

CSC NI

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

CSC NI

16-17

ANNUAL REPORT

Ensuring appointment on merit & safeguarding ethics



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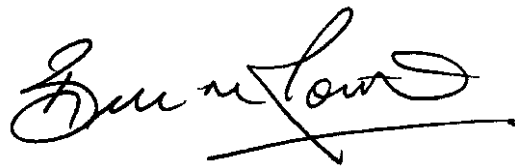
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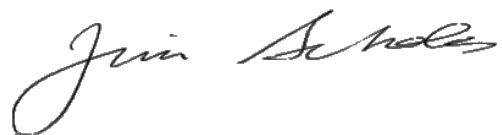
We, Your Majesty's Civil Service Commissioners
for Northern Ireland, present to Your Majesty
this report on our work during the period
1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017



Brian Rowntree CBE
Chairperson

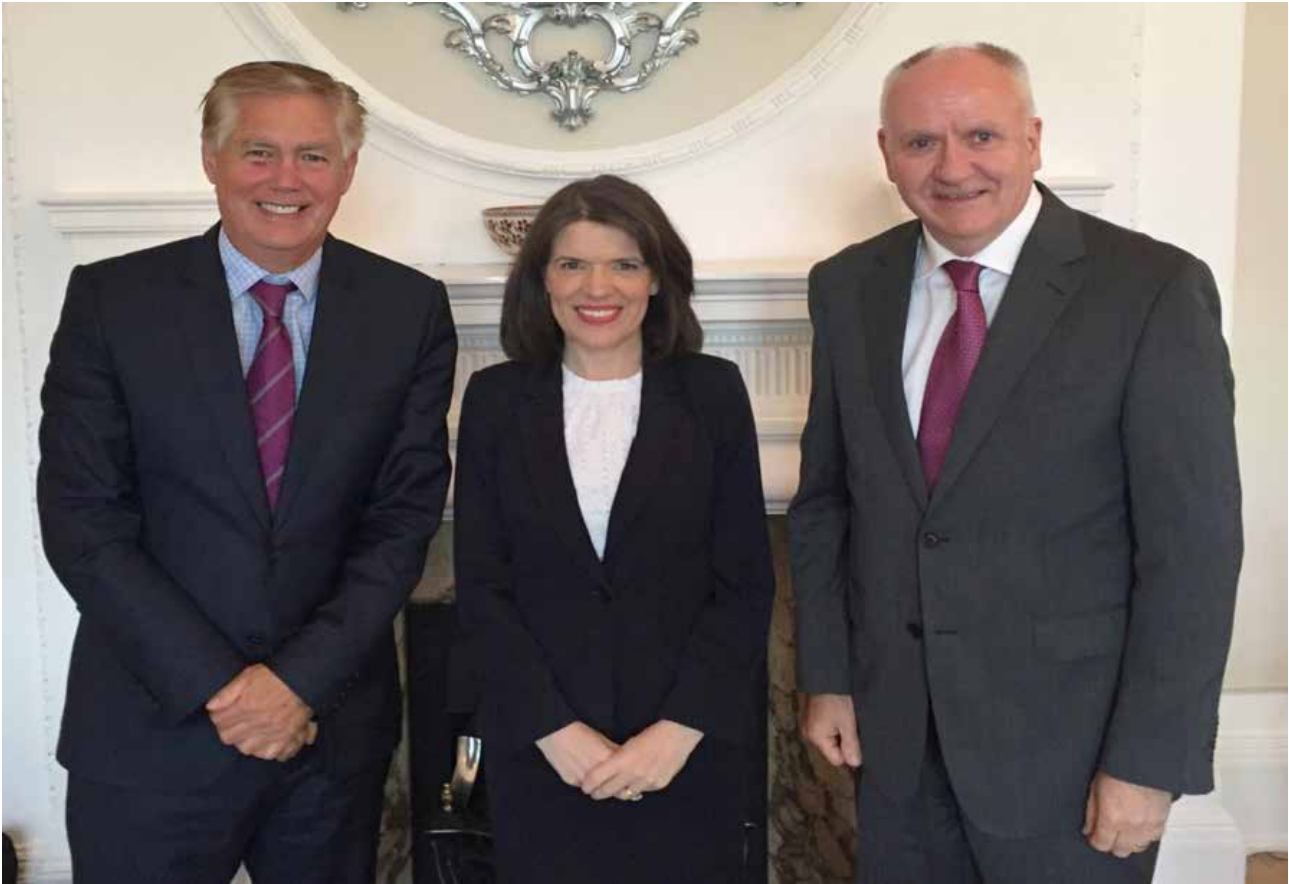


Sinéad Burns



Jim Scholes

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Jim Scholes, Commissioner Sinéad Burns, Commissioner Brian Rowntree, CBE, Chairperson

CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSIONERS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

As regulators and guardians of merit, we 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 Code of Ethics to uphold the Civil Service core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD



On behalf of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Commissioners, I am pleased to present the 2016/17 Annual Report. As you will see from the Report, Commissioners have successfully delivered our statutory role to maintain the principle of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition in relation to the selection for appointment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and as the body responsible for considering and determining appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics. We have worked closely with the NICS and others and continued to improve how we undertake our role.

The Report provides an overview of our work and of progress made on meeting the objectives set out in our [2015-18 Strategic Framework and 2016/17 Business Plan](#). I am very pleased with our achievements and progress to date. It has been a positive and encouraging year for Commissioners. We have dealt with some interesting and challenging issues, which are reported in more detail within the Key Issues in 2016/17 section of the Report. They have included: improvements to audit and assurance provisions; the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS) appointment process; the Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016; appointments made through Exceptions to the Merit Principle; and the NICS HR Restructuring.

Commissioners have continued to strengthen and develop further our audit and review of NICS recruitment and selection processes and policies and we have successfully delivered our commitments as set out in the Audit and Review Strategy. *Based on the review of a number of key areas of NICS selection and recruitment activities set out in the 2016/17 Audit Plan, Commissioners are able to report that the NICS selection and recruitment practices are in keeping with the requirements set out in the Recruitment Code.*

I am particularly pleased to report that this year saw the introduction of the Permanent Secretary Statements of Compliance with the Commissioners' Recruitment Code for all appointments made to NICS Departments and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) during the 2016 calendar reporting period. In reaching this key milestone, it is a reflection of formal accountability at the most senior levels within the NICS for ensuring adherence with the Recruitment Code and that NICS recruitment and selection practices and activities are managed and monitored in line with NICS policies and procedures.

During 2016/17, the NICS liaised with Commissioners in relation to their revision of arrangements to enable the active involvement of the First Minister and deputy First Minister in the recruitment and selection decision-making process for the appointment of HOCS.

As regulators, Commissioners emphasised to the NICS the importance of ensuring that the new arrangements were underpinned by a decision making process that is open and transparent to ensure that the person appointed is selected on merit through fair and open competition and through a process which adheres to the requirements of the Recruitment Code.

Our Report also highlights disappointment that there was no engagement with Commissioners regarding the First Minister's and deputy First Minister's (FM&dFM) enactment of the Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016, amending the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, to enable the appointment by the First Minister and deputy First Minister (acting jointly) of a person to provide specialised support to those Ministers.

