will be conducted by Ulster University officials.

The assessment stage may be followed by shortlisting, if necessary. Those successful at the assessment stage (and any subsequent shortlisting) will then be invited to a criteria-based interview. Applicants will be required to make a presentation at this stage.

Applicants will be kept informed of their progress throughout the competition. A discussion with the appointing Ministers, prior to the appointment decision, may also be required. The process is set out in more detail below.

Process Overview

Stage 1 – Formal Screening of Applications

All applications received by the closing date will be screened to check that they have been fully completed. Only those whose applications are completed fully will proceed to the next stage. Application forms will not be screened until after the closing date, so the onus is on applicants to ensure that they submit all the required information.

Stage 2 - Sift of Application Forms

Sift: Criteria 1-4

Following stage 1 as above, the selection panel will review anonymised application forms against the selection criteria 1-4.

When assessing each application against the selection criteria 1-4, panel members will use a Marking Framework to determine how an applicant's skills, knowledge and experience meets each of the criteria. Applicants will be awarded a score out of five for each criterion. Applicants must score three or above in each criterion to pass the sift (minimum score of 12). Applications which do not meet selection criteria 1-4 will not progress to the assessment.

It is essential that you demonstrate in your application form how and to what extent your personal experience and skills are relevant to the post and the extent to which they satisfy each criterion specified.

The eligibility sift of essential criteria 1-4 is expected to take place during April 2025.

Stage 3: The Assessment (speaking, listening, reading and writing)

Applicants who successfully demonstrate they meet essential criteria 1-4 will be invited to the assessment. The assessment will be used to assess an applicant's ability in the use of the Irish language (speaking, listening, reading and writing) to the required level for this post.

The required level is **C2** on the CEFR (Common European Framework of References for Languages):

- Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read.
- Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation.
- Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

The assessment, which will be administered by Ulster University Officials will be conducted in two parts. Part One will involve an applicant making a presentation which will assess the applicant's ability in speaking and listening in Irish. Part Two will include an editorial task which will assess the applicant's proficiency in reading and writing in Irish.

The assessment is expected to take place in Belfast at the Ulster University campus during May 2025.

Applicants who are successful at the assessment stage and any subsequent shortlisting (if necessary) will be invited to an interview.

Stage 4 - Shortlisting

Following the assessment stage, where it is necessary to prepare a shortlist for interview, only those applicants who have a total mark equal to or higher than an agreed cut-off across eligibility criteria 1-4 and who have passed the Irish language proficiency assessment will proceed to the interview stage.

Stage 5 – Presentation & Interview

It is anticipated that Stage 5 will take place in Belfast during June 2025. Applicants should make themselves available during this time. The interview stage will consist of a presentation and interview.

(i) Presentation

Applicants will be required to make a presentation on a notified topic relevant to the responsibilities of the post, lasting no longer than 7 minutes. This will be followed by a criterion-based question from the panel. The presentation and a follow up criterion-based question will be used to assess essential criterion 1.

Further information including the presentation topic will be provided to applicants in the invitation to interview letter. Applicants should fully prepare their presentation in advance of the interview as no preparation time will be provided on the day of the interview. Applicants may bring prepared flip chart paper and/or printed speaking notes if desired to deliver the presentation. The use of visual aids, handouts or electronic devices is not permitted.

(ii) Interview

Following the presentation, applicants will be interviewed by the selection panel. The panel will focus on testing applicants' experience, skills and knowledge of the essential criteria.

Interview guidance can be found at **Annex A**.

Applicants will also be asked to confirm their commitment to the Principles of Public Life (**Annex B**). Any real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest (**Annex B** and **C**) which may impair their ability to carry out the role of the Commissioner with integrity and objectivity will be explored at interview.

