



**Northern Ireland  
Fire & Rescue Service**

# **CODE OF PROCEDURES ON RECRUITMENT & SELECTION**

**September 2013**

Prepared by: **Human Resources Policy and Recruitment & Services Units**

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE  
CODE OF PROCEDURES ON RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

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<b>Issue Date:</b>	April 1998
<b>Version 2:</b>	December 2011
<b>Version 3:</b>	September 2013
<b>Issued By:</b>	Human Resources Policy Unit

## **FOREWORD**

The publication of the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service's Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection illustrates the commitment of the organisation to the principle of equality of treatment for all persons applying for posts within Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service.

Every appointment or promotion within NIFRS will be decided solely on the basis of merit and without regard to an individual's religious belief, political opinion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, race or disability.

The Code is laid down so that all members of the organisation engaged in Recruitment and Selection are fully aware of their individual and collective responsibilities and so that all applicants can have complete confidence in the selection system.

NIFRS will rigorously deal with any abuse of the processes or procedures set out in this document.

NIFRS will also seek to ensure, by continuous review, that its policy and practice in all recruitment and selection matters remains sound within a dynamic equality framework and in the face of changing demands in the legal and social climate within Northern Ireland.

**J WALLACE  
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NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

## **PART A – CODE OF PROCEDURES**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

This Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection has been reviewed to reflect best practice and ensure compliance with current employment legislation including Equality Commission of Northern Ireland Codes of Practice.

NIFRS is committed to the fundamental principles of “openness”, “fairness” and “merit” to ensure that the best person is appointed for the job and as a result contributing to the improved business performance. These principles signal our commitment to provide equality of opportunity in employment.

We aim to avoid any procedures which directly or indirectly discriminate against individuals on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, race disability or trade union membership.

All Officers and Members of the Board must observe the principles contained within this Code and in exercising their individual and collective responsibilities they must adhere to the practices laid down for each stage of the recruitment and selection process.

Failure to observe the principles and practices set out in this Code may result in disciplinary action if, after a full investigation of the matter, an individual or group of individuals are found to have ignored or altered these arrangements.

### **2 SCOPE**

This Code will supercede the existing Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection. The Procedure relates to all appointments within Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service, full time and part time. Some limited exceptions to the recruitment principles are permitted and are specifically noted in this Code.

The term "Officer" is used throughout as a generic term encompassing both operational and support staff, those working at NIFRS and Members of NIFRS Board involved in the recruitment and selection process.

This document will be supplemented by guidance for Managers.

### **3 DELEGATED AUTHORITY**

The Standing Orders of NIFRS Board specify the powers conferred upon the Accounting Officer.

The ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Code rests with the Accounting Officer. The Director of Human Resources has delegated responsibility for ensuring that the procedures as detailed in this Code are observed.

The designated Officer (Appendix 2) will nominate Officers at appropriate levels to chair and participate in shortlisting and interviewing panels for posts up to but not including Principal Officer/Director level and, by virtue of Board approval of this Code, will have complied with NIFRS Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation for that purpose.

#### **4 LEGISLATION**

The legislative framework which underpins the NIFRS Code is set out below:

- Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970 (as amended);
- Sex Discrimination (NI) Orders 1976 (as amended);
- Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended);
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended);
- The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended);
- Employment Equality (sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003;
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006;
- Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006;
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2006;
- The Fair Employment Act 1989;
- Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 75 and Schedule 9;
- Human Rights Act 1998;
- Rehabilitation of Offenders (NI) Order 1978;
- Data Protection Act 1998;
- Asylum, Immigration and Nationality Act 2006;
- Children & Young Persons Act (Northern Ireland) 1968;
- Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997;
- Part-time Worker (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000.

This list is not exhaustive and many of these provisions are complemented by, or the subject of additional obligations which also exist in, European Law.

