



## **STRATEGIC PLAN: 2025-2029**

### **Ensuring appointment on merit & supporting ethical standards**

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## **Our Role and Remit**

Commissioners uphold the principle that selection for appointment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) should be on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition. Our Recruitment Code interprets the Merit Principle and applies it to the NICS recruitment process. Our auditing of this process encourages confidence in recruitment procedures and helps ensure the most suitable candidate is appointed. We also have an independent role in hearing appeals from civil servants under the NICS Code of Ethics to support the core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

**Our Vision:**

A Civil Service for Northern Ireland which innovatively and effectively recruits and promotes the most talented and diverse people in a fair and inclusive manner which upholds the merit principle.

**Our Mission:**

Ensure fairness and encourage innovation to give the public confidence in appointments to the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

**Core Values:**

While committed at all times to adhering to the seven principles of public life, Commissioners and their Secretariat consider integrity and objectivity as key to Commissioners' role. In addition, Commissioners and the Secretariat have identified the following values as underpinning their strategic vision and mission:

- Independence
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Quality

**Strategic Priorities:**

Commissioners have identified 4 Strategic Priorities which they consider fundamental to assisting them in achieving their Vision and Mission.

Priority 1: Safeguard the merit principal to support an impartial and independent NICS

Priority 2: Support the NICS to attract the most talented and diverse people

Priority 3: Encourage innovation and influence positive change in the recruitment to the NICS

Priority 4: Develop a diverse and supportive internal culture with an ethos of good governance

## **PRIORITY 1: SAFEGUARD THE MERIT PRINCIPLE TO SUPPORT AN IMPARTIAL AND INDEPENDENT NICS**

Commissioners will achieve this by:

- 1.1 Maintaining the principle of selection on merit
- 1.2 Prescribing in General Regulations the permitted exceptions to the Merit Principle
- 1.3 Prescribing and Publishing a Recruitment Code
- 1.4 Regularly reviewing the Recruitment Code to ensure it remains fit for purpose
- 1.5 Auditing NICS recruitment policies and practices to establish whether the Recruitment Code is being observed
- 1.6 Requiring the publication of NICS recruitment related information including the use of permitted exceptions
- 1.7 Considering and determining appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics
- 1.8 Providing written approval for appointments to any situation in the Senior Civil Service, or to any situation prescribed by the General Regulations (See also 2.4 and 2.5)
- 1.9 Chairing Senior Civil Service Recruitment Competitions

## **PRIORITY 2: SUPPORT THE NICS TO ATTRACT THE MOST TALENTED AND DIVERSE PEOPLE**

Commissioners will achieve this by:

- 2.1 Early Engagement with the NICS to support and influence Policy Development
- 2.2 Active Participation in the Recruitment and Selection Development Group (RSDG)
- 2.3 Reviewing the Recruitment Code - to Support Employability Initiatives and Encourage Innovative Recruitment and Selection Methods while continuing to uphold the Merit Principle
- 2.4 Considering Requests to Make Appointments by Exception to the Merit Principle
- 2.5 Considering Requests for Secondments to SCS and Extensions to Secondments below SCS
- 2.6 Engaging with Relevant Bodies e.g. Equality Commission for NI or organisations representative of Section 75 categories
- 2.7 Benchmarking against other jurisdictions, sectors and organisations to learn from best practice.

### **PRIORITY 3: ENCOURAGE INNOVATION AND INFLUENCE POSITIVE CHANGE IN RECRUITMENT TO THE NICS**

Commissioners will achieve this by:

- 3.1 Reviewing Commissioners' legislative framework (in conjunction with NIO Sponsors)
- 3.2 Engagement with NICS Board
- 3.3 Audit of NICS Recruitment and Selection Activities (to ensure they comply with the Commissioners' Recruitment Code)
- 3.4 Active Participation in the Recruitment and Selection Development Group (Also see Priority 2)
- 3.5 Contribution to Policy Development Working Groups
- 3.6 Chairing of Senior Civil Service Recruitment Competitions – Scoping Meetings
- 3.7 Promote the Use of Scoping Meetings to assist with planning and to encourage innovation in Senior Civil Service Recruitment Competitions
- 3.8 Outreach and External Engagement with Representative Organisations
- 3.9 Benchmarking with other Jurisdictions, Sectors and Organisations



## **PRIORITY 4: DEVELOP A DIVERSE AND SUPPORTIVE CULTURE WITH AN ETHOS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE**

**Commissioners will achieve this by:**

- 4.1 Discharging all statutory obligations as a public authority and complying with all relevant legislation
- 4.2 Complying with the NIO Framework Document, including meeting all financial requirements and ensuring resources are allocated effectively to support the discharge of Commissioners' functions
- 4.3 Maintaining and implementing effective business planning arrangements
- 4.4 Deliver effective strategic leadership and performance management, creating an environment where everyone feels valued, included and able to fulfil potential
- 4.5 Meeting the learning and development needs of Commissioners and the Secretariat, including through induction training

## **Delivering the plan:**

This document sets out the overall strategic direction for the Commissioners in the 2025-2029 period.

This plan is underpinned by an annual Business Plan and a Research, Learning and Development Plan both of which set out in more detail how Commissioners' vision and priorities will be delivered. The Business Plan contains specific targets and timescales for delivery.

Progress against targets will be monitored and reviewed quarterly. Performance will be reported upon in Commissioners' Annual Report.

This Strategic Plan 2025-2029 sits alongside the Commissioners' annual budget and links closely with Commissioners' Corporate Risk Register. Commissioners have a comprehensive approach to risk management ensuring that all strategic risks are appropriately identified and managed.