



Northern  
Ireland  
Office



# Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland

## Candidate Information Booklet

April 2025

## **FOREWORD FROM SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

Dear Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in the position of Civil Service Commissioner for Northern Ireland.

I am seeking outstanding individuals who can make a real contribution to the Commissioners' ongoing work and bring expertise and fresh thinking to some of the challenges in the coming months and years.

The enclosed information will, I hope, answer many of the questions you may have about the role and work of the Commissioners. These positions are statutory appointments and, as such, the work must be undertaken consistent with legal powers and duties.

I will be looking to appoint an individual who can bring vision, influence and good judgement to the role; people who will work collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders for the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland.

I welcome applications from all suitably experienced individuals regardless of ethnicity, religion or belief, political opinion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and gender. I particularly welcome applications from men, those with a disability, and those from a black or ethnic minority background as these groups are currently underrepresented. I want to encourage the widest possible pool of talent for this important appointment.

I hope that you will feel able to submit an application and, once again, thank you for your interest in this role.

**RT HON HILARY BENN MP**

**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

## **Introduction**

You may already have some idea about the important work of the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland and the following pages will tell you more about its purpose and the nature of the Commissioner's role.

## **The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland**

Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland were first appointed in 1923 and derive their powers from prerogative Orders made by the Secretary of State. They are appointed by the Crown to uphold the principle that selection for appointment to posts in the Northern Ireland Civil Service should be on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

The Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, sets out the principle that “*a person shall not be appointed to a situation in the Civil Service unless the selection was made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.*” The Order gives Commissioners the responsibility to maintain this important principle, known as ‘The Merit Principle’.

The Order provides for the Commissioners to discharge their responsibilities by:

- publishing and maintaining a Recruitment Code setting out the essential principles and procedures on which recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service must be based;
- making General Regulations prescribing certain ‘Exceptions’ to the principle of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition;
- approving the procedures for appointment through open competition to senior positions in the Northern Ireland Civil Service;
- auditing the recruitment policies and practices followed by Departments and Agencies in making appointments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service, to ensure that they meet the Commissioners’ requirements in regard to the Merit Principle; and
- requiring Departments and Agencies to publish information about their recruitment activity.

Under the terms of the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, Commissioners also have the power to consider, and make decisions on, appeals to them

under the Northern Ireland Civil Service Code of Ethics which is published by the Department of Finance and Personnel for Northern Ireland.

## **The Role**

The role of Civil Service Commissioner is challenging but a rewarding opportunity that calls for someone with good judgement, resilience and sensitivity who can promote the highest standards in public life.

Commissioners engage with the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), Permanent Secretaries Group and the NICS HR function to explore current issues relevant to the work of the Commissioners and to obtain a greater understanding of any relevant recruitment issues in departments and the wider NICS. Commissioners chair all externally advertised competitions for NICS Senior Civil Service appointments.

The Commissioners engage with their counterparts in London and the Republic of Ireland and with other stakeholders and relevant organisations to benchmark and share knowledge and experience.

In addition to safeguarding an impartial and independent NICS, Commissioners have a role in hearing appeals made by existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics, a copy can be found at: <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/nics-code-ethics>

Further information about the Commissioners and their responsibilities can be found on the website at <https://www.nicscommissioners.org/>.

## **Responsibilities (in addition to those provided for in the above legislation):**

All Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland are expected to:

- contribute to establishing the overall strategic direction of the work of the Commissioners;
- collaborate in a culture where decisions are made by consensus as far as possible, in a way that is open and transparent;

- exercise their role in accordance with any protocols, guides and frameworks they have collectively agreed;
- adhere to any legislation, government policies and guidelines as required, in particular in relation to Information and Records Management (including Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Data Protection Act 2018), Information Security, Internet and e-mail usage, data handling and gifts and hospitality policies and procedures;
- take into account any relevant guidance issued by the sponsor department;
- seek to preserve the reputation and independence of the Commissioners and to ensure they do not misrepresent the views or actions of the Commissioners; and
- act at all times in a corporate manner and follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (see **Annex A**).

The Commissioners have no executive or managerial responsibility for the day-to-day work of the Office of the Civil Service Commissioners. Commissioners are appointed individually by Royal Warrant and sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).

## **Person Specification**

An outstanding individual is sought to become a Commissioner; a person who can work as an effective member of a body of Commissioners; forge good working relations with colleagues, senior members of the public sector and with partner organisations; command credibility; make an immediate and powerful impact and promote the highest standards in public life.