The interview will be criteria based which means that all questions asked by the selection panel will be linked to the criteria and applicants will be asked to provide specific examples. The questions will be designed to test the applicant's knowledge, experience and qualities in each of the criteria. The selection panel will score applicant's answers against pre-determined indicators. Each applicant will be required to reach a minimum pass mark on each criterion, otherwise their name will not be put forward to Ministers for consideration.

All applicants will be updated on the outcome of their interview, with feedback on their performance provided upon request.

Applicants should note that the interview will be held in person and conducted in English.

The selection panel members are:

- Richard Irwin, G5, Good Relations and Inclusion Directorate, TEO;
- Iain Greenway, G5, Department for Communities, Engaged Communities Group (ECG);
- Seán Ó Coinn, CEO of Foras Na Gaeilge; and
- Bronagh Hinds, Independent Assessor for the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland

Requests for rescheduling interviews will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, and decisions to allow such reschedules will be at the discretion of the Selection Panel.

Stage 6 - Appointing Ministers' Selection

A list of applicants that the selection panel assess as suitable for appointment will be provided in an unranked format to the First and deputy First Minister who will select the Commissioner. All those applicants deemed suitable for appointment will be invited to make a presentation to Ministers. The Ministers will receive applicant summaries from the Selection Panel that provide an objective analysis of each applicant's skills and experience, based on the information provided by the applicant during the appointment process and the Panel's assessment of that applicant. Ministers will base their selection decision on both the applicant summary and presentation.

Please note the appointment of the Commissioner will be made in accordance with the statutory provisions in operation at that time. The Department will keep applicants updated on any associated material changes to the appointment process.

Reserve List

Ministers have agreed that a reserve list with up to two agreed names will be held to be used to fill any future vacancies that arise within the 12 months following the Ministers' decision.

Stage 7 - Appointment

Following successful pre-appointment checks and acceptance of the post by the successful applicant the appointment will be announced by way of a Press Release. If you are appointed some information on your completed application form will be made public in a press release. This will include your name; a brief summary of your career/experience; length and remuneration of the appointment; details of any other Ministerial appointments held along with any related remuneration received. The successful applicant will be asked to complete a Political Activity Questionnaire Form and the information provided will be published with the announcement of the appointment.

Pre-appointments Checks

Appointments Held

Prior to interview, a cross-departmental check will be carried out on the probity and performance of those applicants who currently hold or have held public appointment roles within Northern Ireland. As such you should be aware that it will be necessary to share information between departments.⁷ Any potential issues identified can be raised at interview and applicants have the right of reply. The recorded performance and attendance in other public appointment roles will not form part of the applicant assessment by the panel but may be taken into account in selecting applicants for appointment.

Access NI Basic Disclosure Check

The successful appointee to the Commissioner post will be subject to an Access NI Basic Disclosure check as a condition of appointment. This check will be activated for the successful applicant only. We will organise a Criminal Record Check to be carried out by Access NI through Experian. HRConnect will provide your details to Experian who will undertake this check.

In accordance with the Act a person may be removed from office if convicted of a criminal offence.

⁷ [TEO Privacy Notice | The Executive Office \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Company directors' disqualification and bankruptcy and insolvency checks

A company directors' disqualification check and a bankruptcy and insolvency check will be conducted. In accordance with the Act a person may be removed from office if the person has become bankrupt or is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order, a debt relief order or a debt relief restrictions order or has made a voluntary arrangement.

Disqualification

Statutory Disqualification

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

The onus is on the person standing for election to state that they are aware of the provisions of the Acts and that, to the best of their knowledge and belief, they are not disqualified from being an MP, MEP or MLA.

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

Other Disqualification

- a) Individuals who are disqualified from holding Company Directorship either through an Order or an Undertaking, who are bankrupt or who are the subject of a Bankruptcy Restrictions Order are not eligible for consideration;
- b) For the Department's consideration, applicants are asked to declare in the application form if they have been convicted of any offence (other than minor motoring offences) which are not spent in accordance with the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978 or if any charges are outstanding. A criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining an appointment;
- c) According to the CPANI Code of Practice, appointments for the same position are restricted to two terms. Notwithstanding the length of individual appointment terms, the maximum period in a post must not exceed 10 years.

