



Northern
Ireland
Office



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Commissioner Role - Candidate Information Booklet

February 2022



FOREWORD FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Dear Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC).

I am seeking an outstanding individual who can make a real contribution to the NIHRC's ongoing work and bring expertise and fresh thinking to some of the challenges in the coming months and years. These include, in particular, the operationalisation of the dedicated mechanism to oversee the commitment to no diminution of relevant rights in Northern Ireland, set out in Article 2 of the Protocol, and the NIHRC's subsequent work in supporting the mechanism's ongoing functions.

The enclosed information will, I hope, answer many of the questions you may have about the role and work of the NIHRC. I will be looking to appoint an individual who can bring vision, influence and innovation to the role; someone who will work collaboratively with a wide range of stakeholders for the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland.

I welcome applications from all suitably experienced individuals regardless of ethnicity, religion or belief, political opinion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and gender. I particularly welcome applications from women, those with a disability and those from a black or ethnic minority background as these groups are currently underrepresented.

I want to encourage the widest possible pool of talent for these important appointments.

**THE RT HON BRANDON LEWIS CBE MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

Introduction

You may already have some idea about the important work of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) and the following pages will tell you more about its purpose and the nature of the NIHRC's role.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (the 'NIHRC') was created by the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as part of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement. Its powers and duties stem from the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007.

The NIHRC was established in 1999. It is a public body independent of Government. It operates as an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office.

Appointments to the NIHRC are made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The NIHRC is a national human rights institution with 'A' status accreditation from the United Nations (UN). Its powers are set out in legislation and its responsibilities as a National Human Rights Institution are set out in the UN General Assembly Resolution 48/134 (The Paris Principles).

The NIHRC's functions include keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights and promoting understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland. The NIHRC also plays a key role in the dedicated mechanism, established under Article 2 of the Ireland/Northern Ireland Protocol to the Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union, working with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

Mission Statement

The NIHRC protects and promotes the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Structure

The Commission is led by a Chief Commissioner with a team of part-time Commissioners. The Commissioners are supported and advised by a small secretariat composed of staff recruited directly by the NIHRC's Chief Executive.

In making appointments to the NIHRC, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland shall as far as practicable ensure that the Commissioners, as a group, are representative of the community in Northern Ireland. If you would like more information on the NIHRC you can access its website at www.nihrc.org.

The Role

A new Commissioner will be appointed alongside the current serving commissioners. Membership of the NIHRC is a challenging and rewarding opportunity which calls for people who have a commitment to human rights.

Key responsibilities:

All Commissioners will be expected to:

- ensure the Commission fulfils its functions in accordance with its statutory remit as defined in legislation;
- act in a way that promotes high standards of public finance, including the promotion of regularity, propriety and value for money;
- ensure that the Commission's activities are conducted in an efficient and effective manner;
- ensure that strategies are developed for meeting the Commission's overall objectives in accordance with Government's policies and priorities and the wider context;
- monitor the Commission's performance to ensure that it fully meets its aims, objectives and performance targets;
- ensure that the Commission's control, regulation and monitoring of its activities ensure value for money within a framework of best practice, regularity and propriety;
- appoint the Chief Executive should this vacancy arise and ensure that his/her performance is regularly assessed against clear objectives and targets.
- attend Commission meetings regularly; and
- act as representatives of the Commission as required, e.g. at events, seminars or other functions.

Person Specification

An outstanding individual is sought to become a member of the NIHRC. The successful applicant will be someone who has a commitment to human rights. They should have an understanding of and commitment to working in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders and be able to apply personal expertise in contributing to the work of the Commission. They should also be committed to the need for good governance in public bodies.

Essential Skills

Candidates for this role will need to demonstrate:

- the ability to build productive and respectful relationships with fellow Commissioners, senior stakeholders and diverse communities;
- knowledge of human rights law and of the considerations that influence the environment in which the NIHRC works and an ability to make a personal contribution to the work of the Commission;
- the ability to analyse information and exercise judgement across a broad spectrum of policy and high level human rights issues; and
- a reputation for personal integrity, professional conduct and credibility, with an exceptional sense of propriety.

