



NIJAC

*Northern Ireland Judicial
Appointments Commission*

Corporate Plan



2014-2017



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Message from the Chairman



It gives me great pleasure to present NIJAC's Corporate Plan for the next three years (2014-2017).

There can be little doubt that many people living and working in Northern Ireland are still facing a challenging time – and the legal profession is not immune from this.

The Access to Justice Review, a rapidly shrinking legal aid budget (set to reduce by £41 million next year) and of course, the potential impact of Welfare Reform, all have the potential to adversely impact on the livelihoods of local practitioners and the general public.

Perhaps as a result of such uncertainty, we are seeing a lot more people applying for both fee paid and salaried judicial roles in Northern Ireland.

A key priority therefore will be to ensure everyone understands how we select and/or recommend people for judicial office while ensuring our approach is based on the very best evidence of good practice.

It has been our custom to listen to feedback and we intend to advance this further.

A key aim for this Corporate Plan therefore is to benchmark our approach against those in other jurisdictions, both nationally and globally, and establish a structured methodology that reflects best practice.

While we have achieved success with many judicial officers reflecting the Northern Ireland community another priority will be to attract applications from those in under-represented groups.



In that context our work with the legal profession, through the Joint Liaison Committee, will become even more important and therefore we aim to develop closer working relationships and encourage their energetic engagement and participation.

Like many other government departments and agencies, NIJAC has been asked to deliver an ever more effective and efficient public service with less resources – both human and financial.

However I am confident that NIJAC's staff will keep providing all those involved with the judicial appointment process with the very high standard of service they have come to expect from them.

Despite the many challenges I will do my part to ensure the good work delivered by NIJAC continues and that recommendations and selections to judicial office are made in an open, fair and transparent way so that members of the public will have confidence that only the best people are appointed to these important roles.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Declan Morgan".

Sir Declan Morgan

Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and Chairman of NIJAC



Foreword

I am delighted that the Chairman has made reference to the important work of NIJAC staff who have supported the Board to ensure that all judicial appointments are made fairly, transparently and from the widest possible pool of eligible applicants.



The team should be very proud of the positive way they have responded to recent changes to their roles and to the loss of experienced colleagues who have moved either back into the wider Courts and Tribunals family or on to pastures new.

The challenges of the past year also included managing a distinct increase in workload and I am encouraged by the professionalism of the team and their continued commitment to deliver a high quality service which ensured all schemes progressed as planned.

I am also delighted by the positive way in which colleagues responded to the development of this Corporate Plan.

Every member of staff provided me with some excellent and pragmatic examples of how we can work smarter to improve our efficiency and the service we provide to both Commissioners and those engaged in judicial appointments.

There has been a track record of achievement not least in adhering to strict governance arrangements and our aim is to continue to maintain those high standards.



It is likely that during 2015 legislation will be enacted enabling the office of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman to be held simultaneously by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman. We look forward to building constructive, respectful relations with the new Ombudsman as we have with the current.

Looking closer at the years ahead, I can see that while many opportunities for judicial appointment will appeal to those with a legal background, there are a number of roles which will seek applications from people who have experience in land valuation, medicine and health and social care and in addition there will be opportunities for members of the public to apply to serve in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals and Mental Health Review Tribunals.

NIJAC is determined to encourage interest in judicial office, so I would encourage anyone with that interest to contact my staff to discuss opportunities and initiatives such as Judicial Shadowing or visit our website (www.nijac.gov.uk) for further information.

Handwritten signature of Mandy Kilpatrick.

Mandy Kilpatrick

Chief Executive



Our purpose

NIJAC is committed to the appointment of the best possible judicial officers for Northern Ireland through fair, open and transparent assessment, selection and appointment processes.

We recognise and value diversity and seek to promote equality while ensuring that merit remains the guiding principle for appointment.

It is our policy to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity to actual and potential applicants irrespective of gender, marital status, religious belief or political opinion, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, dependant responsibilities or geographical location.

Our aim is to ensure that those who do apply will undergo an appointment process that assesses their knowledge, skills and abilities fairly and openly.