#### **5 KEY PRINCIPLES**

In developing this Code NIFRS has endeavoured to ensure that:

- all potential applicants who are eligible and suitably qualified are aware of vacancies and encouraged to put themselves forward for consideration;

- all advertisements are not limited to a publication or other announcement which is likely to be read wholly or mainly by persons who share a particular community background, or sex, or race, or disability, or sexual orientation, or age;
- all advertisements will include a statement to the effect that NIFRS is an Equal Opportunity Employer, committed to the fair and equal treatment of all those seeking employment;
- affirmative action measures will be taken where necessary to attract more applicants from under-represented groups;
- procedures, policies and practices are avoided by which applicants are, mainly or wholly, identified through any restricted group if this means that only members of a particular community, or a disproportionately high number of them, then come forward;
- procedures, policies and practices are avoided which could unlawfully directly or indirectly discriminate; and
- every individual appointed will be selected on merit on the basis of fair and open competition.

## **6 MERIT PRINCIPLE**

Appointment of the best person for the job, assessed against essential and desirable selection criteria, is the fundamental principle underlying all current employment legislation and it is incorporated in these Procedures.

In making appointments using the merit principle, NIFRS will:

- identify essential and desirable job related criteria which are not directly or indirectly discriminatory;
- apply such criteria fairly and consistently at all stages of selection; all criteria will be determined in a logical and reasonable manner and information on them will be made available to applicants at the earliest possible stage and, in any event, prior to interview;
- ensure all applicants are treated fairly and equally;
- agree and record the weighting of each aspect of assessment considered relevant to the identified selection criteria;
- ensure that shortlisting and interviewing panels are trained in non-discriminatory selection techniques, including the content of the Equality Commission's statutory Codes of Practice and NIFRS procedures;
- ensure that proceedings of selection panels are held in confidence, subject only to the need to disclose papers to assist in the resolution of any complaint;

- record the assessments and decisions of members of shortlisting and interviewing panels and all those in attendance at such panels and retain such records for a period of not less than 3 years; and
- record any departures from the Code and the reason for this.

## **7 AFFIRMATIVE ACTION MEASURES**

NIFRS are committed to attracting and retaining a truly diverse workforce and as such we will undertake outreach measures to actively promote fair participation for all groups within our society.

Affirmative action measures may be necessary where the number of applicants for employment or promotion, from a particular group, are fewer than might be expected.

Where affirmative action is necessary to secure fair participation, the programme will be implemented in accordance with the advice contained in the relevant statutory Codes of Practice provided by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

## **8 EXCEPTIONS TO PUBLICLY ADVERTISED VACANCIES**

The normal default position is that all posts are advertised publically. However, there may be times when NIFRS may need to use alternative recruitment methods, for example:

### **8.1 Temporary Job Share**

Temporary job share vacancies will be advertised internally for 2 weeks in the first instance.

If no internal applications are received, or no internal applicant found suitable for appointment, the post will be publicly advertised. In the event that an internal advertisement is not appropriate because there may be potential for adverse impact, the post will be advertised in the normal way.

### **8.2 Organisational Change**

When the organisation is subject to re-organisation/structural change, it may be necessary to advertise affected posts internally in order to ensure job security. This will only be done with the consent of the Director of Human Resources and the Chief Executive.

### **8.3 Acting-up, Temporary Appointments or Secondment Arrangements**

Acting-up, temporary appointments and secondment arrangements will be used in order to meet the exigencies of the Service. They will be time limited to cover, for example, absence, maternity leave or temporary project work.



NIFRS will put in place Acting-Up arrangements in accordance with the agreed Conditions for Service and subject to existing consultation/negotiation arrangements with the Representative Bodies.

Operational temporary appointments normally lasting no longer than 6 months will be progressed in accordance with existing Temporary Promotions Agreement.

Time limited internal secondments may be used in order to cover specific project work. This will involve internal competition and be in line with secondments policies and procedures.

#### **8.4 Employment Agencies**

All Officers must use the methods of recruitment outlined in this Code but where there is a need to recruit temporary support staff urgently and the normal methods of recruitment could not meet the urgent need, then the services of an employment agency may be used. The appropriate level of approval must be sought to proceed, including Departmental approval.