That said, Commissioners were heartened to receive an assurance, from the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, that the resulting appointment of the new Executive Press Secretary was made and managed appropriately, and in line with employment law.

Commissioners highlighted in the 2015/16 Annual Report that we were reviewing the placement of a number of staff working in NICS departments who had been sourced from a particular departmental Arm's Length Body. Commissioners continued to engage with departmental Permanent Secretaries and CHR (now NICS HR) during the year in relation to this matter. Commissioners welcomed the NICS review of the practices and processes surrounding the means by which identified skills gaps in the NICS are addressed and that as a result NICS HR plans to implement its recommendations to address issues identified in the review. Commissioners are keen to bring the issues under consideration to a conclusion this year and to work with the NICS to ensure that there is a clear understanding of Commissioners' expectations, that these are communicated and understood by the NICS and that supporting policies and guidance are reviewed and developed to support the appointment process of staff from bodies outside of the civil service to temporary positions in the NICS.

This year has brought huge changes throughout the Public Sector in Northern Ireland and within government. The NICS has shown tremendous resilience and strength in the face of unprecedented levels of change and unforeseen challenges. With the reduction in the number of NICS departments from twelve to nine; the impact of the Voluntary Exit Scheme (NICS have reduced by 2996 staff (11%); the NICS HR Project to establish a central HR organisation to deliver the retained HR functions of the NICS, which successfully launched in April 2017; and the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive, it has been a year of major reform and uncertainty.

We consider it to be incumbent on us to ensure that during periods of change and uncertainty we work closely with those impacted to ensure that if necessary we develop new ways of working whilst remaining steadfast to the principles and values we uphold.

Safeguarding the merit principle lies at the heart of our work and guides us through the challenges of regulating and supporting the business needs of the NICS. In dealing with all issues during my time as Chairperson I believe that we have built a strong reputation for integrity and are respected by the NICS for our professionalism and willingness to work through issues to bring about constructive and timely resolutions.

On behalf of Commissioners, I would like to wish Sir Malcolm McKibbin, well on the occasion of his retirement from the role of Head of the NICS. I would like to thank Sir Malcolm for his support of, and commitment to, the work of Commissioners over the years. I would also like to acknowledge our positive relationships with the Departmental Permanent Secretaries and NICS HR.

I am grateful for the support of our sponsor Department, the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), who have engaged constructively and co-operatively as we continue to strive to achieve the challenging budget settlement for the period up to 2019/20. This year has seen the implementation of further efficiency measures in order to live within our financial allocation. I would like to thank my Commissioner colleagues and the Secretariat for their continued professionalism, support and high levels of commitment to ensuring that we do not compromise on the delivery of our statutory role.

As Commissioners, we take very seriously our statutory equality responsibilities under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The principles of diversity, inclusivity and equality of opportunity are central to the Merit Principle and are embedded within the Commissioners' Recruitment Principles. Commissioners have continued to seek to influence the NICS to reflect these principles during recruitment processes in order to achieve a Civil Service which reflects the diversity of Northern Ireland society.

This year we had introductory meetings with both the new Chairs of the Civil Service Commission in London and the Commission for Public Service Appointments in Ireland, Ian Watmore and Mr Seán Ó Fearghail T.D (An Ceann Comhairle), respectively. Commissioners greatly value our annual meetings with fellow regulators in Great Britain and Ireland and look forward to building on our understanding of their challenges and sharing issues of common interest in the coming year.

Looking forward

I am pleased that my tenure as Chairperson has been extended for a further year, given the political uncertainty which emerged following the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive in early 2017.

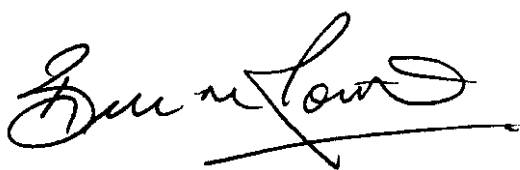
As I reflect on my time as Chairperson, I consider my key goal was one of strategically positioning us as an effective and efficient regulator. Our achievements over the last five years are testament to this. Our vision for "*a Civil Service for Northern Ireland which recruits and promotes the best and most diverse talent available in accordance with merit*" has continued to guide and direct our work. It has been an honour to serve as Chairperson and Commissioner. The NICS continues to promote and develop excellence in recruitment and Commissioners can be rightly proud of their influence and input to date. It is with a sense of achievement that I prepare to hand the reins over to my successor who will be appointed next year and I wish Commissioners, Sinéad Burns and Jim Scholes continuing success in their role during the remainder of their appointment periods.

I wish to also take this opportunity to pay a personal tribute to the professional, hardworking and diligent staff in our office, and in particular the leadership of Joanne Dowling our Secretary. We are very much a unit fit for purpose.

Moving into 2017/18, Commissioners look forward to continuing to deliver their important statutory role and build on the significant strides they have achieved, particularly in relation to their approach to the audit function and the assurance framework being developed to underpin the Permanent Secretary Compliance Statements.

Commissioners are very conscious of the challenges the changed political landscape in Northern Ireland may present. Our primary aim will be to ensure that, while the programme of reform continues, public confidence is maintained in the integrity of processes for recruitment to the NICS. It will be for Commissioners to ensure that our legislative framework and the Recruitment Code continue to meet the needs of, and supports, the delivery of an effective and impartial Civil Service and the independence of our office is protected.

I hope you find this Annual Report both interesting and informative. If you would like further information about any aspect of our work, you can visit our website at www.nicscommissioners.org or contact the Secretariat who will be happy to respond to your queries.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Rowntree', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

BRIAN ROWNTREE, CBE
CHAIRPERSON

KEY ISSUES IN 2016/17

The key issues which Commissioners considered during 2016/17 relate to: the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appointment Process; the Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016; improvements to audit and assurance provisions; appointments made through Exceptions to Merit; and the NICS HR Restructuring. These include:

Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Appointment Process

In last year's Report, we highlighted that the NICS had engaged with Commissioners in relation to ensuring that arrangements for a potential appointment of the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (HOCS) through an open competition recruitment process upheld the principle of merit.

Whilst the responsibility for the development of the recruitment and selection process rests with the NICS, under the general management of control provision set out in the Civil Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, it is the Commissioners' role to satisfy ourselves that the process has been properly applied. In relation to the appointment of HOCS, Commissioners through their engagement with the NICS, sought early assurance that the person to be appointed would be selected on merit, through fair and open competition and that the Principles set out in the Recruitment Code would be fully considered and underpin any new or updated process that the NICS may put in place.

Commissioners recognise that the appointment of HOCS is unique in terms of duties and responsibilities; and in view of HOCS' unique relationship to the Executive, that Ministers may wish to be involved in the recruitment and selection process.

In our view, it is important that any such involvement should be accommodated within a process which ensures that any appointment made is on the basis of merit, free from personal or political partiality. Appointments made in this manner will reassure the public that those appointed may serve Ministers of different political backgrounds and, in so doing safeguard the impartiality of the Civil Service.

