



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# GUIDANCE ON RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION FOR APPLICANTS

## Introduction

1. This guidance has been developed to provide you with information about the recruitment and selection process and how to apply for roles with the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission ('the Assembly Commission').

## Equal opportunities

2. The Assembly Commission is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to the principle that recruitment should be solely on the basis of merit.
3. We welcome applications from all eligible applicants, irrespective of religious belief, political opinion, race, age, gender, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or people with dependants or without.
4. The appointment process will be fair and applied consistently to ensure equality of opportunity.
5. Recruiting the right individuals is crucial to organisational performance. Good recruitment helps us to recruit the right people, for the right roles, at the right time. It ensures that we have the relevant skills and abilities to meet our current and future needs.

## **Eligibility**

6. Before completing an application, you should satisfy yourself that you are eligible to apply. Invitation to attend the selection process should not be taken to imply that you are eligible under the terms of the advertisement.
7. The process will involve the following stages:
  - i) Completion of an application form;
  - ii) Assessment prior to the sift process for high volume competitions (where appropriate);
  - iii) Sift process based on the information provided on the application form against the essential and, if appropriate, shortlisting criteria;
  - iv) Assessments which may include testing, presentations, in-tray exercises, assessment centres (where appropriate);
  - v) Selection Interview(s); and
  - vi) Pre-appointment checks.

## **What is the Recruitment and Selection Framework?**

8. The Assembly Commission recruits using our Recruitment and Selection Framework. This means for each role we advertise, we consider what you will need to demonstrate in order to be successful. This gives us the best possible opportunity of finding the right person for the role, improving organisational performance and increasing diversity and inclusion.
9. Our Recruitment and Selection Framework is made up of five elements.



10. Not all of the elements are relevant to every role and will vary depending on the level and type of role. You should ensure you read the Candidate Information Booklet carefully to see what elements are required for the specific role you are applying for. There is further information regarding each of the elements in the [Recruitment and Selection Framework](#), which will give you more information about what and how you can demonstrate specific requirements.

## How the elements are assessed

11. We assess applicants in a number of different ways, depending on the type of role and level you are applying for. Using a range of assessment methods helps us to more accurately match people to the requirements of the role. For example, you will be asked to complete an application form, which will help us assess your experience and/or technical qualifications.
12. Part of the assessment process will be an interview. You may also be asked to attend an assessment centre or complete an online test to assess your abilities. Often a combination of these approaches will be used and more than one element may be tested within the same assessment method. Details of which elements will be assessed and how we will assess you against these will be included in the Candidate Information Booklet.

## Tips for completing your application form

13. The selection panel may decide to interview only those applicants who appear, from the information available, to be most suitable in terms of relevant experience, technical skills and/or qualifications. It is therefore important that you describe fully in the application form the extent to which you satisfy the specified criteria (giving length of experience, examples and **dates** as required). Selection panels will be interested in whom you reported to, what **you** did, how you did it and how successful **you** were. It is **not** sufficient to simply list your duties and responsibilities. The selection panel will not make assumptions from the title of your roles as to the skills and experience gained.
14. Only details of qualifications (if applicable), the evidence provided in criteria boxes contained on the application form and the Employment History section will be provided to the selection panel. In completing your form, you must, if required, provide details of relevant or equivalent qualifications, type of qualification and date awarded. If you believe your qualification is equivalent to the one required, the onus is on you to provide the selection panel with details of modules studied etc. so that a well-informed decision can be made.

15. Do not use acronyms, complex technical detail etc. Write for the reader who may not know your organisation or role. Include concise examples and dates and be sure you can expand on these at interview.
16. Ensure the information you provide is accurate and reflects the advertised criteria.
17. Write down clearly your personal involvement in any experience you quote. Write 'I' statements e.g. 'I planned meetings', 'I managed a budget', 'I prepared a presentation'. It is how you actually carried out the piece of work that the selection panel will be interested in.
18. Identify relevant examples. This is very important, as you may need to be prepared to talk about these examples in detail if you are invited to interview. It is **your** unique role the selection panel is interested in, not that of your team or colleagues.
19. Please allow yourself plenty of time to complete and submit your application form. If you experience any problems in using the system or with your password, please contact the Human Resources Office on 02890 521741. The Human Resources Office will be available Monday to Friday 0900-1700.
20. Further information on completing the online application form is available at Appendix One.
21. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have completed your application form **fully** in respect of all information requested.
22. ***Applications received by the Human Resources Office after the closing date and time will not be accepted. The onus for ensuring an application is received in the Human Resources Office on time rests with you.*** The Human Resources Office will normally acknowledge receipt of application forms.

23. Any supplementary material will not be accepted in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms.
24. Your application will be examined by a selection panel whose job it is to assess the content of your application against the essential and shortlisting criteria. The selection panel will not make any assumptions regarding your experience, based on your role title. It is therefore in your own interest that you provide a detailed and accurate account of your qualifications and experience, including relevant dates.

