

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2007-08



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TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2007-08

As Commissioners with responsibility for upholding the principle of appointments to the NICS being on merit on the basis of fair and open competition, we are committed to continuing our own professional development and to getting the best from those who support us in our functions. To this end, we will ensure that the Chairperson and Commissioners continue to receive appropriate and relevant training and development to enable us to carry out our role and responsibilities effectively.

The Commissioners also have responsibility to hear appeals to them by civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics, and may under the new Code consider taking complaints directly.

Commissioners' expertise is regularly updated and refreshed. We have again endorsed this as a priority with recruitment training being refreshed on an annual basis, taking account of any new legislation which impacts on our role. Relevant training and development is also made available for those who provide us with support. In the latter context, there is a responsibility on each member of the secretariat to identify his or her perceived training and development needs, and to discuss these with their line manager.

BUSINESS CONTEXT

The Commissioners' Business Plan for 2007-08 and the Communications Strategy set out the Commissioners' objectives and targets for the year ahead. This Training and Development Strategy supports the achievement of these objectives and targets. In 2007-08, development and training will therefore focus on:

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Key Business Areas

Organisational Learning and Growth:

- To provide effective strategic leadership and direction to the OCSC secretariat
- To provide training and continuous professional development for the Commissioners
- To maintain a well managed, trained and motivated secretariat

Customers:

- To promote public confidence in recruitment to the NICS
- To provide timely responses to queries from the Public and Ministers
- To provide timely and appropriate advice to NICS Departments/NIO on interpretation of the Recruitment Code/remit of Commissioners
- To approve SCS appointments within the specified timescales
- To progress Code of Ethics appeals by civil servants with minimum delay
- To promote equality of opportunity and good relations duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998
- To demonstrate our commitment to freedom of information

Processes:

- To ensure the Commissioners have effective support and advice to enable the achievement of their statutory role and responsibilities
- To effectively and efficiently manage Commissioners' meetings with the support of the secretariat
- To support and assist the Chairperson and Commissioners in developing their role

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- To produce an Annual Report on time
- To effectively audit NICS recruitment practices against the new Recruitment Code and complete an agreed audit programme
- To continually review processes for improvement including electronic records management
- To monitor and report on exceptions to the merit principle
- To keep the website up-to-date
- To evaluate key outputs as appropriate

Resources

- To maintain staffing levels required for the effective discharge of the Commissioners' functions
- To deploy and manage resources to secure good value for money

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TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2007-08

Top priority in training and development is to ensure that everyone is capable of carrying out their responsibilities to the best of their ability and in a manner which aspires to excellence in terms of quality, relevance, timeliness and accuracy of service provided. Such a service will be provided best by people who are clear about their role and what is expected from them by way of individual and collective contribution. Our Business Priorities for 2007-08 are set out in a statement by the Chair and the Business Plan sets out in detail our work objectives and targets for 2007-08. Both of these documents are available on our website.

The NIO Strategic Learning and Development Priorities 2007/08-2008/09 have been taken into account in developing this Strategy.

The priority for the Commissioners is that they provide strong leadership and direction for all aspects of the process of recruitment to the NICS, emphasising the significance of securing equality of opportunity, fairness, transparency and diversity. The outcome will be a civil service which enjoys the support and confidence of the public and which reflects the composition of the community at large. The independence and objectivity of the Commissioners are also vital to their role of hearing appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics.

For the secretariat, the Business Plan, Job Descriptions, Forward Job Plans and regular opportunities for discussion with line managers, will enable all our support staff to understand what they are doing, why they are doing it and for whom they are doing it. Line managers are best placed to help explain the role of the Commissioners and to help staff identify their training and development needs as they seek to provide support. These needs will be incorporated in individual Personal Development Plans. The introduction of a new appraisal process

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based on Professional Skills for Government will be monitored and all staff will receive appropriate training in the new arrangements.

All Commissioners and line managers will be encouraged to set an example in leadership and to help staff to feel valued by ensuring that:

- staff are kept fully informed about the Commissioners' Business Plan and Communications Strategy;
- each member of staff has a job description, a forward job plan and a personal development plan;
- team meetings are held regularly to review work plans;
- the performance appraisal cycle, including half-year reviews, is used to take stock of such arrangements and to assess each individual's contribution; and
- annual reports are completed on time.

Training and development will be delivered in a variety of ways ranging from learning on the job or participation in events of general application through to specific courses, tailored to a particular purpose.

The training priorities for 2007- 08 are:

- all Commissioners will be thoroughly equipped to provide professional, independent and objective leadership in chairing Senior Civil Service recruitment panels;
- all Commissioners and staff will be aware of business and communication priorities and kept abreast of relevant information, especially that emerging from relevant bodies such as the GB and Rol Commissioners, Equality and Human Rights bodies, Cabinet Office, DFP and other relevant sources;

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- all new staff will receive induction training and on-going training on the Commissioners' role and individual activities as appropriate, which enable them to promulgate the role and activities to key stakeholders;
- Commissioners will receive refresher training on the management of the recruitment process;
- specific information sessions on new, relevant legislation and recruitment methodologies;
- Commissioners will receive training in investigative techniques including liaison with other bodies which deal with complaints, as necessary, for the purposes of effective handling of appeals under the Code of Ethics;
- Commissioners will arrange information and sharing sessions with other Commissions and Commissioners;
- equal opportunities and health and safety training will be provided as appropriate;
- awareness education and training in areas such as human rights, equality and diversity will be provided as appropriate;
- for all secretariat staff, training in the new appraisal process and, especially for line managers, advice and help in drawing up job descriptions, forward job plans and personal development plans will be available;
- all secretariat staff, and especially line managers, will be given advice and help in evaluating training and assessing its usefulness both to the individual and to their role in supporting the Commissioners;
- training in leadership, corporacy and management skills will be available for all line managers;
- line managers will be provided, as appropriate, with training in setting business objectives, targets and evaluation techniques;
- for all staff, training will be available in communication skills, customer service and relationships. This will include the organising and

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arranging of meetings and events, management of diaries, minute taking and implementation of the Communications Strategy action plan;

- training in financial management and awareness will be available to all staff;
- all staff will be encouraged and trained, as appropriate, to make greater use of information technology and to be proficient in the use of Oasis3 technology for the management of information;
- other specific tailored or customised training will be provided as required.

The return of devolution could have a significant impact on the Commissioners and the secretariat if, for example, the function was moved from the “reserved” to the “transferred” field. This would involve a new relationship for the Commissioners (with the devolved administration), a new arrangement for resourcing the function and a structural change for the secretariat. The expectation is that it would also have an impact on the volume of work required in relation to briefing and awareness sessions for Ministers, Departmental Committees and political parties.

Civil Service Reform and continuing political developments, in particular any proposed restructuring of Departments, will be reviewed regularly to ensure that the Commissioners and the secretariat are ready to respond to changing circumstances. Commissioners will wish to ensure that their independence and objectivity is recognised and valued, and that they can continue to operate in a politically neutral environment.

Other developments, such as the “HR Connect” process and RPA implementation, will also be closely monitored as these are likely to require some adjustments to working practices and relationships. Commissioners will wish to

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be regularly appraised of progress and take steps to ensure that there is no compromise or dilution of their existing role or mandate. We have identified clarification of respective roles as a priority during 2007-08.

Evaluation

Training and development is expected to lead to a number of improvements. With regard to staff in the secretariat, an evaluation of all training and development received will be carried-out post event and reviewed in-year with the line manager. An assessment will be made of the expected benefits of training and development activities and an evaluation will be undertaken at an appropriate time thereafter to ascertain whether the anticipated benefits have accrued.

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