The Assessment Panel will assess your suitability for appointment by comparing the information you give in your CV and personal statement against the essential skills and person specification. You should therefore review the skill requirements as detailed above before preparing your CV and personal statement.

Terms of appointment

The NIHRC's office is located in Alfred House, Alfred Street, Belfast.

Candidates may wish to note:

- the positions are part-time with an expected time commitment on average of three days per month;
- the positions attract an annual remuneration of £7,500 which will be paid in equal monthly instalments;
- travel and incidental expenses will be reimbursed in line with the Commission's travel and subsistence policy;
- these positions are not pensionable; and
- the term of appointment is three years.

Conflicts of interest

In the interests of transparency and openness, applicants are asked to consider whether their appointment may give rise to a conflict of interest and state this clearly on the application form. You should provide information regarding interests that you, or your immediate family, have that might be construed as being in conflict with the role of Commissioner.

An appointee to a public body could find that matters or incidents which did not previously attract attention could become matters of legitimate public interest once the person concerned holds a public appointment. Actual or perceived conflicts might include, for example, a situation where a candidate has interests in an organisation that might benefit from a contract with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission or there may be issues in your personal or professional history (including any convictions or bankruptcy) that could, if you were appointed, be misconstrued, cause embarrassment to Ministers or the Commission or cause public confidence in the appointment to be jeopardised. It is important that you bring them to the attention of the Advisory Assessment Panel and provide details of the issue(s) in your application.

In considering whether you wish to declare any issues, you should also reflect on any public statements you have made, including through social media and blogs. Due Diligence may be carried out on any publicly available information and shared with the Advisory Assessment Panel and Ministers. The panel may explore any issues you declare with you before they make a recommendation on the appointment.

A potential conflict will not necessarily preclude an individual from appointment but candidates must be prepared to have this explored during the recruitment process and before an appointment is confirmed.

The Seven Principles of Public Life

It is important that all public appointees uphold the standards of conduct set out in the Committee on Standards on Public Life's Seven Principles of Public Life. A copy of the principles is appended at **Annex A**.

How to apply

The appointment process will be conducted in accordance with the Governance Code for Public Appointments and is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA). The Northern Ireland Office is committed to the principle of public appointments on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process and to providing equal opportunities for all.

All applications received by the closing date will be acknowledged and put before a duly constituted Advisory Assessment Panel including an independent member. The Panel will in due course make recommendations to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who may wish to meet candidates before deciding whom to appoint.

Application packs are available from the Cabinet Office's Public Appointments website at: <http://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/>.

Unfortunately, we cannot issue or accept hard copy applications due to remote working restrictions.

Completed applications should be sent by email to NIHRC2022@nio.gov.uk by the closing date of 6 March 2022.

Please enclose with your application:

- the completed application summary form, including your personal statement (of no more than two sides of A4) summarising your proven ability related to the person and job specifications. Your supporting statement should provide specific and detailed examples to demonstrate how you meet the essential criteria (including what you did to achieve a specific result);
- Political and Equality & Diversity Monitoring Questionnaires; and
- a full CV (including education and professional qualifications, career history, and relevant achievements and responsibilities).

Process

It is expected that candidates selected at shortlisting stage will be interviewed by the Panel in **April 2022** but this timescale may change at short notice. Interviews will be held remotely by video conferencing. If you require any further information about the application process you should contact the competition coordinator by email at NIHRC2022@nio.gov.uk.

DISABILITY CONFIDENT - OFFERING AN INTERVIEW TO PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

As a Whitehall department, the Northern Ireland Office has adopted the Department for Work and Pensions sponsored Disability Confident scheme, which has replaced the Guaranteed Interview Scheme or Two Ticks scheme that was widely used in Great Britain.

Disability Confident is a voluntary scheme that supports the Government's commitment to halve the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people by encouraging employers to think differently about disability and to take positive action to improve how they attract, recruit and retain disabled workers. We will make reasonable adjustments to help you attend your interview. You may wish to contact the competition coordinator (see contact details above) about your individual requirements should your application proceed to this stage in the process.

