

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

BUSINESS PRIORITIES FOR 2007- 08

We are entering our first full year as a new team of Commissioners and have refreshed our strategies and plans as well as setting our priorities for 2007-08.

It is vital for us to

- maintain our independence as we move into a changing political landscape;
- to promulgate clearly our primary role as guardians of the merit principle in fair and open recruitment to the civil service; and
- promote the values of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) in upholding the new Code of Ethics.

The context for all our work is the Commissioners' **Good Relations Strategy** published in April 2006. Already, we have made progress on a number of key actions in this Strategy and I have attached a summary of this progress to this statement of priorities for 2007-08.

The Commissioners have decided that the Good Relations Strategy, which is intended as a 3-year backdrop for our business activities, should be refined and rolled forward each year. We will therefore do this in the course of the next 12 months during which we will have the benefit of further guidance on promoting good relations from the Equality Commission, together with that Commission's feedback on the 5-year Review of our Equality Scheme and its review of the effectiveness of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

In regard to our **Business Plan** for the next year, we shall focus on three priority areas:

- establishing clarity of roles for the Commissioners, the NICS and the proposed outsourced supplier of personnel services to the NICS. We believe that this will require a number of business sessions with the

Director of Central Personnel in DFP and the new supplier, as their respective responsibilities are determined;

- effective management and chairing of panels in all external competitions for appointments to the Senior Civil Service. We shall continue to work with the NICS in developing the most effective recruitment techniques and assessment tools, and of addressing diversity in attracting applications and dealing with areas of under-representation in the NICS;
- the outcomes from the new approach to auditing NICS recruitment policies and practices under the 2005 Recruitment Code. New auditors are being appointed and we shall review the effectiveness of the new approach before the end of 2008.

The priority in relation to our **Communications Strategy** will be to concentrate on a small number of key stakeholders who are central to our main business activities. Over the course of the next 12 months, these are perceived to be:

- the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and Permanent Secretaries of DFP and NIO to keep abreast of the civil service reform programme and continuing political developments, in particular, any proposed restructuring of Departments or devolution of new responsibilities;
- the NICS and trade unions in relation to the intended outsourcing of personnel services;
- Departmental Permanent Secretaries and the Chief Executives of SSA and CSA to maintain and strengthen relationships and provide an arena for the exchange of views on issues of relevant, mutual interest;
- DFP and NISRA in regard to the effectiveness of current recruitment processes and procedures, including the management of Senior Civil Service competitions;
- The Public Service Commission in relation to those impacts of the Review of Public Administration which may have implications for our business;

- relationships with our counterparts in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.

Our **Training and Development Plan** is revisited annually. While our initial induction programme has been completed, the Commissioners believe that we should continue to set an example in ensuring that regular, up-to-date training is undertaken especially in regard to equality and related legislation and also recruitment processes, interviewing and chairing. We must also ensure that we are ready to deal rigorously with any appeals to the Commissioners under the new NICS Code of Ethics. During 2007-08, therefore, we see the priorities as:

- refresher training on the management of the recruitment process;
- specific information sessions on new, relevant legislation and on recruitment and assessment methodologies;
- training in investigative techniques, including liaison with other bodies which deal with complaints;
- information and sharing sessions with other Commissions and Commissioners.

We will keep under review progress on all our business activities and priorities during the year and will add new priorities as necessary. We look forward to the challenges that a new year brings, especially in a civil service that is changing rapidly. Our primary aim will be to ensure that public confidence in the integrity of recruitment processes is maintained while the programme of reform continues and that civil servants can feel proud of the values to which they aspire as they seek to serve the community.

March 2007

**SUMMARY OF PROGRESS 2006/07 AGAINST
THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS' GOOD RELATIONS STRATEGY**

Strand	Key Area	Action Point	31 March 2007 Position
1	Public Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitor the impact of the new Recruitment Code on recruitment practices to the NICS and amend it, when necessary 	Achieved. Amendment to the Recruitment Code and 2007 General Regulations introduced a new exception.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> publicise changes in 2006-07 to the current complement of Commissioners and revise the explanatory information leaflet sent to applicants for appointment to the NICS to reflect these changes 	Achieved. Website updated. Leaflet amended to include all Commissioners as at 1 April 07 and is issued by Recruitment Service to all applicants as part of the Candidate information Pack.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to review information published on the Commissioners' website. 	Achieved.
	Recruitment Code and audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consult with the NICS regarding their current policies and goals relating to recruitment in order to gain, among other things, an appreciation of any areas of under-representation 	Achieved.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify areas for audit to ensure that NICS policies and goals are being achieved and that areas of under-representation are addressed 	Achieved. 2006-07 Audit programme completed.
	Exceptions to the merit principle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keep under review numbers appointed to the NICS under exceptions to the merit principle 	Achieved. Details to be published in Annual Report.

Strand	Key Area	Action Point	31 March 2007 Position
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keep under review the various categories of exception to assess their continuing relevance; 	Achieved.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consider introducing an exception to allow appropriate reinstatement arrangements in relation to political activity in light of the eventual judgement of the Court of Appeal in the case currently being litigated. 	Achieved. New 2007 Regulations published Feb 2007.
	Publication of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> keep under review the information published by the NICS to assess its continuing relevance 	Achieved. Publication Scheme reviewed and updated November 2007.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to publish in the Commissioners' Annual Report information on appointments under exceptions to the principle of appointment on merit and to identify any concerns the Commissioners may have in relation to use of the exceptions 	Achieved.
2	Building constructive relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> publish the Commissioners' Communications Strategy to identify those groups with whom constructive relationships are being nurtured 	Achieved.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluate on an ongoing basis through the Commissioners' experience of chairing recruitment panels the NICS process for appointment to the Senior Civil Service by way of open competition and to publish information on such appointments in their Annual Report 	Achieved.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seek continuous improvement of NICS recruitment policies and practices through dialogue with the NICS and Permanent Secretaries 	Achieved.
3	Appreciating expectations and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to ensure that all external appointments to the NICS are based on merit on the basis of fair and open competition; 	Achieved.

Strand	Key Area	Action Point	31 March 2007 Position
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To continually test our understanding of expectations and concerns; 	Achieved. Audit programme 2006/07 completed.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify and, where appropriate, encourage the use of positive messages to attract candidates from under-represented groups to apply for appointments to the NICS 	Achieved. Audit on Attracting Candidates completed. Report being finalised.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitor progress in relation to the Crown Employment (Nationality) Bill; 	Achieved. New European Communities (Employment in the Civil Service) Order 2007 came into effect March 2007.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> exhort the application of the highest ethical standards of behaviour to those working in the civil service and to make representations to the NICS regarding the potential role of the Commissioners in any revision of the Code of Ethics, especially in relation to situations where civil servants believe they are being asked to act in a manner which is unlawful or unethical. 	Achieved. New NICS Code of Ethics launched. Commissioners' guidance leaflet for complainants has been revised and placed on Website.