Legal entitlement to work in the UK

The Department needs to ensure that anyone it appoints is not subject to immigration control. Applicants being considered for appointment would need to provide documentation to this effect e.g. passport, share code or other to confirm legal right to work in the UK.

Civil Servants – Rules on the acceptance of outside business appointments

Serving or former civil servants are not debarred from applying for public appointments. However, serving civil servants will require their Department's approval and former civil servants may require the approval of their last Department (depending on their grade and whether they left within the last two years) before taking up an appointment.

Applicants should refer to the [*NICS HR policy 6.01 Standards of Conduct*](#)⁸.

Probity and Conflicts of Interest

The Department must ensure that the individuals they appoint are committed to the principles and values of public service. These principles are: **Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership**. Further information is available at <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/>.

Departments must take account of actual, or perceived, conflicts of interest. Therefore applicants, in their application form, must disclose information or personal connections which, if they were to be appointed, could lead to a conflict of interest, or be perceived as such.

The Selection Panel will determine, at interview stage, whether you are aware of the standards of behaviour required of public appointees and can demonstrate your understanding of the issue. You will also be asked to declare whether or not you are involved, or have been involved, in activities that could call into question your reputation and/or damage the reputation of the body to which you are applying. The Selection Panel will consider fully your answers and, if necessary, question further or challenge.

Conflicts of interest may not be a barrier to appointment but both real and perceived conflicts must be discussed with all applicants by the Selection Panel. This is to ensure that the public can have confidence in the Commissioner's independence and impartiality and the integrity of the potential appointee. Please refer to **Annex B and Annex C** for further information on this subject.

⁸ [*NICS HR policy 6.01 Standards of Conduct*](#)

Successful applicants will be asked to complete a **Political Activity Questionnaire form**. The Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended that all applicants for public appointments be asked to declare any significant political activity (including office holding, public speaking and standing for election) that they may have undertaken in the previous five years. The question only asks for information that is already in the public domain.

Section 5 - HOW TO APPLY

The competition to fill the post of the Commissioner is being administered by HRConnect on behalf of the Department.

This appointment process will be run in the spirit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (CPANI) Code of Practice.

Application forms can be completed via the online application at www.nicsrecruitment.org.uk or by hard copy. Hard copy and alternative formats of the application form (Braille, Large Print, etc.) can be requested by contacting HRConnect on 0800 1 300 330 or via email to recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net. Reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the needs of applicants/candidates with a disability.

To ensure equality of opportunity for all applicants:

- As the application form will be assessed by the panel in English, applicants are required to complete the application form in English;
- the space available on the application form is the same for all applicants and **must not** be altered;
- we **will not** accept CVs, letters, additional pages or any other supplementary material in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms;
- online or hard copy versions of the application form are acceptable;
- application forms should be completed clearly using typescript minimum font size 12 if completed electronically, or legible writing using black ink if completed in hard copy;
- applicants are limited to a maximum of 3700 characters per criterion; and
- HRConnect will not examine applications until after the closing deadline.

Further information about public appointments, including how to complete an application form can be found at www.nidirect.gov.uk/public-appointments

In addition, you may also be interested in registering for a free workshop on the public appointments process being offered by CPANI. Further details can be found at: <https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/workshops>

Completed hard copy application forms can be returned by post or hand delivered to:

**HR Connect,
PO Box 1089,
Beacon House,
27 Clarendon Road,
Belfast
BT1 9EX**

Completed application forms should be submitted to HRConnect before the closing date of **28th March 2025**. You will receive an acknowledgement following receipt of your application.

