

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: 2014 – 17 & BUSINESS PLAN: 2014/15

*Ensuring appointment on merit
& safeguarding ethics*

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CONTEXT

This Plan has been prepared by the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland to set out the strategic direction for Commissioners over the 3-year period 2014 – 2017. It outlines the Commissioners' 3- year strategic priorities and provides details of the specific actions to be taken during 2014/15 that will contribute to the achievement of those priorities. All of the objectives, targets and actions contained within this Plan have been developed to support Commissioners to fulfil their statutory responsibilities to uphold the principle that selection for appointment to posts in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) should be on merit on the basis of fair and open competition and to consider and determine appeals under the Code Of Ethics.

Commissioners discharge their statutory responsibilities by:

- maintaining the principle of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition in relation to selection for appointment;
- making General Regulations which prescribe the circumstances in which the Merit Principle shall not apply;
- publishing and maintaining a Recruitment Code on the interpretation and application of the Merit Principle;
- auditing recruitment policies and practices followed in making appointments to the Civil Service to establish whether the Recruitment Code is being observed; and
- requiring the publication of such information as they may specify relating to recruitment and to the use of permitted exceptions to the Merit Principle.

The successful achievement of the strategic priorities represents a challenging and ambitious programme of work. This Plan takes account of the consideration of inclusion of Section 75 groups, the revised approach to audit which has helped to inform the way forward in undertaking our regulatory audit role; and changes in the wider political, business and social environment in NI and, therefore, the context for recruitment to the NICS. Key changes include the changing economic and employment environment the impact of the 2013 Spending Review announced on 26 June 2013. Commissioners have been advised that in line with Cabinet Office the 2014/15 budget may be subject to a minimum 3% reduction and the 2015/16 budget may be subject to a minimum 11.15% reduction which will make the delivery of our statutory functions and the objectives and target set out in this Plan particularly challenging. A key priority in developing a realistic and achievable programme of work is to ensure we continue to discharge effectively our statutory roles and responsibilities and promote public confidence in recruitment to the NICS.

Commissioners view this Plan as a 'living document' which will be monitored and kept under regular review to enable Commissioners to respond appropriately to any changes in business need which occur over time. Commissioners will evaluate progress towards the strategic priorities and the annual objectives and targets on a quarterly basis and report formally on this in Annual Reports.

Commissioners are committed to working in close partnership with key stakeholders in order to achieve the strategic priorities outlined in this Plan. The NICS, and in particular the Permanent Secretaries of the NI Departments and representatives of Corporate Human Resources (CHR) in the Department of Finance & Personnel (DFP), have a shared interest in protecting the Merit Principle, safeguarding Ethics and promoting public confidence in recruitment to the NICS. Commissioners will continue to work closely with key stakeholders in order to achieve these common goals. Much can also be learned by sharing experiences with fellow Commissioners in other jurisdictions and this is an area we will continue to pursue actively.

MISSION

To fulfil effectively our statutory duties by:

- being an exemplary regulator;
- acting as guardians of the Merit Principle;
- promoting equality, diversity and inclusivity; and
- considering and determining appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics.

ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES

Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland were first appointed by Royal Warrant in 1923. Commissioners are appointed under the Northern Ireland Constitutional Act 1973. The Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 requires them to uphold the principle that selection for appointment to posts in the NICS should be on merit on the basis of fair and open competition (known as the Merit Principle). Commissioners prescribe and monitor appointments made by exception to the Merit principle and may also consider and determine appeals made by, and consider taking complaints direct from, existing civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics. Commissioners contribute to the development of an effective and impartial Civil Service by carrying out the duties imposed on them by the 1999 Order.

Commissioners are independent of the NICS and bring to the role wide experience from their different backgrounds, careers and interests. None is a serving member of the Civil Service.