## **Essential Skills**

Candidates for this demanding role will need to demonstrate:

- the ability to take difficult but fair decisions in high profile and controversial circumstances;
- the ability to work corporately in a diverse team of influential people and build relationships with stakeholders based on integrity, professional conduct and credibility;
- experience of senior level recruitment or regulation, particularly in supporting ethical standards and promoting rights and equality in a diverse society; and

- a proven record in accountability and reporting frameworks with an exceptional sense of propriety.

The Advisory Assessment Panel will assess your suitability for appointment by comparing the information you give in your CV and personal statement against the essential skills. You should therefore review the essential skills requirements before preparing your personal statement and CV.

Serving Civil Servants or equivalents will not be appointed as Commissioners. Business appointment rules for former Civil Servants will apply to this appointment.

## **Terms of appointment**

The Office of the Civil Service Commissioners is located in Erskine House, Belfast and meetings will normally be held at this location or in the Greater Belfast area. Some elements of home working will be required. Candidates may wish to note:

- the expected time commitment is approximately 4-6 days (or part days) per month, but successful candidates may need to be reasonably flexible as this may fluctuate as a consequence of recruitment work or additional casework;
- the position attracts a daily remuneration of £300 (or £150 for a half day);
- this position is not pensionable; and
- the term of office will be for a period of five years from the date of appointment.

This competition will be used to fill one or more positions and may be used to fill other vacancies that arise within the next 12 months.

## **Conflicts of interest**

In the interests of transparency and openness, applicants are asked to consider whether their appointment may give rise to a conflict of interest and state this clearly within your application. You should provide information regarding interests that you, or your immediate family, have that might be construed as being in conflict with the role of Civil Service Commissioner.

An appointee to a public body could find that matters or incidents which did not previously attract attention could become matters of legitimate public interest once the person concerned holds a public appointment. Actual or perceived conflicts might include, for example, a situation where a candidate has interests in an organisation that might benefit from a contract with the Civil Service Commissioners or there may be issues in your personal or professional history (including any convictions or bankruptcy) that could, if you were appointed, be misconstrued, cause embarrassment to Ministers or the Commissioners or cause public confidence in the appointment to be jeopardised. It is important that you bring them to the attention of the Advisory Assessment Panel and provide details of the issue(s) in your application.

In considering whether you wish to declare any issues, you should also reflect on any public statements you have made, including through social media and blogs. Due Diligence may be carried out on any publicly available information and shared with the Advisory Assessment Panel and Ministers. The panel may explore any issues you declare with you before they make a recommendation on the appointment.

A potential conflict will not necessarily preclude an individual from appointment but candidates must be prepared to have this explored during the recruitment process and before an appointment is confirmed.

## **The Seven Principles of Public Life**

It is important that all public appointees uphold the standards of conduct set out in the Committee on Standards on Public Life's Seven Principles of Public Life. A copy of the principles is appended at **Annex A**.

In addition to the above Principles, the Commissioners and Secretariat have adopted the following core values which underpin their work:

- Independence
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Quality

Further information on the Commissioners' core values can be found on their website: [www.nicscommissioners.org](http://www.nicscommissioners.org)

## **How to apply**

The Northern Ireland Office is committed to the principle of public appointments on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process and to providing equal opportunities for all, irrespective of race, age, disability, gender, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, transgender and working patterns.

We encourage all applicants to apply online via the Cabinet Office's public appointments website at: <http://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/>

Further information on how to do this is set out below. However, should you be unable to submit an online application or have any issues then you should contact us at the earliest opportunity by email or telephone at [csc2025@nio.gov](mailto:csc2025@nio.gov) or call 07973773903.

**In order to apply, you will need to [create an account](#) or [sign in](#). Once you are logged into your account, click on 'apply for this role' and follow the on-screen instructions by the closing date of 23 May 2025 at 12noon. The Selection Panel reserves the right to only consider applications that contain all of the elements listed below, and that arrive before the published deadline for applications.**

For your application to be properly considered by the Panel you must upload:

- A supporting statement of **no more than 1000 words** summarising your proven ability related to the essential criteria and person specification. Your statement should provide specific and detailed examples to demonstrate how you meet the essential criteria (including what you did to achieve a specific result); and
- A short CV (including education and professional qualifications, career history, and relevant achievements and responsibilities);
- Diversity / Equality Information;
- Information relating to any outside interests or reputational issues.