When this need arises the Recruitment and Services Unit will liaise with employment agencies and satisfy themselves that any employment agency they intend to use complies with employment legislative provisions and follows the recommendations laid down in the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Codes of Practice and guidance publications. It is of particular importance that the employment agency register should be operated in a manner consistent with the principles of equality of opportunity.

Employment agencies are bound by the provisions of the current anti-discrimination legislation and they must not discriminate on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, race or disability.

It is unlawful for an employer to direct an employment agency to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, race or disability, unless a lawful exception exists. With this in mind the Recruitment and Services Unit will exercise care in the instructions given to employment agencies on the filling of a post.

### **9 TRAINING OF PANEL MEMBERS**

Training as recommended by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland will be provided for all participants on shortlisting and interviewing panels and no Officer shall participate unless he/she has undertaken the training.

Training will be arranged on a formal and structured basis in order to brief Officers and Members on new best practice developments and new legislative requirements as they arise.

In addition, modules covering Equality, Diversity and Dignity at Work will be included in all scheduled supervisory and management training at the Fire & Rescue Service Training Centre.

NIFRS is also committed to providing ongoing training for panel members to cover any revision to procedures and the implications for the Fire & Rescue Service of new employment legislation. In addition, Recruitment and Selection training will be an integral part of other general career development programmes for staff in junior and middle management grades.

## **10 UNFAIR TREATMENT**

Applicants for appointment or promotion who feel that they have not been treated fairly under these procedures may in the first instance raise the matter in writing.

External applicants should raise the matter in writing with the Director of Human Resources. In the case of Board appointments, the matter should be raised with the Chair of the Board. The matter will be referred to the Recruitment and Services Unit to co-ordinate a response along with the relevant Chairperson of the panel. Applicants may also seek redress by referral to outside bodies such as the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland or the Northern Ireland Ombudsman.

Internal applicants should raise the matter using the NIFRS Grievance Policy and Procedure to the Director of Human Resources, who will refer the matter to the appropriate Officer to progress.

If any applicant complains in writing that he/she should have been shortlisted and the interviews have not yet taken place, the Director of Human Resources will arrange for the application to be reviewed and if an error has occurred then the applicant will be invited to attend for interview.

In the context of a selection cycle, if any applicant complains in writing that the failure to shortlist has resulted in the applicant not being involved in the selection cycle, the Director of Human Resources will arrange for the application to be reviewed and if an error has occurred then the applicant will be invited to undertake the process.

If an applicant remains dissatisfied, then he/she may decide to refer the matter to an outside body as referred to above.

## **11 DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

All Officers and Members of the Board are charged with observing due confidentiality in the fulfilment of their respective duties under this Code. All records should be kept confidential and retained in accordance with this Code of Procedures and the Data Protection Act 1998, which requires the release of certain data to individuals on their request.

## **12 REPRESENTATIVE BODIES**

This Code has been the subject of agreement with the relevant Trade Unions.

### **13 REVIEW OF THE CODE**

The Human Resources Policy Unit in conjunction with the Recruitment and Services Unit will review this Code of Procedures triennially and in light of best practice and changes in legislation. Any review of the Code will involve consultation with the appropriate stakeholders and the recognised Trade Unions.

NIFRS will encourage consultation, from within the Organisation and with outside agencies, in accordance with consultation arrangements outlined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998, statutory equality duty in reviewing the implementation and effectiveness of this Code.

### **14 FURTHER INFORMATION AND GUIDANCE**

Further information and guidance can be obtained from the Recruitment and Services Unit at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters.

This Code of Procedures will be made available on the Global Folder under Document Management System, Policies Folder.

### **15 ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

- Equal Opportunities Policy;
- Temporary Promotions Procedure (Operational Staff);
- Operational Selection Implementation Plan (relevant to role);
- Support Staff Selection Implementation Plan (relevant to post/grade).