The current Commissioners are:

Brian Rowntree (Chairperson)
Marion Matchett
Raymond Mullan
Vilma Patterson
Jim Scholes

CORE VALUES

In fulfilling their responsibilities under this Plan, Commissioners and the Secretariat will seek at all times to adhere to the core principles of public life, which are:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

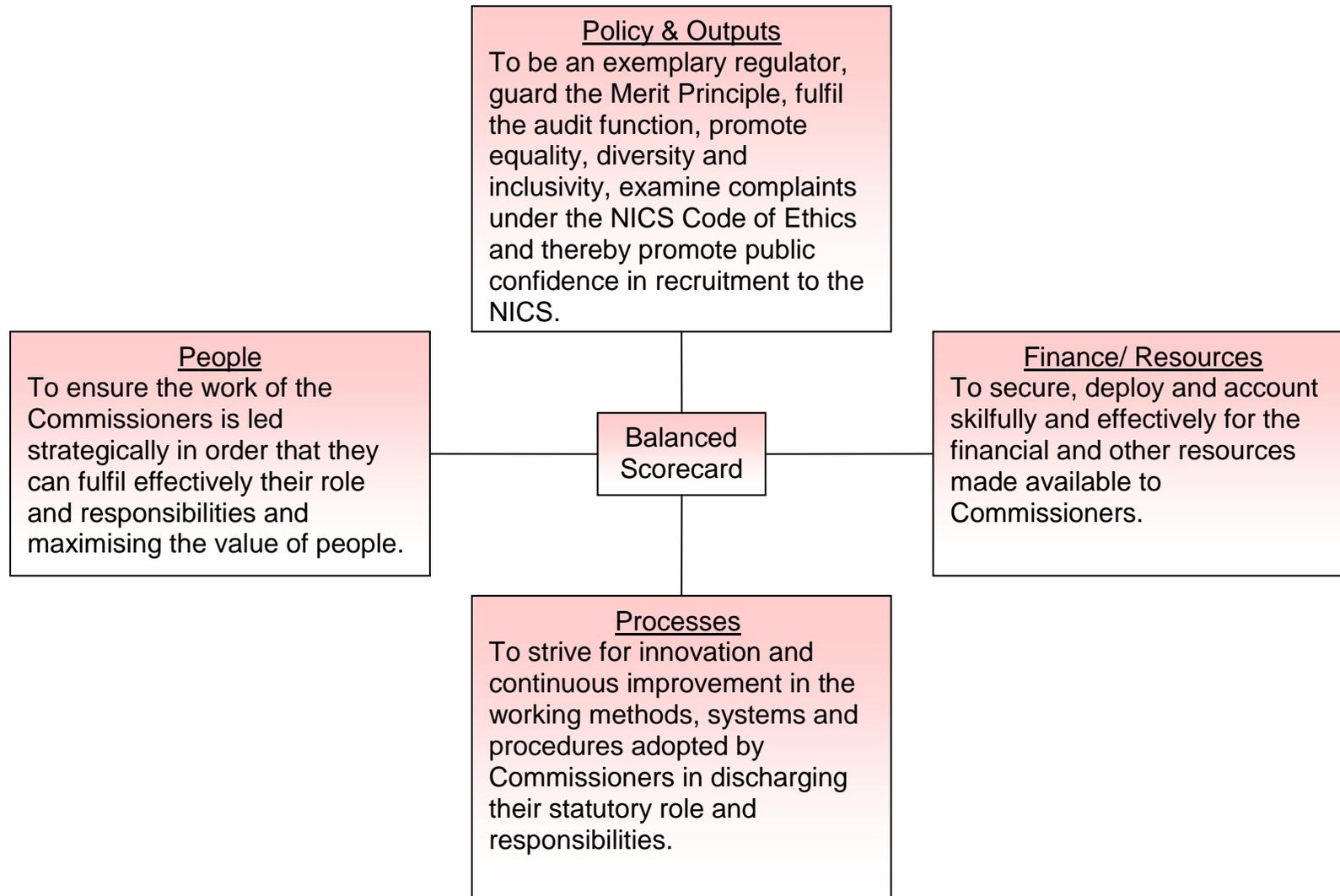
Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example. The Commissioners are fully committed to their duty of considering appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics which emphasises the core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity, and impartiality in the civil service.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: 2014 – 2017