Applications will be receipted, and the time of receipt formally recorded. It is the responsibility of the applicant, taking into account their chosen method of delivery, to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for their application to arrive on or before the deadline. Please ensure that posted applications bear the correct amount of postage as any shortfall may lead to a delay in delivery, causing you to miss the deadline.

Late applications will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances.

You should retain a copy of this booklet for your reference in the event that you are invited for interview. Please be aware that the Department may decide to extend the closing date for this competition. If this is the case, all applicants who have submitted an application by the original closing date/time will be informed.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is committed to ensuring that all eligible persons have equal opportunity for public appointments on the basis of their ability and aptitude for the role. Monitoring is carried out to help us ensure that our processes and procedures promote equality of opportunity as far as possible and therefore your help in completing and returning the monitoring form as part of your application would be appreciated. Please note the information you provide in the monitoring form will be detached from the information on the application form, held separately and will not be available to selection panels or to anyone else involved in the selection process. The information will be used for statistical purposes only and analysed independently by staff in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in the strictest confidence.

Equal Opportunities Commitment

The Department is committed to the principles of public appointments based on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process. We are also committed to equality of opportunity and welcome application forms from all suitably qualified applicants irrespective of religious belief, gender, race, political opinion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or whether or not they have dependants.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme

The aim of the Guaranteed Interview Scheme is to provide applicants with a disability the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities beyond the initial application stage.

Applicants with a disability **who meet all of the essential criteria at the sift stage and who pass the assessment** will automatically be offered an interview. Their application will not be subjected to any short-listing which may take place. To be eligible for the Guaranteed Interview Scheme you must be considered as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which defines a person with a disability as someone who has, or has had in the past, a physical or mental impairment, which has had a substantial and long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (See **Annex D**). If you qualify and wish to apply for the Guaranteed Interview Scheme please complete the appropriate section of the application form. This section of the application form will not be provided to the selection panel.

Accessibility Requirements

Please let HRConnect know if you require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability, to enable you to attend the interview. Any information provided will be used for this purpose only and will not form any part of the selection process.

If you are subsequently successful in the selection process and are being considered for appointment, you may be required to outline any adjustments you consider necessary in order for you to take up an appointment. If you wish to discuss your disability requirements further, please contact HRConnect.

Applicant Expenses

Applicants invited for the assessment and interview are eligible for reimbursement of reasonable travelling expenses incurred within the UK and Republic of Ireland in attending for interview. These will be payable in line with NICS rates and policy.

Feedback

The Department is committed to providing feedback in respect of decisions taken in determining eligibility/shortlisting as well as at interview. Feedback in respect of eligibility/shortlisting at sift will be communicated automatically to those applicants who fail to satisfy any criteria. Further requests for feedback and requests for feedback post interview must be requested by applicants in writing to HRConnect.

Changes in Contact Details

Please ensure you inform HRConnect immediately of any changes in personal circumstances, such as name, address, email address or telephone number.

Complaints or Queries

Should you wish to make a complaint or a query about any stage of this process, you should first direct your concerns to:

**HRConnect,
PO BOX 1089,
Beacon House,
27 Clarendon Road Belfast
BT1 9EX
Email: recruitment@hrconnect.nigov.net**

If after receiving a response you are still concerned, you can send your complaint, in writing, to the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Information on how to go about this is available in the CPA (NI) leaflet which is enclosed with this pack at **Annex C**.

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

Annex A

GUIDANCE FOR APPLICATION AND INTERVIEW

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

- Talk through previous jobs or appointments from start to finish;
- Provide generalised information as to your background and experience; or
- Provide information that is not specifically relevant to the criterion the question is designed to test.

A Criteria-based interview does however require you to:

- Focus exclusively, in your responses, on your ability to fulfil the criteria required for effective performance in the role; and
- Provide specific examples of your experience in relation to the required criteria areas.

When completing your application and in preparation for the interview you may wish to think about having a clear structure for each of your examples, such as:

Situation:	Briefly outline the situation
Task:	What was your objective? What were you trying to achieve?
Action:	What did you actually do? What was your unique contribution?
Result:	What happened? What was the outcome? What did you learn?

