

Review of the Annual Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions Report

Background

The financial challenge facing public services in Northern Ireland has been well publicised. Resource expenditure across the NICS is falling at a time of rising cost pressure, putting departmental budgets under pressure. NISRA has been developing strategies to meet this shortfall including tailoring our outputs and activities to align with available resources while continuing to produce high quality statistics.

As part of the wider effort to operate within these financial constraints, the Human Resource Consultancy Services (HRCS) team within NISRA, reviewed the content and format of a number of publications in 2023. This included the annual [Recruitment Report](#) which provides a high-level statistical summary, from an equality perspective, of recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) in a calendar year. There are two main elements to this output – a set of tables, and a written report which contains the same tables with descriptive commentary.

A formal consultation with users opened on Monday 2 October 2023 and closed on Sunday 29 October 2023. Notice of the consultation was placed on Departmental Intranets, the NISRA website, Twitter and Facebook feeds. In addition, an email was sent to those on the Recruitment Report user mailing list. Users were invited to complete our online [questionnaire](#) to provide feedback on :

- their usage of the report and particular sections within it, including reasons for use, the element used (written report or tables) and frequency of use;
- how the report meets their needs; and
- the impact of proposed changes to the report – specifically proposals to suspend or scale back the written report.

Summary of Responses

Users

We received 27 responses to the consultation and 14 were from users of the report. Most (13) were from internal NICS users and one from academia/ research.

The main reasons for use were identified as:

- Personal Interest (11)
- Policy making/monitoring (5)
- Responding to information requests (4)
- To facilitate research (3)
- Media/informing public/public interest (2)
- To aid decision on resource allocation (2)

Elements Used

Thirteen users responded that they used the written report, and nine used the Excel tables. Each section of the report was used often or occasionally by at least 14 users.

Meeting Needs

When asked to what extent the annual Recruitment in the NICS report met their needs, most of the 14 users said fully/mostly (5) or partly (7). When asked about each section of the output, most users (at least nine) reported the corresponding section fully or mostly met their needs.

Eight respondents provided written comments on the proposed changes and how the report could better meet their needs. Some of these were positive comments on aspects of the report and others were not applicable to the statistical output as they referred to the recruitment process. There was some interest in departmental information, which is not feasible due to the high number of NICS-wide recruitment competitions.

Proposals

Seven users indicated that the impact of stopping the written report would be high or medium, while six said it would be low. Similarly, when asked about the impact of scaling back the written report, six users indicated high or medium impact and seven a low impact. Eleven users said the impact of stopping the written report and the tables would be high or medium.

One of the requirements in the Civil Service Commissioner for NI (NICSC) Recruitment Code is for NISRA to provide annual NICS Recruitment Statistics for publication in a specified format. Therefore, a series of follow-up consultation meetings further explored NICSC requirements. Taking account of all the user responses, it was proposed to publish the relevant equality information in a graphical format with supporting tables and reduced commentary.

Proposed Action

HRCS is grateful to all the users who took time to provide detailed responses to the consultation. The collective feedback paints a positive picture of the importance which users derive from this particular output. However, in view of the tight financial position, NISRA intends to streamline the report by presenting information in graphs with supporting tables, to enable resources to be focused on key issues of policy importance. This will ensure continued delivery of wider analytical priorities, in the face of constrained resource. This position will be kept under review.

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