ANNUAL OBJECTIVES: 2014/ 15

1. POLICY & OUTPUTS	2. PEOPLE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To maintain the principle of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. 2. To maintain and support a Recruitment Code on the interpretation and application of the Merit Principle. 3. To maintain the General Regulations prescribing the circumstances in which the Merit Principle shall not apply. 4. To audit recruitment policies and practices followed in making appointments to the Civil Service to establish whether the requirements of the Recruitment Code are being observed. 5. To require the publication of information relating to recruitment and the use of permitted exceptions to the Merit Principle. 6. To consider appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To develop staff through effective strategic leadership. 2. To undertake appropriate learning and continuous professional development. 3. To ensure effective succession planning in respect of Commissioners and the Secretariat.
3. FINANCE / RESOURCES	4. PROCESSES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To ensure best value from the resources allocated to Commissioners during 2014/15. 2. To discharge effectively all responsibilities in relation to the expenditure of resources arising from the Framework Document. 3. Implement the recommendations coming from the Structural Review of the Secretariat 2014/15 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To maintain effective working relationships with key stakeholders. 2. To ensure effective corporate governance provisions. 3. To fulfil all statutory obligations as a public authority.

1. POLICY & OUTPUTS

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
1.1 To maintain the principle of selection on the basis of fair and open in all competitions.	Continue to exercise the independence and challenge function of the Commissioners.	Continue to make effective use of the oversight tools at the Commissioners' disposal including the Recruitment Code; monitoring and, where appropriate, approving of appointments by way of exception to the Merit Principle; implementing the 2014/15 Audit programme; and ensuring the publication of relevant information.	Enhanced status and recognition as a regulator to uphold appointment on merit at all levels.
	Ensure that appointments to the NICS are made in line with the Merit Principle.	Commissioners to chair all SCS open recruitment competitions and ensure commonality of approach by using the agreed Chairperson's checklist.	Assurance that SCS appointments are made on merit. Enhance knowledge and understanding of NICS recruitment policies and practices.
	Ensure that the SCS recruitment process is in line with the 4-stage authorisation process.	Scrutinise requests under the 4-stage authorisation process and liaise with HR Connect to ensure there is a clear understanding of the requirements.	Assurance that SCS appointments are made in line with the 4-stage authorisation process.
		Undertake an annual audit of the Secretariat's management of the 4-stage authorisation process.	Assurance that Secretariat continues to manage the process on behalf of Commissioners within the 4-stage process.

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
1.2 To maintain and support a Recruitment Code on the interpretation and application of the Merit Principle.	Promote understanding and awareness of the Recruitment Code.	Continue to meet with the Head of the NICS, Permanent Secretaries, Corporate HR, HR Directors and other key stakeholders to ensure a shared understanding of the Code to ensure it is embedded into NICS recruitment practices.	Greater awareness and shared understanding of the Code leading to enhanced interpretation and application.
1.3 To maintain the General Regulations prescribing the circumstances in which the Merit Principle shall not apply.	Ensure the Regulations governing appointments by way of exception to the Merit principle are applied consistently and as intended under the Recruitment Code.	In the Annual Report monitor and report on all appointments made by way of exception to the Merit Principle and scrutinise and challenge any such requests which require Commissioners' approval.	Shared understanding and appropriate use of relevant exceptions. Enhanced status and recognition as a regulator. Improved recruitment practice.
		Identify and implement any learning and follow-up action as a result of the pilot audit of appointments made by way of exception to the Merit Principle via secondment.	
1.4 To audit recruitment policies and practices followed in making appointments to the Civil Service to establish whether the requirements of the Recruitment Code	Maximise the effect and impact of the 2014/15 Audit Strategy.	Determine the audit methodology from the suite of available options and work closely with NICS stakeholders including the Head of the Civil Service, Permanent Secretaries, CHR and / or HR Directors in taking forward the 2014/15 Audit Strategy.	More robust audit assessment and improved understanding of the NICS recruitment processes and policies.