During 2016/17, the NICS liaised with Commissioners in relation to their revision of arrangements to enable the active involvement of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (FM&dFM) in the recruitment and selection decision-making process for the appointment of HOCS.

Commissioners impressed upon the NICS the importance that arrangements should ensure that recruitment decisions are made in an open and transparent manner thereby ensuring that the person appointed is selected on merit through fair and open competition and through a process which adheres to the requirements of the Recruitment Code.

Commissioners noted the NICS revised recruitment and selection process for the appointment of the HOCS and welcomed the updating of the NICS Recruitment and Procedures Manual that provides guidance for those involved in the process. As a result Commissioners reflected the necessary changes in our Recruitment Code.

As with all Senior Civil Service (SCS) competitions, Commissioners will continue to exercise our authorisation and approval function through the 4-Stage Authorisation process. This allows Commissioners to discharge their statutory role to approve all appointments to situations in the SCS.

Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016

In September 2016 the First Minister and deputy First Minister (FM&dFM) enacted the Civil Service Commissioners (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016, amending the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, to enable the appointment by the FM&dFM (acting jointly) of a person to provide specialised support to those Ministers.

While Commissioners acknowledge that prerogative powers “as respects to the Northern Ireland Civil Service” are vested in FM&dFM by virtue of section 23 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, we were disappointed that there had been no engagement with Commissioners regarding this amendment to the respective section of the 1999 Northern Ireland Order. That said, Commissioners welcomed an assurance from the Head of the Civil Service that the resulting appointment of the new Executive Press Secretary was made and managed appropriately, and in line with employment law.

Audit and Assurance provisions

As outlined in the 2015/16 Annual Report, Commissioners obtained a commitment from the NICS to provide assurances at Permanent Secretary level for the 2016 reporting period.

This has been a key priority for a number of years in our endeavours to firmly reposition audit and assurance requirements at a more strategic level within the NICS.

Commissioners are delighted to report that, for the first time, we have been provided with Permanent Secretary Statements of Compliance with Commissioners’ Recruitment Code for all appointments made to NICS Departments and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) during the 2016 reporting period.

Commissioners consider this a significant milestone in strengthening the evidence based assurances provided annually by the NICS. It signals the commitment and acknowledges formal accountability at the most senior levels within the NICS for ensuring that recruitment and selection practices and activities are managed and monitored in line with NICS policies and procedures, and in adherence with the Code.

Commissioners' audit and assurance requirements are outlined in more detail under the Commissioners' Regulatory Framework section of this report.

Appointments made through Exceptions to the Merit Principle

Commissioners acknowledge that there may be particular circumstances where NICS may seek to make appointments by way of exception to the Merit Principle. Commissioners have outlined these exceptions in the Recruitment Code. The objective in permitting exceptions is to provide flexibility where it can be justified as necessary and appropriate to meet demonstrated business needs of the NICS.

Commissioners highlighted in the 2015/16 Annual Report that they were reviewing the placement of a number of staff working in NICS departments who had been sourced from a particular departmental Arm's Length Body and that as a result of our examination of the issue, the NICS had commissioned a review of the practices and processes surrounding the means by which identified skills gaps in the NICS are addressed.

This year, Commissioners continued to engage with departmental Permanent Secretaries and Corporate HR (CHR) in relation to the review and in the final quarter of 2016/17 we noted that the NICS Board had endorsed the report reviewing the approach undertaken by the NICS in relation to addressing key skill gaps in the NICS and were moving to implement its recommendations. Commissioners will seek further engagement with the NICS in the coming year towards bringing our exceptions review to a conclusion.

In the meantime, Commissioners continue to monitor, scrutinise and challenge requests for any appointment to be made by way of exception to the merit principle to be satisfied as to why it is not reasonably practicable for the Department to make such appointments through open competition and in accordance with the Merit Principle.

NICS HR Restructuring

The NICS HR restructuring project, which forms part of the wider cross cutting Reform Programme, seeks to continue the transformation in HR service delivery and establish a central NICS organisation to deliver the retained HR functions for the NICS, drawing together those currently delivered by CHR, Departmental HR, Centre for Applied Learning and Job Evaluation Analysts.

From the outset Commissioners impressed on the Project Lead the need to ensure that our statutory role and the requirements of the Code were embedded into the new structure and systems for the delivery of recruitment and selection activities. Commissioners are pleased to report that CHR (now NICS HR) ensured that Commissioners' role was taken into account from the early stages of the NICS HR restructuring project.

Commissioners commend the Project Team on achieving the 'go live' target on 3 April 2017, particularly given the backdrop of a number of HR-related matters facing CHR, including the reduction in the number of Departments from twelve to nine, the Voluntary Exit Scheme and the lifting of the embargo on recruitment and promotion.



(Left to Right) Jim Scholes, Sinéad Burns, Jill Minne, NICS HR and Brian Rowntree, CBE

Commissioners consider this a very positive initiative by the NICS Board to reshape the NICS HR service delivery model to achieve greater consistency of approach across Departments. We welcome the appointment of Jill Minne as the Head of the NICS HR and look forward to working closely with her as she leads and implements the transformation of HR service delivery. While we recognise that it will take time to embed the new model, we are looking forward to seeing the out-workings of the new model in terms of delivering improvements to corporate oversight of NICS recruitment activities and reporting of NICS recruitment related information and data to better inform Commissioners' in their regulatory role.

OUR REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Commissioners' Statutory Audit Function

Article 4(4) of the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, requires Commissioners to audit recruitment policies and practices followed in making appointments to situations in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to establish whether or not the four key principles set out in the Commissioners' Recruitment Code have been upheld both in spirit and in practice.

In discharging this important statutory duty as regulators, Commissioners, being mindful of reforms within government, seek to strike a balance between ensuring compliance with the Recruitment Code and promoting a more modern and dynamic approach to their oversight role. A key focus for the delivery of Commissioners' regulatory role is through audit and review of recruitment activities and regular engagement with the NICS, in particular NICS HR within the Department of Finance (DoF).

Under Article 4 of the Civil Service (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, the Department of Finance is responsible for the general management and control of the Civil Service, making regulations or giving directions relating to the recruitment of persons to situations in the Civil Service in a manner consistent with the Merit Principle.

Commissioners would like to express our appreciation for the positive engagement provided by staff in CHR (now NICS HR), the NICS Departments and their resourcing partner HR Connect during the conduct of our audit function and the follow-up work arising from it.

Risk based approach to Audit and Review

Commissioners have developed a range of options which they consider when regulating processes and policies underpinning recruitment to the NICS. As part of our Strategic Audit and Review Planning process, Commissioners identify and prioritise areas of recruitment we wish to examine through a risk-based analysis approach. Commissioners oversee recruitment through the implementation of our 3-year Audit and Review Strategy which identifies recruitment themes and issues to be examined and progress these through our Annual Audit Plans.

Commissioners' approach to audit is set out in [Regulating for Improvement - Audit Framework and Guidance](#), which requires that audit and reviews undertaken on behalf of Commissioners adhere to agreed standards and produce robust, evidence-based and reliable audit findings, this is also available from our website www.nicscommissioners.org.