In this way we are confident that those most meritorious will be appointed.



Our statutory responsibilities

1. To select and appoint, and recommend for appointment, in respect of all listed judicial offices up to and including High Court Judge.
2. To recommend applicants solely on the basis of merit.
3. To engage in a programme of action to secure, so far as it is reasonably practicable to do so, that appointments to listed¹ judicial offices are such that those holding such offices are reflective of the community in Northern Ireland.
4. To engage in a programme of action to secure, so far as it is reasonably practicable to do so, that a range of persons reflective of the community in Northern Ireland is available for consideration by NIJAC whenever it is required to select a person to be appointed, or recommend a person for appointment, to a listed judicial office.
5. To publish an annual report setting out the activities and accounts for the past year.

¹ Schedule 1 of the Justice Act 2002.



Our principles

The principles which guide and inform our work are:

Independence – we will ensure NIJAC fulfils all of its statutory obligations, free from any political influence or interference;

Merit - we will appoint and recommend for appointment applicants solely on the basis of merit;

Diversity - we will implement a programme of action designed to support our aim to achieve, as far as reasonably practicable, a judiciary that is reflective of our society;

Fairness - we will be fair in our decision making;

Transparency - we will be open about our policies, procedures and activities;

Accountability - we will explain our activities and where appropriate the reasons for our decisions; and

Partnership - we will work closely with interested parties to share learning and to progress and inform our work.



Our Future Direction

The general public will always need and demand access to justice – whether through the Courts, Tribunals or mediation services.

In these difficult times, it is only natural that people will challenge or appeal decisions made by others which directly affect their employment, solvency and/or sources of income or benefits.

While there is a demand for justice, there will always be a requirement for people to serve their communities as judicial office holders.

To that end, we see the next three years as a very busy period of outreach and recruitment for NIJAC. NIJAC's key objectives and performance targets are set out in the Business Plan each year.

We are confident that the improved working arrangements (with the Department of Justice and Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service), which were established following the devolution of justice, will help ensure this scheme runs smoothly.

We are also confident that our team, aided by our new online and back office systems, will be able to manage this high volume of work.

There was a recent and positive review of our work by the Northern Ireland Assembly's Justice Committee in April 2012; the review flowed from the requirement set out in the Northern Ireland Act 2009 and we are happy to play our role in any further review of the arrangements for appointments and removals.



It is important we continue our engagement with political representatives, while also focussing on our core business – selecting and recommending people for appointment to judicial office.

In the same way, we must be alive to other issues, such as Welfare Reform, the Future Administration and Structure of Tribunals in Northern Ireland, Legal Aid Reform and of course, any alterations to our applicant pool influenced by various factors, including changes to the economy.

When you add into the mix, the review of public sector pensions (which has led to the introduction of a new career average judicial pension scheme from April 2015) and a Supreme Court ruling (that said, amongst other things, that some fee paid judicial office holders are to be treated as part time workers and therefore should receive a pension based on their service – much in the same way as their salaried colleagues) - to potentially catalyse early judicial retirements, changes to judicial terms and conditions and the impact this might have on both salaried and fee paid judicial roles and the composition at relevant tiers, it is easy to see how the next three years might be a challenging time for us.

For all these reasons and others which are yet to materialise, it is extremely important our Corporate and Business Plans remain fluid documents – able to adapt to change quickly and respond to external factors.



Our Corporate Plan is set around NIJAC’s key aim, to appoint and recommend for appointment solely on merit. In accordance with our governing legislation NIJAC is required to engage in a Programme of Action to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable that appointments to listed judicial office are such that those holding such offices are reflective of the community in Northern Ireland.

As you can see from the diagram below, we have identified four key work areas, each of which interact with the other and work towards delivering our key aim and complying with our statutory commitments.





While some operational targets may change in the next 12, 24 and 36 months, our focus will remain on meeting the commitments aligned to each of these four areas.

Our Business Plan will set out what work we will do each year, how we will do it and by when we will do it.

It will set out how we will work across teams, with Commissioners and with key stakeholders to achieve our key aim.