The Panel will ask you to provide specific examples from your past experience in relation to each of the criteria. You should therefore come to the interview prepared to discuss in detail a range of examples which illustrate your skills and abilities in each criterion area. You may draw examples from any area of your work / life experiences.

You are strongly advised to read the 'Public Appointments Guide 'when preparing for interview [Public Appointments Guide \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](http://executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk)

In addition, you may also be interested in registering for a free workshop on the public appointments process being offered by CPANI. Further details can be found at:

<https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/workshops>

Annex B

PROBITY & CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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

Standards of Behaviour

Ministers expect that the conduct of those they appoint to serve in public office will be above reproach. Everyone who puts themselves forward for a public appointment must be able to demonstrate their commitment to the maintenance of high standards in public life.

The Seven Principles Underpinning Public Life

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

- **Selflessness** – holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity** – holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity** – holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability** – holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness** – holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honesty** – holders of public office should be truthful.
- **Leadership** – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

As part of the selection process, you will be tested on your commitment to maintaining high standards in public life with particular emphasis on probity issues and conflicts of interest.

What is a conflict of interest?

Public appointments require the highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity, in relation to the stewardship of public funds and the oversight and management of all related activities. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the body concerned should be declared.

There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.

No-one should use, or give the appearance of using, their public position to further their private interests. This is an area of particular importance, as it is of considerable concern to the public and receives a lot of media attention. It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for a public appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the individual that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a perceived conflict of interest on the part of an office holder can be extremely damaging to the body's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would be. The fact that an office holder acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form for you to complete. This asks you to consider and declare whether or not you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, in order to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

No, each case is considered individually. If you are short-listed for interview, the Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to contribute effectively and impartially and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. For example, it may be possible to arrange for you to step out of meetings when an issue is discussed, in which you have an interest.

However, if, following the discussion with you, the Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the probity of the Office or the appointment they can withdraw your application from the competition. The summary of the outcome of the interview process, which is put to the Ministers, will include clear written reference to any probity issues or perceived or actual conflicts of interest connected to any applicant put forward as suitable for appointment. It will include sufficient information to ensure that the Ministers are fully aware of any of these matters and can make an informed decision.

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

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Department may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would be deemed to have breached the seven principles of conduct underpinning public life and may terminate your appointment.

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

This situation may arise where the applicant is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the Panel, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the applicant in the application form. They will then explore this at interview with the applicant.

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 individual's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in doing so, a conflict with their work becomes apparent. The second is where an individual is unfamiliar with the range

of the work of the body, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.

In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Sponsoring Department to decide whether or not the post holder 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 individual to continue in their role.

You may be asked to sign a declaration of commitment to the above principles as a condition of your appointment.

Annex C

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



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

These public appointments are made by First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. If you decide to apply for a public appointment the administration of your application will be handled by civil servants in the relevant Department. The Commissioner regulates the selection process but is not involved in individual competitions.

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

Making a Complaint

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

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

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

Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland

Stormont Castle – Interim

Stormont Estate

Upper Newtownards Road

Belfast BT4 3XX

Tel: 028 905 24820

Email: info@publicappointmentsni.org

Guidance on Conflicts of Interest and Integrity

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

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

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

These are examples only. Please remember that identifying a conflict will not necessarily stop you being appointed. You should consider carefully your own circumstances to decide whether or not a perceived, potential or real conflict exists and be ready to discuss it with the Selection Panel at interview. Even if you have not identified any conflicts of interest when applying for the post, you will still be asked about the issue if you are interviewed.

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

Integrity

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

Feedback

You may request feedback on the outcome of your application from the Department running this public appointment competition. This application pack contains relevant

contact details. Feedback can be delivered in writing, by e-mail or by phone. It is up to you. It should be useful, jargon-free and based on the assessment of the selection panel. Please see paragraphs 3.48 and 3.49 of the Code of Practice.