You will be asked to check and confirm your personal details to ensure that your application is accurate and will also have the opportunity to make a reasonable adjustment request or apply under the Disability Confident Scheme before you submit your application.

**Completed applications should be submitted by the closing date of 23 May 2025 at 12 noon.**

## **Process**

All applications received by the closing date will be acknowledged and put before a duly constituted Advisory Assessment Panel including an independent member. It is expected that candidates selected at shortlisting stage will be interviewed by the Panel **in June 2025** but this timescale may change at short notice. Interviews will take place remotely.

The Panel will in due course make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who may wish to meet candidates before deciding who should be his preferred candidate. The final appointment will be confirmed by His Majesty the King on the advice of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

The recruitment of Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland is not regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. .

If you require any further information about the application process you should contact the competition coordinator by email at [csc2025@nio.gov.uk](mailto:csc2025@nio.gov.uk).

## **Disability Confident - Offering an Interview to People with a Disability**

As a Whitehall department, the Northern Ireland Office has adopted the Department for Work and Pensions sponsored Disability Confident scheme, which has replaced the Guaranteed Interview Scheme or Two Ticks scheme that was widely used in Great Britain.

Disability Confident is a voluntary scheme that supports the Government's commitment to halve the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people by encouraging

employers to think differently about disability and to take positive action to improve how they attract, recruit and retain disabled workers. We will make reasonable adjustments to help you attend your interview. You may wish to contact the competition coordinator (see contact details above) about your individual requirements should your application proceed to this stage in the process.

We will also offer an interview to a fair and proportionate number of disabled applicants that meet the minimum criteria for the job - you must be able to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate relevant skills and experience for each of the selection criteria set out in the essential skills section. This does not mean that all disabled people are entitled to an interview.

The aim of this commitment is to encourage positive action for disabled people, encouraging them to apply for positions in public life by offering them the assurance that, should they meet the minimum criteria as advertised for the position, they will be given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, talent and abilities at the interview stage.

It is important to note that in certain recruitment situations such as an urgent appointment or if we receive a higher volume of applications that far exceeds the number of those expected then we may need to limit the overall numbers of interviews offered. This will include the number of interviews offered to disabled people that meet the minimum criteria for the job.

If you have a disability and require reasonable adjustments then you may wish to contact the competition coordinator about your requirements at the interview stage should you proceed in the process.

## **Complaints**

If you feel that you have any complaint about any aspect of the way your application has been handled please e-mail the competition co-ordinator at **[csc2025@nio.gov.uk](mailto:csc2025@nio.gov.uk)**.

Complaints must be received by the competition coordinator within 1 calendar month from the issue or after the campaign has closed, whichever is the later. Your complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt and answered as quickly and clearly as

possible; at the most within 20 working days of receipt. If this deadline cannot be met we will inform you why this is the case and when you can expect a reply.

## **Use of your Personal Information**

Your personal information will be held in accordance with GDPR and all relevant data protection legislation. You will not receive unsolicited paper or electronic mail as a result of sending us any personal information. No personal information will be passed on to third parties for commercial purposes.

When we ask you for personal information, we promise we will:

- only ask for what we need, and not collect too much or irrelevant information;
- ensure you know why we need it;
- protect it and insofar as is possible, make sure nobody has access to it who shouldn't;
- ensure you know what choice you have about giving us information;
- make sure we don't keep it longer than necessary; and
- only use your information for the purposes you have authorised.

We ask that you:

- give us accurate information;
- tell us as soon as possible of any changes; and
- tell us as soon as possible if you notice mistakes in the information we hold about you.

Our data protection policy is in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act. Information held electronically, including your contact details and the monitoring information which you provide will be held for at least 2 years. If you would like your details to be removed from our records as soon as this recruitment exercise is complete, please inform the competition coordinator via the email address to which you sent your application.

## **Equality and Diversity Monitoring Information**

This information is not used in the selection process. It will be removed on receipt and is not seen by the panel assessing your application. We only use this information to monitor the diversity of candidates we attract and those we appoint.

## THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

The principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected for appointment to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, NDPBs and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public services. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

<b>Selflessness</b>	Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
<b>Integrity</b>	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.
<b>Objectivity</b>	Holders of Public Office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
<b>Accountability</b>	Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is necessary to ensure this.
<b>Openness</b>	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.
<b>Honesty</b>	Holders of public office should be truthful.
<b>Leadership</b>	Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.