## **Completion of Equal Opportunities Monitoring Information**

25. Along with the application form, when applying for external competitions you will be asked to complete an Equal Opportunities Monitoring questionnaire. The Assembly Commission is committed to promoting equality of opportunity in employment. The information provided will help us to measure the effectiveness of our policies and help us develop new policies if appropriate. All information contained in the monitoring form will be treated in confidence and will not be provided to the selection panel.

## **Guidance on the Definition of Disability**

26. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines a disability as a “physical or mental impairment which has substantial and long term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”.
27. **Physical Impairment** includes, for instance, a weakening of part of the body (eyes, ears, limbs, internal organs, etc.) caused through illness, by accident or from birth. Examples would be blindness, deafness, paralysis of a leg or heart disease.
28. **Mental impairment** includes mental ill health and learning disability.
29. **Long-term** means lasting, or likely to last, at least 12 months.

30. **Normal day-to-day activities** include:

- Mobility – moving from place to place
- Manual dexterity – use of hands, wrists or fingers
- Physical co-ordination
- Continence
- Ability to lift, carry or otherwise move ordinary objects
- Speech, hearing or eyesight
- Memory or ability to concentrate
- Ability to learn or understand
- Ability to recognise the risk of physical danger
- Taking part in normal social interaction
- Forming social relationships

31. If the effects of the disability are reduced by medication or other treatment then the relevant effects are those that would be present if there was no medication or treatment taking place. There is an exception to this rule for people who wear spectacles or contact lenses, then the relevant effects are those that remain while the spectacles or contact lenses are being used.

32. We encourage the recruitment of people with disabilities. If you have a disability, please indicate on the application form if you feel you require any reasonable adjustments, and if so, what those adjustments are, to enable you to participate in the selection process. A representative from the Human Resources Office will contact you to discuss your requirements.

33. We also operate a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) for applicants with disabilities.

## **Guaranteed Interview Scheme**

34. The GIS has been developed for applicants with disabilities or those with a long-term impairment or health condition, that is expected to last for at least 12 months and which means that you cannot meet all of the shortlisting criteria. In these instances, provided that you have demonstrated in your application form that you meet the essential criteria for the role, you will be invited to interview.
35. You do not have to have a registered disability to apply under the GIS.
36. If an assessment or test is used as a shortlisting tool then if you apply under the GIS you will not be required to complete the assessment or test and will be offered a guaranteed interview, provided that you demonstrate in your application form that you meet the essential criteria for the role.
37. In instances where an assessment or test forms part of the selection process and is not a shortlisting tool, then you must meet the minimum standard required regardless of whether you are applying under the GIS.
38. The application form will include a section on disability, and you can indicate whether you wish to apply under the GIS for that particular role and the basis on which you qualify for the GIS.
39. When considering applications made under the GIS, the Human Resources Office reserves the right to request medical information from your general practitioner (through you and with your consent).
40. The Human Resources Office will monitor all applications made under the GIS.

## Assessment Stage

41. Please read the information provided on the [Recruitment and Selection Framework](#) in advance of your assessment.

### Some examples of the Assembly Commission's assessment methods

42. Details of which selection methods will be used will be outlined in the Candidate Information Booklet.

#### Online tests

43. You may be asked to complete one or more online tests as part of the recruitment process. You will usually be sent a link to a website where the tests are to be completed. These tests help us to identify whether you have the skills required for the role and assess your suitability. The number and type of tests you will be asked to complete will depend on the type of role you are applying for. You can usually take the tests at any time within a specific number of days, which will be outlined in the email sent to you. The tests may be timed, so please ensure that you can give them your full attention before starting the assessment.

#### Presentation

44. You may be asked to do a presentation as part of the assessment process. You may be told the subject of the presentation in advance to allow you to prepare, or it could be given to you on the day. The subject of the presentation may or may not be an area you are familiar with and you might be given some additional materials to help you prepare. The letter inviting you to the assessment will give details of the format the presentation will take, the time allowed for the exercise and whether handouts or presentation slides are expected. It is also likely that the assessors will ask you further questions about your presentation. These might focus on the subject matter but may also cover the way in which you prepared for the assessment.

## **Assessment centre**

45. You may be asked to attend an assessment centre will usually consist of a combination of different selection methods.

## **Interview**

46. Part of the assessment process will involve an interview. The interview will be a Blended Interview which is a flexible style of interviewing which uses a combination of distinctive interview question types. These are as follows:
- Past-Behavioural Questions;
  - Situational Questions;
  - Technical Questions; and
  - Strength Questions.
47. You will be advised of the length of the interview in your invite letter.
48. Interview questions will be based on the information contained in the Candidate Information Booklet and may assess different elements of the Recruitment and Selection Framework – Experience, Technical, Assembly Skills and Behaviours and Strengths.

