

# CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

## BUSINESS PLAN: 2023-2024

*Ensuring appointment on merit  
& supporting ethical standards*

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**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: COMMISSIONER FUNCTIONS**

**OBJECTIVE:**  
 Commissioners will safeguard an impartial and independent Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) by maintaining the principle of selection on merit and considering and determining appeals made by existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics.

KEY ACTIONS:	ASSOCIATED TASKS:	DESIRED OUTCOME:
<p><b>1.1</b> Maintain the principle of selection on merit as required by the Recruitment Code</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scrutinise and consider requests made by NICS in relation to appointments made by way of exception to the Merit Principle;</li> <li>- Publish an Annual Report;</li> <li>- Seek assurances from the Department of Finance that all recruitment activity is conducted in line with current NICS Recruitment Policy and Procedures and in accordance with the NICS Commissioners’ current Recruitment Code.</li> <li>- In response to the NIAO’s report on Capacity and Capability in the NICS published on 18 November 2020 and the subsequent report published by the Public Accounts Committee on 20 May 2021, continue to work in partnership with the NICS by actively participating in the ‘Recruitment and Selection Transformation Group, on a quarterly basis or more often if required, to progress the implementation of recommendation 3.4 –   <i>“The NICS and Civil Service Commissioners should work in partnership, taking account of how other models operate, to explore how they can best support the delivery of the transformation agenda and the changes needed to reform the recruitment and selection process throughout the NICS”.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Public confidence in the independence and effectiveness of NICS appointments process.</p>

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<p><b>1.2</b> Prescribe in General Regulations the permitted exceptions to the Merit Principle</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review General Regulations with a view to identifying any additions or amendments/improvements to the exceptions to the Merit principle.</li> </ul>	<p>Clear and unambiguous General Regulations which are fit for purpose.</p>
<p><b>1.3</b> Prescribe and publish the Recruitment Code ensuring it remains fit for purpose</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Monitor and make revisions to ensure the continued effectiveness of the Recruitment Code.</li> </ul>	<p>A Recruitment Code which is fit for purpose, ensuring the Merit Principle is upheld.</p>
<p><b>1.4</b> Audit NICS recruitment policies and practices to establish whether the Recruitment Code is being observed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement Audit Plan 2023-2024 by conducting audits and reviews in line with Commissioners' Audit and Review Guidance and publish the results in the Annual Report;</li> <li>- Monitor the implementation of all audit recommendations;</li> <li>- Prepare Audit Plan for 2024-2025.</li> </ul>	<p>Public confidence that appointments to the NICS are made on merit.</p>
<p><b>1.5</b> Require the publication of NICS recruitment related information including information related to the use of permitted exceptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review the requirements set out in Appendix C of the Recruitment Code in order to ensure that the information published by the NICS is relevant and effectively supporting Commissioners' Annual Report;</li> <li>- Require the NICS to publish relevant recruitment information in accordance with Appendix C of the Recruitment Code.</li> </ul>	<p>Enhanced information available to the public about recruitment to the NICS and the work of Commissioners.</p>

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KEY ACTIONS:	ASSOCIATED TASKS:	DESIRED OUTCOME:
1.6 Consider and determine appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manage the appeals process for the NICS Code of Ethics in line with the Commissioners' Guidance.</li> <li>- Periodically review the Commissioners' Code of Ethics Guidance on raising a concern under the NICS Code of Ethics to ensure that it remains fit for purpose by effectively supporting Commissioners' statutory role and meeting the needs of appellants.</li> </ul>	Effective handling of appeals made under the NICS Code of Ethics.
1.7 Provide written approval for appointments to any situation in the Senior Civil Service, or to any situation prescribed by the General Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Scrutinise and provide written approval for appointments to any situation in the SCS made in accordance Article 6;</li> <li>- Consider and make a determination on all requests for appointments to be made as exceptions to the Merit Principle;</li> <li>- Report on the outcome of all requests for appointments to be made as exceptions to the Merit Principle.</li> </ul>	Public confidence that appointments to the NICS are made on merit.
1.8 Engaging with the NICS and relevant stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage with key stakeholders to ensure promotion of Recruitment Code and its embedding into NICS recruitment practices;</li> <li>- Engage with the NICS on pro-active measures and initiatives to provide opportunity for and encourage participation from disadvantaged sections of the community ensuring that all schemes are in line with the Recruitment Code.</li> </ul>	Public confidence that appointments to the NICS are made on merit.

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KEY ACTIONS:	ASSOCIATED TASKS:	DESIRED OUTCOME:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Engage with UK Civil Service Commission and the Commission for Public Service Appointments (ROI) to share good practice and learning.</li></ul>	
<b>1.9</b> Chairing SCS competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Chair all open SCS competitions.</li></ul>	Public confidence that appointments to the NICS are made on merit.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: COMMISSIONER FUNCTIONS  
TARGETS 2022/2023**

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>	<b>TIMESCALE</b>	<b>ASSOCIATED ACTION (S)</b>	<b>CURRENT STATUS</b>
Complete Audit as detailed in the Audit plan	March 2024	1.4	
Commissioners chair all external SCS competitions in accordance with the Recruitment Code	Ongoing	1.9	
Appendix C data is reviewed and requested from the NICS	December 2023	1.5	
Review General Regulations and take action if necessary	November 2023	1.2	
Agreed Annual Report published	October 2023	1.1	
All Code of Ethics appeals dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner	Ongoing	1.6	
Secretariat to submit requests for an exception to Merit to Commissioners	Within 2 days of receipt of request	1.7	
Commissioners to provide initial response (final response may take longer, subject to availability of information and level of complexity)	Within 7 days of receipt of request from Secretariat	1.7	

**SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

**(This evidence will be considered and analysed by Commissioners on a regular basis)**

- Requests made by NICS in relation to appointments made by way of exception to the Merit Principle;
- Outcome of audits and reviews undertaken;
- Publication of relevant recruitment data by NICS in accordance with Appendix C of the Recruitment Code;
- Number of Code of Ethics appeals received and considered by Commissioners.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: GOVERNANCE

### OBJECTIVE:

Comply with sponsor department's governance and financial requirements and fulfill our obligations as a public authority

KEY ACTIONS:	ASSOCIATED TASKS:	DESIRED OUTCOME:
2.1 Maintain effective business planning arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Publish the agreed 2023/24 Business Plan;</li><li>- Deliver the Business Plan and monitor and report quarterly on progress;</li><li>- Schedule a Business Planning day to identify priorities for 2024/25 Business Plan.</li></ul>	Commissioners efficiently and effectively supported.
2.2 Discharge all statutory obligations as a public authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Comply with Information Management requirements;</li><li>- Agree Retention and Disposal Schedule with PRONI and Department for Communities;</li><li>- Comply with Data Protection Policy (and review policy as appropriate) to ensure adherence with Government Information Assurance requirements and relevant legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, FOIA 2000, Equality, Disability, Diversity and Health and Safety legislation;</li><li>- Comply with Equality Scheme; Review and Implement Equality Action Plan and Disability Action Plan; and submit Annual Equality Progress Report to ECNI.</li></ul>	Compliance with all statutory obligations.
2.3 Comply with the OCSC(NI) Framework Document with the sponsoring department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Comply with the requirements of the OCSC(NI) and NIO Framework document and report via Stewardship Statements to NIO bi-annually.</li></ul>	Good governance is maintained with no breaches of internal controls.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: GOVERNANCE**

**OBJECTIVE:**  
Comply with sponsor department’s governance and financial requirements and fulfill our obligations as a public authority

<b>KEY ACTIONS:</b>	<b>ASSOCIATED TASKS:</b>	<b>DESIRED OUTCOME:</b>
2.4 Comply with sponsoring department’s financial requirements, to ensure all resources are allocated and managed effectively to support the discharge of Commissioners’ functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ensure financial systems procedures and practices meet NIO requirements;</li><li>- Ensure financial activity corresponds with the NIO Letter of Delegation;</li><li>- Meet with NIO Finance Partner on a regular basis to monitor current and future resources;</li><li>- Work with NIO to identify and if appropriate implement any efficiency targets with agreed timescales;</li><li>- Monitor profiling against expenditure and conduct mid-year reviews of expenditure and advise NIO at earliest opportunity of any need for in year bid or easement; and</li><li>- Report on financial position to Commissioners at quarterly Business Meetings.</li></ul>	No breaches of internal procedures with services delivered within budget.



**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2: GOVERNANCE  
TARGETS 2022/2023**

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>	<b>TIMESCALE</b>	<b>ASSOCIATED ACTION (S)</b>	<b>CURRENT STATUS</b>
2023/24 Business Plan published	1 <sup>st</sup> week in April 2023	2.1	
Business Planning day to consider priorities and inform drafting and development of 2023/24 Business Plan; Risk Register; and Learning and Development Plan held	November 2023	2.1	
Submission of Annual Equality Section 75 Progress Report to ECNI	August 2023	2.2	
OCSC Stewardship statements completed and returned to NIO bi-annually	November 2023 March 2024	2.3	
Budget variance within NIO tolerance	Monthly	2.4	

**SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

**(This evidence will be considered and analysed by Commissioners on a regular basis)**

- Quarterly monitoring of Business Plan progress, risk register and L&D plan;
- Completion of OCSC stewardship statements to NIO;
- Review of response times to requests for information under DPA or FOIA.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PEOPLE

### OBJECTIVE:

Support the development of Commissioners and appointment and development of members of the Secretariat

KEY ACTIONS:	ASSOCIATED TASKS:	DESIRED OUTCOME:
<b>3.1</b> Ensure suitable arrangements are put in place to assist effective succession planning for the appointment and induction of Commissioners and members of the Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ensure staffing levels are adequate to discharge the functions of the Commissioners;</li><li>- Identify when vacancies are likely to arise and liaise with NIO with regard to replacements;</li><li>- Transfer of knowledge from leavers;</li><li>- Training of replacement staff.</li></ul>	Adequate staffing levels to support Commissioners' to discharge their statutory duties.
<b>3.2</b> Deliver effective strategic leadership and performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ensure that the Chair carries out the appraisal of Commissioners;</li><li>- Ensure that the Secretariat understands fully the commitments in the Business Plan and their role in contributing to its effective delivery and that this is reflected in all Personal Performance Plans.</li></ul>	Clarity of purpose leading to the achievement of business objectives.
<b>3.3</b> Meet the learning and development needs of Commissioners and Secretariat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Identify the learning and development needs of the Commissioners and Secretariat;</li><li>- Agree, implement and monitor quarterly the learning and development plan.</li></ul>	Commissioners and Secretariat all suitably trained to meet business and professional needs.

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3: PEOPLE  
TARGETS 2022/2023**

<b>PERFORMANCE MEASURE</b>	<b>TIMESCALE</b>	<b>ASSOCIATED ACTION (S)</b>	<b>CURRENT STATUS</b>
Vacancies advertised and progressed in a timely manner	Ongoing	3.1	
100% of Commissioner and Secretariat appraisals undertaken	April 2023	3.2	
Learning and Development Plan complied with and actioned in full	Ongoing	3.3	

**SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**  
**(This evidence will be considered and analysed by Commissioners on a regular basis)**

- Secretariat vacancies;
- Commissioner vacancies;
- Budget spend on training.