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
are being observed.		Implement the 2014/15 audit programme and publish key outcomes and recommendations in the Annual Report and on the website.	Increased NICS and public awareness of the Commissioners' regulatory role.
		Monitor the implementation of the audit findings and recommendations and ensure learning and follow-up action.	Acceptance of audit outputs and implementations of key recommendations.
		Review the effectiveness of the audit and identify learning and, as necessary, embed any changes to the process for 2015/16.	Increased effectiveness of the audit process.
		Establish the structure and processes necessary to develop and support the in-house audit resource.	Promotion of improved recruitment practice.
		Promote training and development of all staff engaged in audits	Establishment of a structured in-house audit resource.
			Effective in-house management of the regulatory audit function.

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
		Engage with GB, ROI Commissioners and other stakeholder bodies, to share knowledge, experience and expertise on issues relating to audit.	
1.5 To require the publication of information relating to recruitment and the use of permitted exceptions to the Merit Principle.	Obtain timely NICS recruitment-related information to meet the Commissioners' information and data requirements.	<p>Liaise with CHR and NISRA to secure the required data and information.</p> <p>Ensure that the NICS publishes the information required under Appendix C to the Recruitment Code.</p> <p>Produce and publish the Annual Report by end October 2014.</p>	<p>Robust information and data which provides assurances that the Merit Principle is being upheld.</p> <p>Enhanced access for the public to information about recruitment to the NICS.</p>
1.6 To consider appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics.	Deliver a considered and timely response to any request to Commissioners in relation to appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics.	Ensure all appeals are dealt with in line with agreed procedures.	Effective handling of Code of Ethics appeals.

2. PEOPLE

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
2.1 To deliver effective strategic leadership.	By end of April 2014, ensure that the objectives for 2014/15 are finalised and communicated effectively to all Commissioners, the Secretariat and other key stakeholders.	Publish the 2014/15 Business Plan on the Commissioners' website no later than 1 April 2014.	A shared clarity of purpose leading to the achievement of objectives.
		Ensure that the Secretariat understands fully the commitments in the Plan and their role in contributing to its effective delivery as reflected in all Forward Job Plans.	
2.2. To undertake appropriate learning and continuous professional development.	By end of April 2014 to review and implement Learning and Development plan to meet the needs of Commissioners and the Secretariat.	By April 2014, identify learning needs of Commissioners and the Secretariat and develop a Plan to address these during 2014/15.	Appropriate learning and development of individuals to meet business and professional needs.
		Monitor in-year changes in learning needs and adjust Plan accordingly, paying particular attention to any emerging issues in relation to equality/ legislative responsibilities.	

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
2.3 To ensure effective succession planning.	Ensure staffing levels are adequate and appropriate to meet business requirements.	Liaise regularly with the Sponsor Department to ensure effective staffing levels are maintained and any necessary succession planning managed effectively.	Effective delivery of Commissioners' statutory duties and the Business Plan.

3. FINANCE/ RESOURCES

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
3.1 To ensure best value of the resources allocated to Commissioners during 2014/15.	Secure the necessary resources to support delivery of the Commissioners' 2014/15 Plan.	Bid for the resources necessary to discharge Commissioners' Business Plan.	Best use is made of allocated resources
		Monitor current and future resource requirements and provide early warning of potential problems.	
3.2 To discharge effectively all responsibilities in relation to the expenditure of resources arising from the framework document.	Monitor progress against the achievement of objectives and report quarterly to Commissioners.	Review expenditure on a monthly basis.	Effective planning and monitoring of resources and compliance with Sponsor Department budget management requirements.
		Comply with all appropriate financial monitoring requests from Sponsor Department within agreed timescales.	
		Provide Commissioners with a quarterly report on progress towards annual business plan.	
	Maximise the benefit of IT in delivering the work and to develop branch information processes to make best use of OASIS.	Pro-actively keep up to date with developments in relation to the OASIS filing system and effectively manage and maintain the system. Maintain efficient monitoring and information retrieval arrangements.	Improved access to data