NICS Recruitment Assurances

Commissioners consider it essential that a risk based approach to audit and review is complemented by an evidence based assurance framework. Under Appendix C of the Recruitment Code Commissioners require:

- (a) evidence to provide assurance that systems are in place in the NICS to ensure that selection for appointment is made in accordance with the Recruitment Code; and
- (b) evidence to provide assurance that recruitment policies and practices in the NICS are subject to regular internal monitoring.

Permanent Secretary Assurance Statements

On an annual basis the NICS provide Commissioners with an assurance in their [Recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Annual Report](#) that the requirements under Appendix C of the Recruitment Code have been met. To build on the information provided Commissioners have engaged with the NICS over a number of years to seek assurance statements from Permanent Secretaries, which are more aligned to current good governance and accountability practices for other key business areas within NICS Departments.

Commissioners are delighted to report that a key development this year has been the provision of Permanent Secretary Statements of Compliance with the Commissioners' Recruitment Code for all appointments made to NICS Departments and the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) during the 2016 reporting period.

Commissioners consider the provision of these statements and the assurances in relation to their oversight and monitoring, a significant step forward in strengthening and underpinning the assurance provisions included in the NICS Annual Report.

Over the coming year Commissioners look forward to considering any refinements to the process which might be required to take account of the introduction of NICS HR and the changes in the structure and delivery of HR functions.

Commissioners' 2016/17 Audit & Review Opinion

Based on the evidence available from a wide range of regulatory work undertaken throughout the year and the assurances provided by the Permanent Secretaries, it is our opinion that the NICS selection and recruitment practices are in keeping with the requirements set out in the Recruitment Code. That said, Commissioners are disappointed that matters of concern in relation to the appointment of staff into situations in the NICS which we consider should fall under Commissioners' Regulation 3 exceptions provisions were not resolved during this year. We will continue to engage with the NICS regarding this matter and are hopeful that these will be satisfactorily resolved during 2017/18.

Review of Commissioners' Approach to Audit and Review

In line with our commitment to ensure that as regulators we are in step with reforms within the NICS, whilst at the same time upholding our statutory role as guardians of the Merit Principle, Commissioners reviewed our present approach to audit and review to ensure it is still consistent with the Audit Framework and Guidance and effective in establishing whether or not the four key recruitment principles have been upheld by the NICS. We consulted with and sought feedback from the NICS as a key stakeholder in the audit and review process.

Our review identified a number of benefits in relation to the Commissioners' approach to audit and review, including:

- the strategic approach taken to address high level issues of concern was more effective in delivering improvements;
- face to face engagement meetings improved communication and understanding; and
- issues/problems were identified earlier which led to prompt discussion and agreement of actions/interventions.

Significantly the NICS welcomed the rebalancing of focus away from formal audits towards more active engagement and discussion on a bilateral basis between Commissioners and CHR.

As a result of this particular review a number of actions were identified and implemented to further strengthen the audit engagement process. These will be reported in more detail in the 2016/17 Audit and Review Summary Report.

Looking Forward

Having achieved the important milestone of obtaining high level recruitment related assurances from Permanent Secretaries, a key focus for the coming year will be to build on this work. Commissioners will continue to engage with the NICS to gain an understanding of the framework in place to support these assurances, the impact the restructuring of HR functions will have on assurances going forward and, once the framework has been embedded, consider including this as a potential topic in our Audit and Review Strategy.

The year ahead will be a period of significant transformation for the NICS following the introduction of NICS HR in April 2017. Commissioners look forward to working with the new HR team as the NICS strive to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of HR services. While the structure of NICS HR service delivery has changed, the NICS have assured us that the requirements and the role of Commissioners have been taken into account and will be built into their revised policies and procedures.

Following the 2015 Review of Recruitment Related Data, Commissioners welcomed the NICS revised arrangements for reviewing recruitment data for professional and specialist posts. We look forward to this work being further developed by NICS HR during 2017/18 to ensure effective reporting on this analysis to Commissioners and in the NICS Annual Report on Recruitment. Commissioners also look forward to liaison with the NICS in relation to the planned Strategic Review of Resourcing and the out-workings of the NICS Diversity Champions Network including the NICS Outreach Action Plan.

Commissioners' 2017/18 Audit and Review Plan

In line with Commissioners' 2016-19 Audit and Review Strategy, the following areas of NICS selection and recruitment have been identified for review with the NICS during 2017/18:

- Assurances required under Commissioners' SCS Authorisation and Approval Process; and
- Exceptions Provisions.

Assurances required under Commissioners' Senior Civil Service (SCS) Authorisation and Approval Process

Commissioners have a statutory role to approve all appointments to the Senior Civil Service (SCS) made through open competition to the NICS. To support the approval process, the NICS is required to provide a number of specific assurances to Commissioners at four key stages in respect of all senior external competitions. The process is managed by the Secretariat on behalf of Commissioners and is known as the 4-Stage Authorisation Process. Commissioners decided to review the process to establish if the assurances sought appropriately address the risks associated with the current NICS recruitment process and provide adequate assurance in relation to adherence to the Recruitment Code. We will report the outcome of this review in our 2017/18 Annual Report.

Exceptions Provisions

This review originally planned for 2016/17 was postponed due to ongoing casework closely related to the topic of the review. The review will now take place under Commissioners' 2017/18 Audit & Review Plan and will focus on NICS appointments made under Commissioners' 2007 General Regulations (Exception) provisions.

Commissioners' 2016/17 Audits & Reviews

Commissioners 2016/17 Audit and Review plan included the following key areas of NICS recruitment:

- Management of Merit Lists below SCS (Stage B); and
- NICS Selection & Recruitment Assessment Methodologies.

A detailed report on Commissioners' audits and reviews for the 2016/17 reporting period will be published on Commissioners' website in Autumn 2017.

2016/17 Management of Merit Lists below SCS (Stage B)

Commissioners reported last year on the completion of Stage A of the review of NICS Management of Merit Lists. This was a high level examination of the policies and processes the NICS have in place with regard to the operation of NICS merit lists. Stage B of the review sought assurance that the practical management of NICS merit lists, in non-routine circumstances, was in line with NICS Policy and Procedure and Commissioners' Recruitment Code. This was underway at the publication stage of last year's report and the key findings are detailed below.

The appropriate management of NICS competition Merit Lists is fundamental in ensuring the application of the principle of selection on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition for posts in the NICS. Commissioners require measures to be in place to ensure that appointments are made on an order of merit basis and that due regard has been paid to the potential for unfair treatment of those who are not given the opportunity to be considered for appointment.

The review outcomes will be outlined in more detail in our 2016/17 Audit and Review Annual Report due to be published in the Autumn 2017.

Key Findings

The Review found that the routine operation of merit lists in the NICS, insofar as it is a systems driven process, is well managed by HR Connect and compliant with NICS Policy and Procedures and Commissioners' Recruitment Code.

In relation to the non-routine operation of NICS merit lists the Review Team identified two key issues:

- a) a lack of evidence of a robust and valid assessment, carried out by CHR, on the Departments' business cases for extending a merit list which allowed CHR to conclude that the circumstances of the case fell within the terms of 'cogent and practical' reasons; and

- b) no evidence of reporting or publication of information, including to candidates, about decisions to extend NICS merit lists.