It will set out how we will work with various departments responsible for the Courts and Tribunals so that we can best meet their needs and capture their input.

It will set out how we will continue working with other public appointments bodies both nationally and globally - to identify areas of best practice in appointment methodology which will both encourage applications and inspire confidence in our recruitment methods.

It will set out how we will improve our services – how we will listen and respond to applicant feedback; how we will simplify our appointments process and explain it better; how we will work to remove barriers, whether perceived or real, to a judicial career.

And of course, we will do all of this in a way which is open, transparent and communicated clearly – both online and offline - to those who have an interest in judicial office and the appointments process.



At the end of the day, we must ensure that all who are interested in becoming a judicial office holder know what is involved, how to apply and what to expect from our assessment and selection process.

We are a busy, small, effective and efficient organisation and the prospect is for more hard but rewarding work to come but we are looking forward to the next three years.

What is certain is that Courts and Tribunals across Northern Ireland will continue to need lawyers, doctors, and other individuals to serve the justice system.



Financial Performance

The Annual Report and Accounts sets out NIJAC's performance each year. The forecasted is detailed in the NIJAC Business Plan.

The expenditure for the years ending 31 March 2013, 2012 and 2011 are shown in the table below.

	2012-13	2011-12	2010-11
Staff costs	755,316	816,456	807,647
Depreciation, amortisation and revaluation	16,694	13,079	9,559
Other expenditure	538,874	582,151	617,061
	<u>1,310,884</u>	<u>1,411,686</u>	<u>1,434,267</u>
Income	(579)	(675)	-
	<u>1,310,305</u>	<u>1,411,011</u>	<u>1,434,267</u>
Capital	3,954	-	45,398
Total (including Capital)	<u>1,314,259</u>	<u>1,411,011</u>	<u>1,479,665</u>
Cost saving on prior year	7%	5%	7%

The final audited figures for the year ending 31 March 2014 can be found in the 2013-14 Annual Report & Accounts published later in the year.



Recruitment & Selection

What we will do

We will strive to meet our statutory duty to ensure a reflective judiciary which is appointed on merit.

How we will do it

- ***We will develop, implement and deliver a programme of action to attract applications from the widest possible pool.***
- ***We will deliver a programme of appointments and renewals that meets business needs and ensures continuity in Courts and Tribunals.***
- ***We will review and benchmark what we do and implement an evidence based plan of action to deliver best practice in judicial appointments.***



Our People

What we will do

We will fulfil our commitments through the efforts of skilled and engaged Commissioners, Co-opted Experts and Staff.

How we will do it

- ***We will put in place a Programme of Development to ensure that all Commissioners and Co-Opted Experts are clear and confident in their roles and responsibilities and supported to deliver on our commitments.***
- ***We will promote an ethos of appreciating the value of diversity and encourage continuous improvement.***
- ***We will value the contribution of staff and develop mechanisms to enhance their engagement and performance.***



Working with Others

What we will do

We will work closely with others to deliver our statutory duties and implement best practice.

How we will do it

- *We will actively strengthen our consultative processes with the Bar Council and Law Society to ensure we deliver on expectations.*
- *We will build upon our relationships with the Department of Justice and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service to review responsibilities and implement an enhanced Memorandum of Understanding.*
- *We will build upon our relationships with the Department for Social Development, the Department for Employment and Learning and the Judicial Appointments Ombudsman to review responsibilities and implement a Memorandum of Understanding.*



Accountability

What we will do

We will make judicial appointments while safeguarding public money and making the best use of our resources.

How we will do it

- ***We will manage our resources effectively through sound financial management and controls, while increasing our efficiency.***
- ***We will protect all data held, safeguarding the confidentiality of applicants.***
- ***We will deliver an effective governance system that will ensure probity and the safeguarding of public funds and provide assurance to our sponsor, the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister.***



Recruitment & Selection



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NIJAC Business Plan



A copy of our Business Plan is available to download at
www.nijac.gov.uk



Contact us

We welcome any feedback on this plan or any aspect of our work.

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