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
		Maintain a professional web presence, regularly reviewing and updating content to ensure relevance, appropriateness and ease of access.	Enhanced openness and transparency.
3.3 Consider and where appropriate implement the recommendations coming from the Structural Review of the Secretariat 2014/15	Revised structure in place for 2014/15	Examine and amend where necessary the structure, roles and responsibilities of staff in accordance with the Review findings.	A responsive, flexible Secretariat, dedicated to working together to provide a high quality service

4. PROCESSES

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
4.1 To maintain effective working relationships with key stakeholders.	Continue to work closely with the NICS to understand key issues and use the Commissioners' influence to help shape and inform recruitment policy and practice.	Engage with the Head of the Civil Service, Permanent Secretaries, CHR and/or HR Directors to communicate relevant key messages, including the Commissioners' role as regulator.	Effective engagement with key stakeholders leading to enhanced understanding of the Commissioners' role.
	Promote and encourage partnership working with similar bodies to share knowledge and experience and develop closer relationships with other regulators.	Seek opportunities to engage with GB and ROI Commissioners, to share knowledge, experience and expertise on issues of common concern.	
		Engage with other relevant key stakeholders as and when the need/ opportunity arises.	
4.2 To have in place effective corporate governance arrangements.	Maintain and implement effective corporate governance arrangements.	By April 2014 agree a Risk Register for 2014/15.	Effective corporate governance procedures in place.
		Review the Risk Register, in terms of completeness and the status of risks on a quarterly basis.	

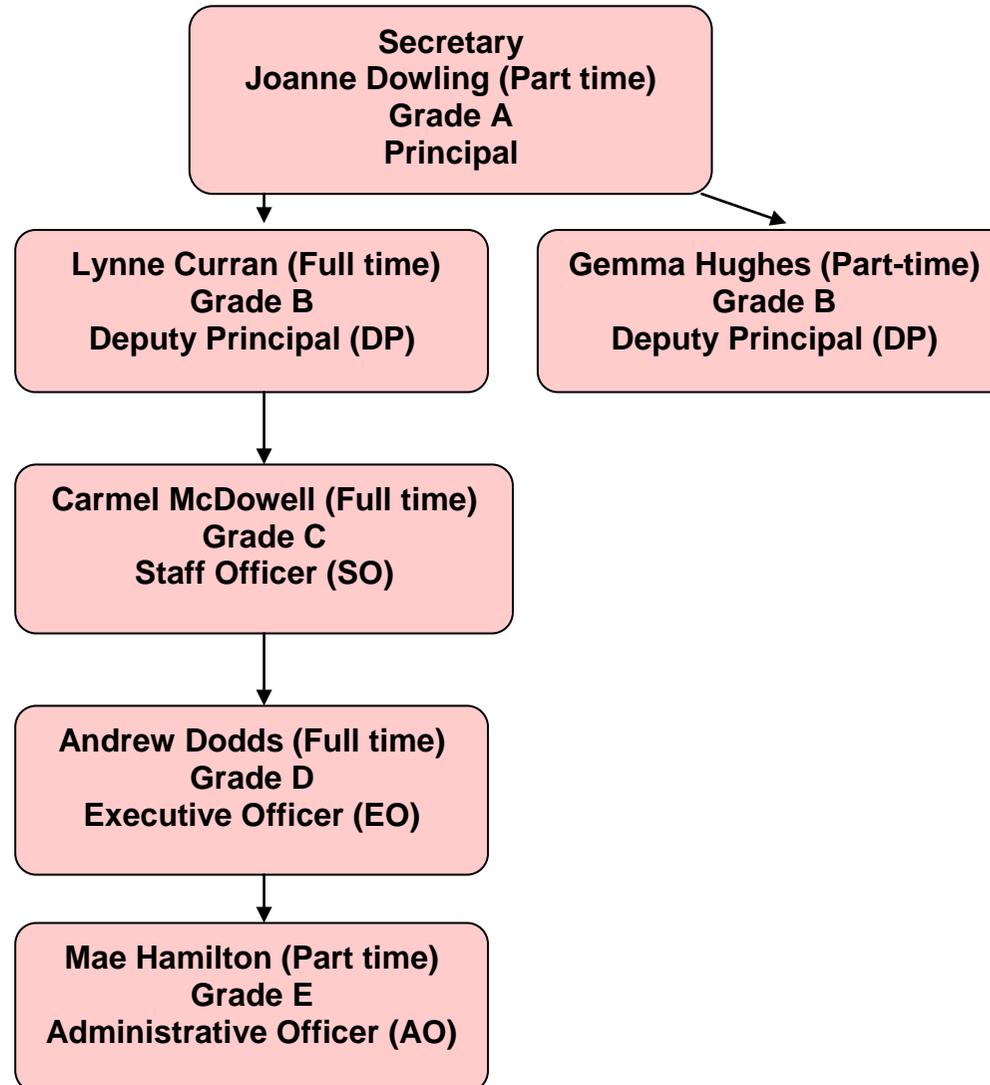
Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
	Deal effectively with any Freedom of Information requests within agreed Sponsor Department procedures and timescales.	Secretariat is trained, as appropriate, to effectively operate all appropriate Sponsor Department financial management procedures. Secretariat trained in the handling of FOI requests.	
	Ensure regular and effective monitoring of progress towards agreed 2014/15 targets.	Quarterly reviews of progress carried out.	
	Ensure effective and timely forward planning beyond 2014/15.	An effective business planning process.	Agreed business planning documents by the end of February.