Outcomes

In response to above the NICS have agreed to:

- o review the assessment process when making decisions to extend the life of a merit list and ensure that this process is appropriately recorded, monitored and reviewed by NICS HR;
- o publish information in relation to the extension of NICS merit lists in their Annual Reports on Recruitment from 2017 onwards; and
- o to include an additional statement in the Candidate Information Booklet in relation to communicating to candidates that a merit list may be extended in certain circumstances.

2016/17 NICS Selection & Recruitment Assessment Methodologies

The NICS selection and assessment process was identified as a key area for Commissioners' review under the 2016-19 Strategic Audit Plan and was taken forward as a 'themed discussion' with the NICS under Commissioners' 2016/17 Audit and Review Plan. The main focus of the discussion was the assessment methodologies currently employed by the NICS to better inform selection and appointment decisions.

The examination of this topic also functioned as a development and induction tool providing useful detail in relation to NICS recruitment policy and processes, for Commissioners and our Secretariat.

Commissioners decided to review this topic using a more creative and flexible form of audit and review, namely, a 'themed discussion'. To ensure the discussion was as focused and productive as possible the NICS provided Commissioners with information in relation to their approach to selection and assessment under the headings of: NICS policy; process; evaluation; and future developments in advance of the discussion. In preparation for the discussion Commissioners also revisited the outcomes of Commissioners' 2008/09 Selection Processes Audit.

Outcomes

The themed discussion was sufficiently fluid and flexible to allow Commissioners to become more informed as regulators, in relation to the fundamental NICS recruitment and selection processes. Commissioners found this form of 'light touch' review both proportionate and appropriate for this particular topic.

Going forward Commissioners will continue to promote best practice in the NICS selection and assessment policy and practice and are particularly interested in the planned review of interview techniques under the Strategic Review of Resourcing project. Commissioners look forward to engaging with the NICS on this aspect of the project in 2017.

Follow Up Engagement with the NICS during 2016/17

During 2016/17, Commissioners examined a range of recruitment issues as part of the engagement process with the NICS, including a number of outstanding action points from Commissioners' 2015/16 audits and reviews.

Review of Recruitment Related Data

During the year 2016/17 Commissioners continued to engage with the NICS to ensure progress in relation to responding to the three high level issues identified in the 2015 Review of Recruitment Related Data.

As a result the NICS have introduced a number of welcome improvements, which include the following key developments:

Statistical Analysis of NICS Recruitment Data

- new and improved arrangements in relation to the reporting of statistical analysis and data in the NICS Annual Report on Recruitment.

Department Led Competition Data

- the introduction of arrangements for the statistical analysis and reporting of Department led competition data which allows for issues and trend information to be identified and addressed, as necessary, by the NICS HR.

Both of these new reporting arrangements are detailed in 'Monitoring NICS Recruitment' section of this Report (see pages 23-31).

Departmental Compliance/Assurance Statements

- As mentioned previously, as part of an ongoing engagement process and also as a result of this review, Permanent Secretaries agreed to provide Statements of Compliance assuring adherence to the Commissioners' Recruitment Code for all appointments made to NICS Departments and the PPS. Commissioners consider this evidence-based assurance framework as essential and significant in providing the necessary corporate oversight which was identified as a requirement during the course of the review.

2015/16 Review of NICS Recruitment and Selection Training

In the Commissioners' 2015/16 Annual Report, we reported the outcomes of a review of recruitment and selection training provided to all NICS staff involved in the recruitment and selection process. The review found that the objectives of the NICS recruitment and selection training modules are in line with the expectations of Section 4.6 of the Commissioners' Recruitment Code. The review identified three issues for the NICS to consider in relation to the content and delivery of training.

The NICS have committed to carrying out a thorough review of the content of recruitment and selection training during 2017/18, subject to the availability of resources.

Commissioners will consider and report on the outcomes of the NICS review in their 2017/18 Annual Report as appropriate.

Senior Civil Service (SCS) 4-Stage Authorisation Process

All appointments to the SCS through open competition require the approval of Commissioners.

In support of the request for approval, relevant recruitment information is provided by HR Connect or Departments to Commissioners at four key stages of the SCS recruitment process. The process also requires a number of assurances from HR Connect in relation to the competition process.

Detailed information on the Commissioners' 4-Stage Authorisation Process can be found on our website www.nicscommissioners.org

During this year Commissioners oversaw eight SCS external recruitment competitions. These are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Senior Civil Service (SCS) Competitions dealt with in 2016/17¹

POST	LEAD NICS DEPARTMENT
Head of NICS HR (Grade 3)	Department of Finance
Permanent Secretary	Department of Education
Senior Medical Officer - Screening, Maternal & Child Health (Grade 5)	Department of Health
Head of the Civil Service	The Executive Office
Deputy Director of Construction Division Health Projects (Grade 5)	Department of Finance
Director of Re-offending (Grade 3)	Department of Justice
NICS Finance Director (Grade 5)	Department of Finance
Director of Rivers (Grade 5)	Department for Infrastructure

These competitions were scrutinised under Commissioners' 4-Stage Authorisation Process where necessary and any appointments made from these competitions have been approved under this process.

¹ SCS competitions handled by Commissioners and Secretariat between April 2016 and March 2017, some of which remain live processes. The average period for the NICS to manage a SCS recruitment competition from Stage A to appointment during 2016/17 was 83 days. The average length of competitions was 79 days for 2014/15 and 83 days for 2015/16

MONITORING NICS RECRUITMENT

The Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 and the Commissioners' Recruitment Code require NICS Departments and Agencies to publish a wide range of information and statistical summaries in relation to recruitment to the NICS.

To effectively discharge their statutory duties, Commissioners are reliant on a range of recruitment-related information and statistical data collated and analysed by DoF, the Northern Ireland Statistical and Research Agency (NISRA) and other organisations.

The NICS publish their Recruitment-related information for the calendar year of 2016² in the [Recruitment to the NICS Annual Report 2016](#). The report also includes the NISRA Analysis of NICS Competitions 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016 published by DoF.

Each year Commissioners determine how the information published in the NICS Annual Report on recruitment fulfils Article 4(5) of the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as set out in Appendix C of the Recruitment Code. Since the review of recruitment related data under Commissioners' Audit Plan in 2015, the NICS have engaged constructively with Commissioners to improve the information presented under Appendix C.

Commissioners are pleased to note the out-workings of the improvements in the presentation of information in the 2016 Recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Annual Report and are content that the NICS has fulfilled its requirements under Article 4(5) of the Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 as set out in Appendix C of the Recruitment Code.

Developments in NICS Recruitment Monitoring

Under the Commissioners' Audit Plan in 2015 a Review of NICS Recruitment Related Data identified the need for: improvements to the clarity, significance and breadth of information reported in the statistical analysis of NICS recruitment competitions produced annually by NISRA; and increased statistical analysis and reporting of Department-led competition data.

Following the review, and in line with Commissioners move towards more modern regulation, Commissioners also reassessed the recruitment related information and data requested under Appendix C of the Recruitment Code to better inform our regulatory role and the publication of information in our Annual Report.