## **PART B - RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCEDURE**

Recruitment and selection will be carried out systematically and objectively. The Procedure set out below must be followed in accordance with the Code on each occasion when a job vacancy arises.

### **1 WORKFORCE PLANNING**

All vacancies will be referred to the Workforce Planning Group via Human Resources for approval to proceed with the Recruitment and Selection Process.

When a vacancy has been approved a Selection Implementation Plan will be prepared or reviewed, as appropriate, in conjunction with the Recruitment and Services Unit and reflect the Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection.

### **2 JOB DESCRIPTION**

Where there is a vacancy to be filled the Job Description will be prepared by the appropriate level of management and then approved by the relevant Director, Chief Fire Officer, Chief Executive or Chair of the Board, as appropriate. Existing Job Descriptions will be reviewed each time a vacancy occurs to ensure that it is up-to-date, meaningful and accurately reflects the duties of the post.

As far as possible Job Descriptions will be generic and provide standardised information:

- Job title;
- Reporting relationship;
- Main purpose of job;
- Main duties and responsibilities.

The language used in all Job Descriptions will be clear, simple and non-discriminatory.

All Job Descriptions will contain:

- an express duty which requires post holders to comply with NIFRS equal opportunity, dignity at work, health and safety policies and procedures.

The Recruitment and Services Unit will ensure that Job Descriptions are prepared in accordance with the requirements of current employment legislation.

All Job Descriptions and Personnel Specifications will be retained on a Job Directory which will be held by the Recruitment and Services Unit. Substantive changes to any Job Description will be subject to any existing consultation/negotiation arrangements with the Representative Bodies.

### **3 PERSONNEL SPECIFICATION**

The Personnel Specification will be prepared by the appropriate level of management and then approved by the relevant Director, Chief Fire Officer, Chief Executive or Chair of the Board, as appropriate. It will set out clearly the qualifications, skills, experience and knowledge which are essential for the performance of all the duties of the post, and any other criteria which might be deemed desirable. It will contain sufficient information to enable prospective applicants to be clear as to the requirements of the post.

The method used to develop the Personnel Specification will be determined by the Recruitment and Services Unit on the basis of the staff grouping. Where appropriate, a competency framework will be used to assess the competencies relevant for a particular job.

There must be no criterion shown which could cause direct or indirect discrimination as defined under current employment legislation.

Where appropriate, criteria will be expressly defined and quantified; for example, length and type of experience in a particular role(s) at the specified closing date.

The Recruitment and Services Unit will provide guidance to line managers on matters such as equivalencies of academic qualifications or other qualifications. In doing so the Recruitment and Services Unit will rely on current national guidance such as National Qualification Framework.

The Recruitment and Services Unit will ensure that the Personnel Specification accurately sets out relevant, non-discriminatory and objectively justifiable requirements to be met by the post holder in accordance with current legislation.

Once a Personnel Specification has been drawn up for a post, it should be reviewed as appropriate, to reflect the Job Description or to comply with legal requirements. The criteria must remain justifiable, appropriate to the job and clearly objective and as a matter of good practice they will be reviewed for compliance with these requirements.

The Job Description and the Personnel Specification must be finalised before advertising a post.

### **4 ADVERTISING**

NIFRS aims to attract a diverse range of applicants. The key objective in advertising vacancies is to encourage applications, representative of the entire community maximising the chance of appointing the best possible person for the job and as a result contributing to the improved business performance.

Advertisements and Establishment Instructions (for operational personnel) will be prepared by the Recruitment and Service Unit. The advertisement will be based on the information set out in the Job Description and Personnel Specification and will contain sufficient information to enable potential applicants to determine their suitability for the post.

All advertisements will include:

- An equal opportunity statement;
- An affirmative action statement, as appropriate;
- Job title;
- Location of the post;
- Brief description of the role and/or requirements of the role;
- The anticipated date(s) for assessments/interviews, where possible;
- Procedure for requesting an application pack;
- Procedure for submitting an application form;
- Closing date for the receipt of applications.