## **Past-Behavioural Questions**

49. These questions assess capability, past experience and behaviour.

Example:

- *Tell me about a time when you have managed a team member who was not performing to the standard required?*
  - i. What did you do in preparation for speaking with the team member?*
  - ii. Was your approach effective and if so, why?*
  - iii. What did you learn from this?*

50. Such questions are used to assess the Experience element and the Assembly Skills and Behaviours element of the Recruitment and Selection Framework.

## **Situational Questions**

51. Sometimes referred to as hypothetical, these questions assess instinct and thought process and what an applicant would do. The response could be shaped by past experience and/or natural instinct and potential.

Example:

- *You are chairing a meeting with a large number of stakeholders. The group needs to work together to find an agreed way forward for a new invoicing system. A small number of stakeholders are dominating the discussion and time is running out. How would you go about managing this situation to agree a way forward?*

52. Such questions are used to assess the Experience element and the Assembly Skills and Behaviours element of the Recruitment and Selection Framework.

## **Technical Questions**

53. Technical questions assess evidence of knowledge/skill in a particular field. Context is important and recent use of skills is likely to be important. Such questions are best designed by Subject Matter Experts.

Example:

- *What is the Disability Discrimination Act and how would you apply it in recruitment?*

54. Such questions are used to assess the Technical element of the Recruitment and Selection Framework.

## **Strength Questions**

55. Strength questions assess what applicants enjoy doing, have a natural ability for and have engagement with. They are often more person focussed than behaviour-based questions. Answers given do not need to relate to a work context.

56. For example, a selection panel which is recruiting to a Policy Team Leader role requires the job holder to frequently sign off and quality assure policy documents drafted by their team. The strength **Precise** may be appropriate to assess as it is defined as '*you are detailed focused, you ensure everything is accurate and error free*'. Examples of the type of strength questions that may be asked to assess **Precise** are shown below.

Examples:

- *If you were required to sign-off every policy document your team drafted, how would you feel about ensuring it is accurate and error free?*
- *'I am detail-focused' – how true is this of you?*
- *Would others describe you as someone who ensures everything is accurate and error free?*

57. If strength based questions are to be asked in the interview then a warm-up question will be asked at the start of the interview. This will help to set a baseline of your engagement and will be a short question, lasting for no more than two minutes. An example of a strength warm-up question could be:

- *What things have you done recently that you really enjoyed?*

58. Strengths questions can be asked in different ways:

- Open – *What, when, how...*
- Closed – *Do you...*
- Situational - *Imagine if...*
- Statement-Based – *To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?*
- Leading – *Is it true...*
- Assumptive – *How often/How do you feel when...*
- Past-behavioural - *Tell me about a time when/Give me an example...*

59. Responses to Strength questions are assessed on the following:

- Content of what the applicant says
- Tone of voice

- Non-verbal behaviours (e.g. eye contact, posture and hand movements)
60. The [Strengths Dictionary](#) will give you an idea of the strengths we look for in the Assembly Commission. The strengths which will be tested for a particular role will not be detailed in the Candidate Information Booklet.

## Preparing for Assessment

61. You can best prepare yourself by:
- Reading and thoroughly reading the Candidate Information Booklet.
  - Reminding yourself of the content of your application form.
  - Reflecting on how you might relate your experiences in detail to the selection panel emphasising your own role and unique contribution.
  - Consider the information you wish to relate to the selection panel and if necessary remove any information that does not add value to the example.
62. Set out below are some tips for answering the interview questions:
- Listen carefully to the questions. If necessary, ask for a question to be repeated.
  - Do not be afraid of silence for a few seconds while you think through your answer.
  - Be sure you answer the question that has been asked. Do not try to make an example fit just because you have prepared it and you really want to use it.
  - Do not generalise e.g. 'I always provide a good service' or 'I always communicate well'. Give specific examples of actual occasions when you did so.
  - Listen carefully to the type of question being asked. Answers may be work-related or experience from outside of the workplace with the exception of Technical questions which must always be work related.
  - Be prepared for supplementary questions which may be used to gather more information about your example – e.g. *What went well for you? What would you do differently?* Do not give one word answers – explain with an example.

- Use the first person singular – ‘I’ (not ‘we’) when giving examples.
  - Clarify your role in the examples you give.
63. A selection panel member or Chairperson may have to interrupt you during your answer if they need to manage the time or if they need to get you back on track. Please do not let this put you off.
64. At the end of the interview if you have time remaining in your interview time the Chairperson will ask if you have anything to add to your answers. If you have no time remaining you will only be asked if you have any questions in relation to the process/ role. If you have nothing to add, do not talk simply because you feel you must.
65. The selection panel will assess all applicants based on performance at interview and award each with a unique score. All applicants will be listed in order of merit with the highest scoring applicant ranked first. The merit list will normally remain ‘live’ for 18 months from the date the mark frame is signed.