During 2016/17 Commissioners have been progressing the recommendations from the review with the NICS. In response to the review, and to Commissioners requirements under Appendix C, the NICS introduced significant improvements to the monitoring and reporting of NICS recruitment competition data during 2016. This is reflected in the Recruitment to the NICS Annual Report 2016.

² NICS recruitment-related data has been reported on a calendar-year basis to bring the reporting period into line with other reports on equality information.

The NICS addressed the need for increased statistical analysis and reporting of Department-led competition data through the introduction of a dedicated competition monitoring process managed by the Equality and Diversity Branch (EDB) within NICS HR. Under the new arrangements NISRA provide data on recruitment activity to EDB for analysis on a quarterly basis. Each competition is analysed by EDB across the diversity of the applicant pool and the success rates of each equality group through all stages of the recruitment process. Analysis results are thus more meaningful and over time EDB will be able to identify recruitment trends across all the equality groups and at each and all stages of NICS recruitment. Commissioners consider the move from the examination of aggregated data to the analysis of individual competitions decreases the risk of inequalities being masked.

Commissioners welcome the new process, which will continue to be NICS HR work in progress and will lead to the increased availability of more informative recruitment data. Commissioners hope that this process will inform targeted NICS outreach measures and ultimately assist the NICS to achieve a workforce reflective of the society it serves.

NICS Recruitment during 2016 and Trends in Recruitment

The number of recruitment competitions, applications and appointments for 2014-16 reporting periods are included in **Table 2** below

Table 2: NICS Open Recruitment Competitions, Eligible Applicants and Updated Appointment Figures for 2014 to 2016

Detail	2014	2015	2016
Open Competitions	71	21	51
Eligible Applicants	6,192	4,579	4,131
Appointees	169	181	196

The embargo on NICS recruitment, clearly evident during 2015, was lifted in April 2016. By the end of 2016, 51 NICS recruitment competitions had been held attracting 4,131 applications, 9.8% lower than in 2015 at 4,579. There were no general service corporate recruitment competitions during 2016 and the only competition which attracted a high volume of applicants during 2016 was the Fixed Term Executive Officer II competition (1,247 applicants) run by the Department for Communities.

While Commissioners have no regulatory role in relation to internal competitions, Commissioners consider that it provides context and helpful comparative perspective to publish the information alongside the open recruitment data. NICS internal recruitment competitions and appointment figures for 2014 to 2016 are detailed in **Table 3** below.

Table 3: NICS Internal Recruitment Competitions and Appointment Figures for 2014 to 2016

Detail	2014	2015	2016
Internal Competitions	47	4	42
Internal Appointments*	258	15	54

*Figures as at March 2017

As expected internal recruitment activity during 2016 has increased following the lifting of the embargo on recruitment and promotion in April 2016. Two of the 42 internal competitions during 2016 were for Senior Civil Service positions and one appointment had been made by 1 February 2017. Commissioners continue to encourage the NICS to address diversity issues within the NICS through open competition but understand the requirement for the current measured approach taken by Departments to ensure cost savings from the 2015 Voluntary Exit Scheme are protected.

Summary of eligible applicants for the periods 2014-2016 by equality grouping

Table 4 below details the NICS eligible applications for 2014, 2015 and 2016 by equality groupings (extracted from NISRA's '2016 Analysis of NICS Recruitment' and the 'Recruitment to the NICS Annual Report 2016'). It is important to note that the profile of applicants is heavily influenced by the occupations for which jobs were advertised and the numbers of applications for each competition.

Commissioners note in 2016: more applications have been received from males than females; applications from Protestant and Catholic community backgrounds is reasonably balanced; and ethnic minority applicants and applicants declaring a disability are reflective of the economically active population 1.8% and 4.7% respectively (2011 Census).

In light of the published NICS statistic that 35.7% of civil servants are aged over 50 (NISRA, April 2016 Report), Commissioners are encouraged to note in 2016 77% of applicants were aged under 40.

Table 4: The breakdown by equality grouping of eligible applicants for NICS posts from 1 Jan 2014 to 31 Dec 2016³

Equality Category	Description	Eligible Applicants		
		2014	2015	2016
Overall	Total	6,192	4,579	4,131
Gender	Male	58%	62%	59%
	Female	42%	38%	41%
Community Background	Protestant	41%	59%	44%
	Catholic	52%	29%	46%
	Not Determined	7%	12%	10%
Ethnicity	White	98%	99% ⁴	98%
	Minority Ethnic Groups	2%	1% ⁴	2%
Disability	With a declared disability	3%	2%	4%
	Without a declared disability	97%	98%	96%
Age group	16-24	28%	33%	22%
	25-39	53%	48% ⁴	55%
	40-49	13%	13% ⁴	15%
	50+	6%	6% ⁴	8%
Sexual Orientation	Both sexes	1%	5% ⁵	2%
	Same sex	3%		3%
	Different sex	96%	95%	95%
NICS employment history⁶	Current	9%	2%	14%
	Previous	5%	1%	10%
	None	44%	16%	74%

Updated Summary of NICS appointments

The NICS Annual Report presents recruitment data for NICS competitions with a closing date in a particular calendar year, currently 2016. The appointment figures quoted in the report are all appointments made from these competitions by 1 February of the following year, 2017. The figure reported is not however the final number of appointments which will be made from these competitions. Competition merit lists can remain live for 1-2 years after a competition has completed and further appointments can be made during this time.

³ This information is based on data provided by NISRA in the Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 2014 - 2016. The full reports are available on the NISRA website.

⁴ Applications for permanent posts only.

⁵ Figure is total for same sex and both sexes applicants.

⁶ Employment history is not available for a number of 2014, 2015 and 2016 applicants.

Following a recommendation from Commissioners the NICS publish the updated appointment figures for the three reporting periods prior to the current period in order to address the issue of unreported appointments. The [Recruitment to the NICS Annual Report 2016](#) provides updated NICS appointment figures for 2013, 2014 and 2015. The NISRA [Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 2016](#) breaks this information down into competitions run centrally through Corporate HR and those run by NICS Departments for the same periods.

Table 5: The number and breakdown by equality grouping of **appointees** for NICS posts 2014 to 2016 (Difference in actual and expected number of appointments in that grouping)

Equality Category	Description	2014 (Actual minus Expected)	2015 (Actual minus Expected)	2016 (Actual minus Expected)
Total number of appointments		169 (0)	181 (0)	196 (0)
Gender	Male	64% (11%)	68% (3%)	52% (-4%)
	Female	36% (-11%)	32% (-3%)	48% (4%)
Community Background	Protestant	38% (-4%)	54% (-3%)	50% (8%) ⁷
	Catholic	58% (9%)	28% (-3%)	
	Not Determined	4% (-4%)	18% (6%)	
Ethnicity	White	#	100% (2%)	100% (2%)
	Minority Ethnic Groups	*	0 (-2%)	0 (-2%)
Disability	With a declared disability	*	4% (1%)	0 (-2%) ⁸
	Without a declared disability	#	96% (-1%)	100% (2%) ⁸
Age group	16-24	28% (2%)	33% (-6%)	25% (-3%)
	25-39	41% (-3%)	52% (8%)	57% (4%)
	40-49	22% (4%)	12% (-1%)	18% (-1%) ⁹
	50+	8% (-3%)	3% (-2%)	
Sexual Orientation	Both sexes	3%(1%)	4% (-1%)	9% (2%) ¹⁰
	Same sex			
	Different sex	97% (-1%)	96% (1%)	91% (-2%) ¹⁰
NICS employment history¹¹	Current	16% (6%)	6% (3%)	21% (-7%)
	Previous	6% (1%)	3% (0%)	9% (-2%)
	None	76% (-7%)	27% (2%)	67% (-7%)

number has been suppressed to avoid disclosing another number that is too small to publish

* number of cases too small to publish (ie below 5)

⁷ Catholic and not determined combined due to small numbers of not determined appointees.