The Recruitment and Services Unit will ensure that the language used in advertisements is clear, simple and non-discriminatory and complies with current legislation, including Statutory Codes of Practice and other Guidance.

The Recruitment and Services Unit will consider the job role and in conjunction with the Equality Unit, monitor the composition of the workforce and applicants to inform the choice of media outlets used to advertise vacancies.

Where affirmative action is required, the text of advertisements and the circulation of advertisements will be tailored accordingly and appropriate outreach measures will be considered.

NIFRS will publicise vacancies in accordance with the Advertising Schedule (Appendix 1) with the exception outlined above in Part A, Section 8.

The closing date for advertisements will be as follows:

External – normally 2 weeks from publication;

Internal – normally 2 weeks from publication;

Establishment Instructions – normally 4 weeks from publication (to take account of Fire Service shift systems).

## **5 APPLICATIONS**

Application forms will be prepared by the Recruitment and Services Unit in a structured format.

All application forms will:

- Reflect the grade or role of the post;
- Specify the essential and desirable selection criteria, ie, skills, experience, qualifications;
- Enable applicants to state clearly and comprehensively how they meet the essential and desirable criteria.

Application forms will also include a section which invites disabled applicants to indicate any relevant effects of their disabilities and to suggest adjustments which might help them to overcome any disadvantages they might expect to encounter in the recruitment process and in doing the job.

The application form will not request information relating to:

- Religious belief;
- Political opinion;
- Race or ethnicity;
- Nationality;
- Immigration status;
- Marital or civil partnership or family status;
- Sexual orientation;
- National insurance number;
- Age and date of birth (unless relevant to objectively justified selection criteria).

Application packs will be issued by the Recruitment and Services Unit at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters and from other locations as specified in the advertisement for the post. All forms will be returned to the Equality Unit at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters.

All applicants will receive as much information as possible to enable them to consider whether or not to apply for the post.

Application packs will include:

- an Application Form;
- an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Questionnaire;
- a Notification of Family Relationship;
- a Job Description;
- a Personnel Specification;
- the essential and desirable criteria;
- a Job Preference Sheet (as appropriate);
- the contact details of a named individual to enable applicants to discuss reasonable adjustments;
- a summary of Conditions of Employment, including reference to pre-employment checks;
- the Equal Opportunities Policy Statement.

The same information will be sent to all applicants to ensure that everyone is treated consistently and fairly. Information will also be made available in alternative formats on request.

The Equal Opportunities Monitoring Questionnaire will be attached to each application form and will be removed by the Equality Officer. This form will not be provided to the Selecting Officers.

Applications for all vacancies will be monitored on the basis of community background, sex, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, age, dependency and race in order to assess the extent to which equality of opportunity is being achieved.

A written application form will be completed by all applicants in response to a planned recruitment exercise. This will provide the selection panel with sufficient information in a standard format from applicants to enable them to assess if the applicant meets the essential and desirable criteria.

No application will be accepted after the specified closing date and time.

## **6 CANVASSING**

Canvassing of Officers or Members of the Board, directly or indirectly, in connection with any appointment, shall disqualify an applicant. An Officer or a Member of the Board shall not solicit for any person any appointment within NIFRS.

## **7 COMPOSITION OF PANELS**

For posts up to Principal Officer/Director level, shortlisting and interviewing will be conducted by a panel nominated by the designated Officer in accordance with the Schedule for Shortlisting and Interviewing Panels (Appendix 2).

Due consideration will be given to the "balance" of the panel in all respects, bearing in mind the need to progress appointments quickly and the individual's availability to participate at each stage. Shortlisting and interviewing panels, as far as is reasonably practicable, will consist of persons of different sex and community background. A record of panels will be kept by the Equality Unit.