We will also offer an interview to a fair and proportionate number of disabled applicants that meet the minimum criteria for the job - you must be able to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate relevant skills and experience for each of the selection criteria set out in the essential skills section. This does not mean that all disabled people are entitled to an interview. The aim of this commitment is to encourage positive action for disabled people, encouraging them to apply for positions in public life by offering them the assurance that, should they meet the minimum criteria as advertised for the position, they will be given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, talent and abilities at the interview stage.

It is important to note that in certain recruitment situations such as an urgent appointment or if we receive a higher volume of applications that far exceeds the number of those expected then we may need to limit the overall numbers of interviews offered. This will include the number of interviews offered to disabled people that meet the minimum criteria for the job. If you have a disability and require reasonable adjustments then you may wish to contact the competition coordinator about your requirements at the interview stage should you proceed in the process.

Complaints

If you feel that you have any complaint about any aspect of the way your application has been handled, we would like to hear from you. In the first instance please e-mail the competition coordinator at NIHRC2022@nio.gov.uk.

Complaints must be received by the competition coordinator within 1 calendar month from the issue or after the campaign has closed, whichever is the later. Your complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt and answered as quickly and clearly as possible; at the most within 20 working days of receipt. If this deadline cannot be met we will inform you why this is the case and when you can expect a reply.

If, after receiving our response you are still not satisfied, you may contact the Commissioner for Public Appointments:

The Commissioner for Public Appointments
Room G/8, Ground Floor
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ
Tel: 0207 271 0849

The Commissioner for Public Appointments regulates and monitors appointments to public bodies to ensure procedures are fair. Information about the Commissioner's policy and manner in which complaints are investigated are set out in the Commissioner's leaflet *Your Guide to Making a Complaint about a Public Appointments Process*. More information about the role of the Commissioner and their Code of Practice is available from website address:

<http://publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk/>

Use of your personal information

Your personal information will be held in accordance with GDPR and all relevant data protection legislation. You will not receive unsolicited paper or electronic mail as a result of sending us any personal information. No personal information will be passed on to third parties for commercial purposes. When we ask you for personal information, we promise we will:

- only ask for what we need and not collect too much or irrelevant information;
- ensure you know why we need it;
- protect it and insofar as is possible, make sure nobody has access to it who shouldn't;
- ensure you know what choice you have about giving us information;
- make sure we don't keep it longer than necessary; and
- only use your information for the purposes you have authorised.

We ask that you:

- give us accurate information;
- tell us as soon as possible of any changes; and
- tell us as soon as possible if you notice mistakes in the information we hold about you.

The Commissioner for Public Appointments regulates and monitors appointments to public bodies to ensure procedures are fair. We are required by the Commissioner for Public Appointments to retain information about the people who apply for public appointments within their remit, and make this information available to them for audit purposes, if requested to do so. Information you provide in your application may therefore be made available to the Commissioner for Public Appointments and the Commissioner's auditors on a confidential basis in order to help fulfil the Commissioner's formal complaints investigation role and for audit purposes.

Our data protection policy is in line with the requirements of GDPR and data protection legislation and the requirements of the Governance Code on Public Appointments. The Commissioner's requirements relating to the information we collect about applicants are set out below:

- your initial contact details, including your name and address may be held by the Northern Ireland Office for a period of at least 2 years.

- if you submit an application form, then for audit purposes, the form and any supporting documentation will be retained for at least 2 years.
- information held electronically, including your monitoring information may also be held for at least 5 years.

If you would like these details to be removed from our records as soon as this recruitment exercise is complete, please inform the competition coordinator via the email address to which you sent your application.

Equal and diversity monitoring information

This information is not used in the selection process. It will be removed on receipt and is not seen by the panel assessing your application. We use this information to monitor the diversity of candidates we attract and those we appoint.

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

The principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected for appointment to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, NDPBs and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public services. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

- Selflessness** Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends.
- Integrity** Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might 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 for their decisions and actions to the public 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 that 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.