⁸ Appointees for permanent posts only.

⁹ 40-49 and 50+ categories combined due to small numbers.

¹⁰ Appointees for temporary posts only.

¹¹ Employment history is not available for a number of 2014, 2015 and 2016 appointees.

As at 1 February 2017 no appointments had been made from 23 of the 51 NICS competitions that took place in 2016, appointments from these competitions may change the profile of the appointees. The updated appointment figures for 2016 will be included in the 2017 Recruitment to the NICS Annual Report and Commissioners' 2017/18 Annual Report.

Table 5 above in relation to the analysis of the 196 appointments from the 2016 competitions reveals some disparities between the actual number of appointees and the number expected if applicants within each equality category had been equal in merit. This is covered in detail in the NISRA [Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 2016](#). Commissioners appreciate the limitations on interpretation of statistical analysis and consider that the new quarterly NICS competition monitoring process run by EDB will enable the NICS to interpret and use recruitment related data to better inform recruitment related outreach and diversity actions going forward.

Senior Civil Service (SCS) Recruitment 2016

During 2016 Commissioners were invited to chair recruitment panels for all SCS external competitions. The following commentary is based on the recruitment data published in the NISRA [Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 2016](#).

Of the 51 NICS recruitment competitions during 2016 appointments to the SCS totalled 11. 131 applications were received for these competitions and 61 applicants (46.6%) were deemed eligible for the competition for which they had applied. Commissioners note with interest that current NICS employees and candidates aged 50 or over were more likely to meet the eligibility criteria.

By 1 February 2017, a total of 5 candidates had been appointed from 5 of the above 11 competitions, with no appointments having been made from the other 6 competitions. Given the small number of appointments, Commissioners would not expect detailed analysis by equality groupings to be conducted however 5 males were appointed higher than the expected number of 4, given the nature of the applicant profile applicant profile of the competitions from which these appointments were made.

The SCS staff profile is currently 37% female and Commissioners welcome the initiatives the NICS have put in place to address gender imbalance in the SCS under the NICS Diversity Champions Network and the targets the NICS has set for female representation in the SCS by 2020 and 2023. This is discussed in more detail in the NICS Diversity Champions Network section below.

NICS Recruitment - 2016 Developments

Commissioners meet regularly with the NICS and we are pleased to note a number of very positive achievements and developments reported by the NICS during this very busy period year:

- The NICS HR project to transform HR service delivery across the NICS went live in April 2017 and will provide a centralised HR function delivering a consistent approach across all NICS Departments;
- The Permanent Secretary Compliance Statements - a signed declaration to Commissioners from each Department that all appointments have been made in accordance with Commissioners' Recruitment Code and NICS recruitment policy and procedure;
- Improved recruitment competition monitoring and reporting arrangements carried out quarterly by EDB in NICS HR;
- Improvements to the recruitment information and data presented in the NICS Annual Report on Recruitment;
- Two separate updates to the NICS Policy and Procedures Manual to reflect policy developments and guidance in relation to: recruiting people with conflict related convictions; and the Head of the Civil Service appointment process;
- Continued work to minimise adverse impact in NICS assessment testing; and
- The work under the NICS Diversity Champions Network, detailed below.

NICS Diversity Champions Network

An important part of Commissioners' role as regulators is to seek to influence the NICS to better target areas of under-representation. Commissioners take a close interest in the work being progressed by the NICS under the Diversity Champions Network set up in 2015 and are pleased to note a number of initiatives being progressed during 2016:

- liaison with the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGB&T) representative organisation, the Rainbow Project, and the completion of a confidential survey to gather information on the experience of NICS staff who are lesbian, gay or bisexual, and staff who are transgender;
- the Work Experience Scheme for People with Disabilities and undertaking of new research in relation to recruitment, career development and management support for disabled staff in the NICS;
- the development of an e-learning course on unconscious bias to be rolled out across the NICS in 2017; and

- the introduction of the Mentoring Circles Initiative set up for women within the NICS which will also offer ‘conversations with a purpose’ for females at Grade 6 & 7 as part of the Initiative.

Commissioners look forward to updates in relation to the LGB&T survey findings and the recommendations arising from the disability research. Commissioners will also engage with the NICS during 2017 on the actions resulting from these initiatives and require the NICS to include the publication of any outcomes from these initiatives under their Appendix C requirements for 2017.

Female representation in the NICS at SO level and above is below female representation in the economically active population. Female representation at SCS grades is 37.3%, lower than the economically active population and lower than the proportion of female senior civil servants in the GB civil service (40.1%). The figures, however, have been improving since 2010. Female representation at Grade 6/7 (the feeder grades for the SCS) has increased from 38.8% in 2010 to 44.4% in 2016. Representation at SCS level itself has increased from 31.0% to 37.3% over the same period. These statistics are taken from [Equality Statistics for the NICS 1 April 2016](#) - the full report is available by clicking on the link.

Commissioners are hopeful that the work of the Diversity Champions Network and the targets the NICS has set for increased female representation within the SCS by 2020 (45%) and at Grade 2/3 level by 2023 (40%) are achievable. Although not all appointments have been made from the 2016 SCS competitions, the 5 appointments which had been made by 1 February were all male. Commissioners will continue to engage with the NICS during 2017 to seek updates on progress in this regard going forward.

Commissioners welcome the new Diversity and Inclusion Award in recognition of all the varied work in relation to diversity that takes place across NICS Departments. Commissioners commend the NICS Women’s Network Team who won the award for 2017. This is a welcome development towards ensuring that the NICS workforce is reflective of the society they serve.

Appointments made by way of Exception to the Merit Principle

While specific approval of Commissioners is required for some appointments by way of exception to merit, the Recruitment Code does permit Departments to make appointments via exception to merit in certain limited circumstances at grades below Senior Civil Service (SCS) level for a period of up to two years. However, any extension beyond two years requires Commissioners’ approval.

During 2016/17, Commissioners approved one appointment at SCS level to a position in the NICS under Commissioners' **2007 General Regulations, regulation 3(d) Exceptional needs of the NICS**. Commissioners also approved the extension of two appointments to the NICS at SCS level under **Regulation 3(a) Secondment**.

As mentioned above, under **Regulation 3(a)** Departments can make appointments below SCS level for periods of up to two years. In line with the Code, Commissioners' approval was sought, and granted, for extensions to secondments for one post at Grade 7, three at Deputy Principal and one post at Staff Officer grade.