It is important that the same individuals conduct both stages of the selection process. If it is unavoidable that the same individuals cannot be involved throughout the selection process, reasons for change should be noted. This, however, should be the exception rather than normal circumstances. Where more than one panel will conduct the interview stage, only one of the panels will be chosen to conduct the shortlisting exercise.

No Officer will participate in any recruitment exercise where he/she feels that personal impartiality is compromised due to a relationship with any applicant.

NIFRS will ensure that any of its employees or Members of the Board involved in any part of the shortlisting or interviewing process will not participate in such procedures if a family relationship, as defined at Appendix 3, is known to exist between the panel member and any person who is applying for a particular post within NIFRS.

Where it emerges that a panel member or proposed panel member is implicated in any claim or allegation that would lead to the potential for conflict of interest, the designated Officer, in accordance with Appendix 2, in nominating the panel will examine each case on its merits and if, in the Officer's opinion, there is potential for conflicting interests or the appearance thereof, then the Officer may have regard to this in designating the panel without prejudice to panel members or interviewees.

The composition and status of the panel must remain intact, where possible, however, where a substitute panel member is nominated he/she must receive a full briefing on the selection stages already completed.

All panel members will receive training on NIFRS recruitment, selection and promotion procedures and Equal Opportunities Policy, non-discriminatory selection techniques, employment legislation, including the content of the Equality Commission's statutory Codes of Practice and guidance publications.



## **8      SHORTLISTING**

Shortlisting will be carried out as soon as possible following the closing date for receipt of applications. The Recruitment and Services Unit will prepare all shortlisting documentation.

### **8.1    Firefighter & Firefighter (Controls)**

Shortlisting will be conducted by assessment of the application forms against agreed criteria.

Following this process, applicants will be shortlisted using Firefighter Selection Tests, which may include a written test and a series of physical/practical tests.

### **8.2    Operational (Principal Officer to Crew Commander) and Support Staff**

The panel will meet and before viewing the application forms will agree:

- (i) the extent to which desirable criteria will be applied;
- (ii) the weighting to be given to each aspect of the selection process. (For operational personnel, NIFRS have predetermined weighting factors for particular aspects for the selection process, the shortlisting panel will be advised of this by the Human Resources Adviser to the panel); and
- (iii) whether or not tests will contribute to the overall score or will be used purely as a shortlisting tool;
- (iv) which additional method(s) of selection, to be used should there be a tie in the overall score of applicants, in order to distinguish between the applicants, ie, second interview/test/assessment.

The panel will then shortlist against the agreed essential criteria and as appropriate the desirable criteria.

The shortlisting criteria will be based on the criteria as described in the Job Description and the Personnel Specification. Where the panel agree to apply the desirable criteria this will be clearly recorded on the Shortlisting Report. Panel Members must be satisfied that the weighting given to each aspect of assessment is justifiable, appropriate to the job and clearly objective.

Where more than one panel will conduct the interview stage, a panel will be designated, representative of the interview panels, to conduct the shortlisting exercise.

Panel members in fulfilling their duties as a selecting Officer must have due regard to the Equal Opportunities Policy. They must apply the shortlisting criteria consistently and fairly to all applicants, subject to occasions where reasonable adjustments are being made for disabled applicants.

Clarification should be sought from the Recruitment and Services Unit for equivalencies of academic or other qualifications and from the Impairment Case Conference Team in determining whether reasonable adjustments should be made.

No Officer will participate in any recruitment exercise where he/she feels that personal impartiality is compromised due to a relationship with any applicant.

The Chairperson of the panel will have an overview responsibility for the arrangements and for ensuring that panel members behave appropriately and that they follow the proper process. All panel members must be in agreement with the final shortlist of applicants. The Chairperson should remind the panel members not to discuss the applicants outside the panel meeting, and that all information on applicants should remain confidential.

NIFRS has a standardised system for recording shortlisting decisions. This sets out how each applicant has been assessed against the specified criteria and provides a full and detailed record as to the basis on which the panel has made its selections. The record must include a clear explanation as to the reason why some applicants are unsuccessful, other applicants are deemed suitable and any matters of clarification or comments relevant to their decisions.