## **Pre-appointment checks – Appointment of external applicants**

66. Pre-employment checks are an integral part of the recruitment and selection process. Pre-appointment checks will be undertaken for the successful applicant(s) based on the merit list and number of vacancies. No offers of appointment will be made until the pre-appointment checks are found to be satisfactory.
67. The Human Resources Office will carry out a final check to ensure all identification documents and essential qualifications have been received and validated.
68. An Access NI basic check will be carried out before a final offer of employment is made. For some roles, a higher level of vetting may be required and you will be advised of this in the Candidate Information Booklet.

69. Please note that having a criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining a position with the Assembly Commission. We deal with all criminal record information in a confidential manner and information relating to convictions is destroyed after a decision is made. For further information, please ask about our Policy on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders.
70. Access NI is unable to obtain overseas criminal records or other relevant information as part of the Disclosure service. Many countries, including most EU countries, allow their citizens to obtain certificates of good conduct or extracts from their criminal records. The Human Resources Office will consider whether it is appropriate to request this from you if you have recently moved to the UK.
71. Confirmation of information provided by you in your application is required to cover a minimum of the last three years of your employment / education / non employment. If a post requires experience of more than 3 years, the period covered by the reference must reflect the length of experience required. A reference from your current employer (or previous, if not currently employed) must be sought as part of the pre-appointment checks. Confirmation of employment dates will be sought from previous employers if current employment has lasted less than the experience required for the role. Where there has been no employment history, a personal reference from someone (not a family member) who has known you for the period of the experience required for the role will be sought.
72. References will be sought before an offer of appointment can be made.
73. If you have indicated on your application form that you have a disability and may require reasonable adjustments when taking up the role, you will be contacted by the Human Resources Office to discuss any requirements for adjustments. Letters of offer of appointment will remind you that you must advise the Human Resources Office of any reasonable adjustments you consider necessary to take up your appointment.

74. The Human Resources Office will obtain the necessary documentation from you to ensure that you have the right to work in the UK.

## **Canvassing**

75. Any attempt on your part to enlist support during the recruitment process could result in your disqualification.

## **Appointments**

76. Appointments will be determined mainly by the business requirements of the Assembly Commission and you may be required to serve in any of the Directorates.

## **Feedback**

77. You may obtain a copy of your interview answer booklet and scores on request. Selection panel members will not provide informal feedback. All requests for feedback should be made in writing to the Human Resources Office who will manage the process.
78. Any requests for information will be considered by the Human Resources Office in light of Data Protection and Freedom of Information legislation.

## Appendix One - Guidance on completing your online application

- a. You should check compatibility before attempting to submit your online application.
- b. Please **set up a new user account by clicking on the 'New user registration'**. If you have previously submitted an online application form for a role with the Assembly Commission, the next time you apply you may find that the current application form has been auto-filled with previous information. Please ensure that you review the information as it may not be relevant to your current application.
- c. You should fill in the details as requested using the 'next' button to move to the next part of the form. Please note that the 'summary' button acts as the 'save' function and should always be used to save information as you progress through the form or if you wish to exit out of a form and come back to it at a later time.
- d. If you need to add any other qualifications use the 'add' button. If your qualification and/or subject is not listed in the drop down menu, please use the 'other qualification/subject not listed' text box. If you run out of characters when entering the information, you will need to abbreviate accordingly e.g. the name of the University you attended.
- e. When completing the essential and/or shortlisting criteria boxes, you need to be aware that the system **does not** count down the number of characters remaining nor does it automatically stop you from exceeding the 3700 limit. Please ensure that, when you have completed the essential criteria fields, you click the 'summary' button as this will inform you if the maximum data length has been exceeded and will not allow you to proceed until you edit the character count to meet the 3700 limit. You can use Word to gauge your character count but should not copy directly from Word to the online application form as it is a HTML system and errors could occur with the text. It is better to copy text from Word to Notepad and then from Notepad into the application form.

- f. The asterisk symbol denotes mandatory fields which must be completed and you will not be able to move to the next section of the form unless you populate the mandatory fields.
- g. When all essential and/or shortlisting criteria boxes are complete, you will be asked to complete a declaration by placing a tick in the box. Once the declaration box has been ticked, you must hit the summary button which will return you to the page that will allow you to submit your application. You should then hit the 'apply' button.
- h. You will then be asked if you wish to continue or cancel and return to the form. This is the final opportunity for you to amend your form and if you are content to proceed you should hit the 'continue' button.
- i. Once the 'continue' button has been pressed, you will receive a message to advise that your application has been submitted and you will also receive an email to confirm this. If you do not receive this email, you should contact the Human Resources Office as soon as possible.