Table 6: Appointments made by Exception to Merit: January 2014 – December 2016¹²

Exception Category	Appointments: January 2014-December 2014	Appointments: January 2015-December 2015	Appointments: January 2016-December 2016
(a) Secondment	18	12	12
(b) Transfer from another civil service of the crown	0	0	0
(c) Transfer of persons employed on functions being transferred	9	126	6
(d) Exceptional needs of the NICS	1	0	1
(e) Appointments made under Government initiatives/ programmes	0	0	0
(f) Reinstatement	0	0	0
Total	28	138	19

¹² This information is sourced from the NICS Annual Reports 2014- 2016.

COMMISSIONERS' ENGAGEMENT

A focus for Commissioners is to build and develop effective relationships with stakeholders. This ensures that the role of Commissioners is understood and promoted, where possible, and provides an opportunity to learn and develop from others. During 2016/17 we held a series of outreach meetings to engage with experts from public, professional and regulatory bodies.

Diversity in the Northern Ireland Civil Service was a theme which resonated through many Commissioner engagements. Steps to be taken to encourage a greater applicant pool to the NICS from the Black and Minority Ethnic community was the focus of a meeting we had with the former Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Council For Ethnic Minorities. Diversity within the NICS was also at the forefront of meetings between Commissioners and Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Commissioner for Older People. Disability Action was invited to update Commissioners on current legislation relating to the recruitment of people with disabilities and to inform us of the barriers to recruitment experienced by people with disabilities.

In a meeting with the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland (CPANI), the discussion was focused on the need to improve female representation at senior positions in public life. Commissioners were interested to note the targeted measures CPANI were taking in trying to improve gender equality on the boards of public organisations.

Building on the close relationship enjoyed with the Civil Service Commission in the UK, the Chairperson of the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland met with the Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive following their recent appointments to the UK Civil Service Commission. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss and share issues of common concern. One of the UK Civil Service Commission's priorities is to improve the agility of the Civil Service, making it more responsive to changing demands. Commissioners will view with interest any developments to the role of the Commission and its regulation of the UK Civil Service recruitment of staff in the face of challenging demands and priorities.

In a programme of routine engagement, we met with our Ireland colleagues in the Commission for Public Service Appointments and Public Appointments Service to share experience and best practice in relation to audit and regulatory roles. A meeting with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission focused on our role in hearing appeals under the Code of Ethics and how our review of such cases could be framed within a human rights perspective.

In our annual engagement with the Permanent Secretaries Group (photo below), Commissioners welcomed further evidence of commitment to NICS Diversity and Inclusion initiative with the creation of Diversity Champions in each department. We also noted

and welcomed the introduction of NICS HR, the centralised human resources function of the Civil Service, which Commissioners view as the driver of a modern and diverse public organisation.



(Left to right) Noel Lavery, Jim Scholes, Sinéad Burns, Brian Rowntree, CBE, Sir Malcolm McKibbin, David Sterling and Peter May.

During the year we have engaged with:

- Head of the Civil Service;
- Permanent Secretaries and senior officials;
- Corporate Human Resources, in DFP;
- NI Statistics and Research Agency;
- Senior Officials in the Northern Ireland Office;
- Crown Solicitor's Office
- Civil Service Commission (UK);
- Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
- Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland;
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland;
- Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities;
- Human Rights Commission
- Disability Action;
- Fujitsu;
- Commission for Public Service Appointments (ROI); and
- Public Appointments Service (ROI).

THE NICS CODE OF ETHICS

One of the Commissioners' statutory roles is to hear appeals under the NICS Code of Ethics.

In the reporting year there were no Code of Ethics cases investigated by Commissioners. Four concerns were raised with Commissioners and, after full and detailed consideration, it was determined that the concerns raised were not matters which fell to be considered under the Code of Ethics.

The NICS is required to provide annually the number of concerns dealt with by Departments under the Code of Ethics.

During the 2016 calendar year the NICS reported that four complaints were received under the Code of Ethics. The outcome of the investigations concluded that there was no evidence to substantiate the allegations and the complaint was not upheld for three of the reported cases. One case remains live and under investigation.

In addition, two complaints received were in relation to alleged breaches of procedures/ health and safety, rather than breaches of the Code of Ethics and these also remain live and under investigation. A further three complaints received were raised by those outside of the NICS and therefore did not fall to be considered under the Code of Ethics.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY

Commissioners attach particular significance to issues of diversity, inclusivity and equality of opportunity which are central to the Merit Principle and embedded within our Recruitment Principles.

We have sought to reflect our commitment to fulfilling our obligations to promote equality and good relations. Commissioners also seek to influence and encourage the NICS to take proactive measures to promote equality of opportunity and good relations throughout all stages of the recruitment process. As a result of their earlier engagement with the NICS Diversity Champion Peter May, Commissioners were pleased to meet with and discuss barriers to recruitment with the NICS Disability Action Group. Commissioners also note that the NICS have appointed a second Diversity Champion. We look forward to seeing actions that will demonstrate how diversity and inclusion is fully embedded throughout the NICS, particularly in relation to recruitment activity.

The Commissioners' Equality Scheme and related Implementation Plan set out how our obligations will be fulfilled. Copies of current documents are available from our website at www.nicscommissioners.org.

Annex A

COMMISSIONERS IN POST DURING 2016-2017



Brian Rowntree, CBE

Chairperson,
appointed 1 June 2012
for a 5 year period.
Extended for 1 year,
until 31 May 2018.



Jim Scholes

Commissioner,
appointed 1 July
2012 for a five a year
period. Extended for
5 years, until 30 June
2022.



Sinéad Burns

Commissioner,
appointed 8 March
2016 for a five year
period.

SECRETARIAT AND RESOURCES

To deliver our statutory responsibilities we receive support from a Secretariat which comprises 6 members of staff, 5 of whom are part-time and 1 is full-time:

2016/2017 Budget Expenditure

Item	(£000s)
Commissioners' Fees	30
Staff Salaries	223
Accommodation and overheads	23
Training (Commissioners and Staff)	1
Total	276

WEBSITES AND RESEARCH MATERIAL

The Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland www.nicscommissioners.org

NICS HR <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/nics-hr>

NICS Recruitment www.irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency www.nisra.gov.uk

Civil Service Commission www.civilservicecommission.independent.gov.uk

Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland www.publicappointmentsni.org

Human Rights Commission for Northern Ireland www.nihrc.org

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland www.equalityni.org

Labour Relations Agency www.lra.org

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development www.cipd.co.uk

Commission for Public Service Appointments www.cpsa.ie

The Commissioner for Public Appointments
www.publicappointmentscommissioner.independent.gov.uk

Public Appointments Service www.publicjobs.ie

'Recruitment to the Northern Ireland Civil Service' Annual Report 2016

<https://irecruit-ext.hrconnect.nigov.net/resources/documents/r/e/c/recruitment-to-the-nics-annual-report-2016.pdf>

'Analysis of NICS Recruitment Competitions 1 January 2016 – 31 December 2016'

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Analysis-of-NICS-Recruitment-Competitions-2016.pdf>



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