If a potential error is discovered in the shortlisting process, the process should be halted to establish the reason for the error and, if it is established that a mistake was made, this should be rectified. A special meeting of the shortlisting panel should be convened to discuss the error and the remedial action. For example, if an applicant who meets the criteria has been excluded, he/she should be invited to the assessment centre or interview, as appropriate. If an applicant has been shortlisted in error then, they should be advised of the error and the application should be withdrawn from the shortlist.

## **9 ASSESSMENTS AND TESTS**

NIFRS may use assessment centres and tests when deemed appropriate either to aid the shortlisting process or contribute to the overall score for selection.

Any assessments and tests used should:

- be designed to reflect the grade/role of the post concerned;
- provide relevant, reliable and valid assessment of the applicants' ability to perform the duties of the job;
- have no discriminatory impact on any of the statutory equality groups.

Assessment tests may be purchased from professional organisations; designed internally; or obtained from other Fire & Rescue Services.

The effectiveness of the tests used will be reviewed and NIFRS will monitor their use to ensure no adverse impact on the designated groups.

Assessment centres or tests may be used, in the case of:

- (i) Support Staff/Principal Officer & Director posts
  - (a) to determine the final applicants to be invited to interview;
  - (b) to contribute to the overall score for selection.
  
- (ii) Operational posts (up to and including Area Commander)  
(Wholetime/Retained/Controls)
  - (a) to identify those eligible to progress to the selection process;
  - (b) to determine the final applicants to be invited for interview;
  - (c) to contribute to the overall score for selection.
  
- (iii) Operational posts (Firefighter & Firefighter (Controls))
  - (a) to determine the final applicants to be invited to interview (applicants must have successfully completed all of the selection tests).

The results of the Assessment Centre noted at (i) and (ii) will be available to the interviewing panel on completion of all interviews.

## **10 INTERVIEWING**

### Pre-interview meeting

Prior to interviews the panel(s) will meet and agree a structured format for the interviews. The panel(s) will also agree suitable questions which directly and clearly correspond to the selection criteria and are non-discriminatory. All interview questions must be developed from the criteria for the post and must be targeted at obtaining evidence to support decision-making about the most suitable applicant.

In the case of Firefighter interviews, a range of relevant core questions will be prepared for this specific post, together with a questions matrix which determines the questions to be used at interview. The questions must be fair to all the applicants, and for the assistance of the panel, a key point summary relevant to the questions will be prepared for reference during the interviews.

The Recruitment and Services Unit shall ensure that guidance is available to the panel members on the type of response expected. The advice of panel members with specialist experience may be sought but all panel members must guard against any action which may influence others either for or against a particular applicant.

### Interviews

Before the interview commences the information provided on the application form by the applicant will be checked for verification purposes.

The aim of the interview is to obtain from the applicant enough additional information to enable panel members to assess applicants accurately against the criteria.

The Recruitment and Services Unit will prepare all interview and selection decision documentation. The marking sheet/weighted factor sheet will indicate the source of the relevant information to be assessed. Relevant documentation will be provided to each panel member.

The Recruitment and Services Unit will also provide briefing notes on procedures for the Chairperson of the panel on each occasion.

The Chairperson will again have an overview responsibility for the arrangements and for ensuring that panel members behave appropriately and that they follow the proper process. The Chairperson should remind the panel members not to discuss the applicants outside the panel meeting, and that all information on applicants should remain confidential.

Members of the panel may, in addition to the core questions, ask relevant supplementary questions if issues arise either from the application form or from the applicant's answers which are related to the responsibilities and organisational position of the post. In order to ensure a consistent approach, every effort should be made to allow all applicants to develop their answers. It should be remembered that a friendly atmosphere, created by a pleasant informal introduction to the more formal stage of the interview, is conducive to good interviewing practice and more professional than an intimidatory or aggressive approach. It is entirely in order, and often necessary, to include ordinary dialogue with the applicant as part of the interviewing process as long as panel members avoid a line of questioning from which inferences could be drawn of direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of religious or political belief, race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status or disability. It is the responsibility of the Chairperson to give guidance on this aspect and for each of the panel members to comply.