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
4.3 To discharge all statutory obligations as a public authority.	Discharge effectively all statutory responsibilities.	By end August 2014, submit to ECNI an Annual Report on the implementation of the Commissioners' 2011/ 12 Equality Plan and include a report on the implementation of the Commissioners' Disability Action Plan.	Compliance with all statutory requirements.
	Promote diversity, equality and good relations inclusivity via the recruitment process.	Obtain data from the NICS relevant to diversity in the selection process.	Enhanced assurance that diversity issues are effectively considered during NICS recruitment.
	Comply fully with Government information assurance requirements.	Ensure compliance with all Sponsor Department Information Assurance requirements.	Enhance assurance on all data handling
Ensure appropriate use of protective markings on all data (both electronic and hardcopy) and ensure it is stored and transmitted securely in line with the relevant classification.			

Objectives	Targets	Actions	Expected Outputs / outcomes
		<p>Maintain a high level of awareness among both Commissioners and the Secretariat of the importance of this issue and, as required, provide sponsoring Department encrypted laptops and confidential storage facilities.</p> <p>Publish documents electronically and maintain in line with disposal schedule.</p>	
	<p>Ensure understanding of and compliance with relevant employment related legislative requirements.</p>	<p>Ensure that all policies and procedures are in place and communicated effectively.</p>	<p>A positive and respectful working environment where staff feel valued</p>
		<p>Ensure that members of the Secretariat are trained in Health and Safety requirements and that all necessary procedures and practices are understood and publicly displayed as necessary.</p>	<p>A safe and secure working environment.</p>
		<p>Ensure that members of the Secretariat are aware of all relevant employment legislation and attend appropriate training in line with sponsoring Department requirements.</p>	

OFFICE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS – SECRETARIAT SUPPORT

It is envisaged that the Secretariat support available to Commissioners during 2014/ 15 will be as follows:



BUDGET ALLOCATION: 2012/13 – 2014/15

ITEM	ALLOCATION 2013/14	ALLOCATION 2014/15	ALLOCATION 2015/16*
Commissioners' Fees	£47.6K	£45.1K	£TBC
Staff	£207.5K	£226.7K	£TBC
Training	£8K	£3K	£TBC
Accommodation & Overheads	£60K	£40.2K	£TBC
TOTAL	£323.1K	£315K	£TBC

* To be confirmed by Sponsor Department – Northern Ireland Office (NIO)