Annex D

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is committed to ensuring that all eligible persons have equal opportunity for public appointments on the basis of their ability and aptitude for the role. Monitoring is carried out to help us ensure that our processes and procedures promote equality of opportunity as far as possible.

This section provides an explanation of the definition of disability.

Disability

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* (the DDA) provides protection for disabled persons against discrimination on the grounds of disability.

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

This definition is interpreted as follows:-

- **Physical Impairment:** this includes, for instance, a weakening of part of the body (eyes, ears, limbs, internal organs etc) caused through illness by accident or from birth. Examples would be blindness, deafness, paralysis of a leg or heart disease.
- **Mental Impairment:** this includes mental ill health and what is commonly known as learning disability, and social functioning.
- **Substantial:** put simply, this means the effect of the physical or mental impairment on ability to carry out normal day to day activities is more than minor or trivial. It does not have to be a severe effect.
- **Long-term adverse effect:** the effect has to have lasted or be likely to last overall for at least 12 months and the effect must be a detrimental one. A person with a life expectancy of less than 12 months is of course covered if the effect is likely to last for the whole of that time.
- **A normal day to day activity:** this is something which is carried out by most people on a fairly regular and frequent basis such as washing, eating, catching a bus or turning on a television. It does not mean something so individual as playing a musical instrument to a professional standard or doing everything involved in a particular job.

What sort of effect must there be?

The person must be affected in at least one of the respects listed in the DDA: mobility; manual dexterity; physical co-ordination; continence; ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects; speech; hearing or eyesight; memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand; ability to take part in normal social interaction and form social relationships; or perception of risk of physical danger.

What happens if the effects are reduced by medication or other treatment?

Broadly speaking, the effects that matter are those that would be present if there was no medication or treatment taking place. The exception is people who wear spectacles or contact lenses when what matters is the effect that remain while the spectacles or contact lenses are being used.

Are there any types of condition covered by special provisions in the DDA?

Yes, because some people with particular conditions might not otherwise be counted as disabled. These are provisions covering:

Recurring or fluctuating conditions such as arthritis, where the effects can sometimes be less than substantial, which are treated as continuing to have a substantial adverse effect so long as that effect is likely to recur.

Conditions which progressively deteriorate, such as motor neuron disease, which count as having a substantial effect from the first time they have any effect at all on ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities even if it is not substantial, so long as there is eventually likely to be a substantial adverse effect; and

People with cancer, HIV, or multiple sclerosis are deemed to be disabled people from the point of diagnosis, regardless of whether or not they have any symptoms.

Are any conditions not covered?

Yes, the following conditions specifically do not count as impairments:

- Addiction to or dependency on alcohol, nicotine or any other substance (unless resulting from the substance being medically prescribed);
- Seasonal allergic rhinitis (e.g. hay fever) unless it aggravates the effect of another condition;
- Tendency to set fires, or steal, or physically or sexually abuse other persons;
- Exhibitionism and voyeurism;
- Severe disfigurements consisting of tattoos, non-medical body piercing or attachments to such piercing are not treated as having substantial adverse effects.

What if someone has recovered from a disability?

Much of the DDA also applies to people who have had a disability in the past (for example, someone who was disabled by mental ill health) but have now fully recovered. People who were registered disabled under the *Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (NI) 1945* both on 12 January 1995 and 2 December 1996 will be regarded as having had a disability in the past if they do not in any case fall within the definition of the DDA.

Section 75 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998* requires public authorities in carrying out their functions in NI to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons with a disability and persons without.

As with other forms of personal data, the obtaining, use, storage and disclosure of monitoring information is covered by the *Data Protection Act 1998* (DPA). Access to this data is restricted and misuse of monitoring information is viewed as a disciplinary offence.