Every effort should be made to ensure a sensitive and fair approach to each applicant. The interviewing panel is the "front window" of NIFRS as an employer and it is incumbent upon all participants to promote NIFRS as an employer of sound reputation for fair practice in employment matters.

Following each interview panel members, without conferring at this stage, will award marks for each interview question on the marking sheet/weighted factor sheet. This will not preclude the provision of generic technical advice.

The marking sheet/weighted factor sheet will include a mark for performance at interview and may include a mark for performance at an assessment centre, presentation or test if agreed to contribute to the overall score for selection in advance of shortlisting. The Human Resources Adviser will retain assessment centre/presentation results, in a sealed envelope until all interviews have been completed.

If overall scores are tied following the final stage of the selection process the panel should use the agreed additional method(s) of selection to distinguish between applicants.

NIFRS has a standardised system for recording interview decisions which provides a full and detailed record as to how the applicant performed at interview in answering the questions/presenting and as to the basis on which the panel has made its selections. The record must include a clear explanation as to the reason why some applicants are unsuccessful and other applicants are deemed suitable.

Panel members in fulfilling their duties as a selecting Officer must have due regard to the Equal Opportunities Policy and ensure that the selection of any applicant is fair and equitable. They will be accountable for the individual assessments made and may have to explain these if a dispute arises under any legislation. It is essential therefore that notes are legible and meaningful in order to assist good recall in the event of proceedings.

The Chairperson of the panel will have an important role to play in the conduct of the interviews generally and particularly when advice is sought from panel members with specialist experience. It will be for the Chairperson to ensure that all decisions are based on merit and that the best person for the job is appointed in every case.

When a suitable applicant has been identified, the Recruitment and Services Unit will issue a job offer subject to pre-employment checks and where necessary an operational competency test.

## **11 TECHNICAL ASSESSORS**

For appointments by the Board, in accordance with Appendix 2, the Board may avail of the advice of a Technical Assessor which will be confined to the qualifications, skills and experience of the applicants and the Advisor will at all times guard against influencing panel members for or against a particular applicant.

In appointing a Technical Assessor the Board will ensure this is based on recognised sector competent skills, qualifications, eg, CIPFA, CIPD.

An independent Technical Assessor will be invited to attend shortlisting and interviewing for the post of Chief Fire Officer. The Assessor can give advice but the panel must take the decision.

## **12 ORDER OF MERIT**

In recruitment exercises with a single panel the applicants will be ranked in order of merit.

Where a recruitment exercise has involved a number of panels the applicants will be ranked in overall order of merit, once all interviews have been completed.

## **13 RESERVE LISTS**

Reserve lists of successful applicants will normally be kept open for no longer than 12 months from the date on which the interviewing panel completed its deliberations; unless there are cogent practical reasons for extending the period. Appointments from the reserve list will always be subject to available funding.

If the same vacancy arises within one year of the interview date, the post may be offered to applicants from the reserve list. "Same vacancy" is defined as a post with the same Job Description, Personnel Specification and on the same salary scale. Where similar posts arise, NIFRS will consult with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, under its Voluntary Undertaking with the Commission, regarding the use of existing reserve lists.

Applicants who are on the reserve list will be asked if they wish their name to be kept on a reserve list. They may withdraw their name from the list at any time.

#### **14 OPERATIONAL SELECTION CYCLE (RELEVANT TO ROLE)**

A selection cycle (relevant to role) may be used to determine a list of successful candidates, in rank order, from which promotions can be made. The assessment and selection process for each role will be outlined in a Selection Implementation Plan and will reflect this Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection.

Once a selection cycle (relevant to role) has been completed, the successful candidates will be placed, in rank order, on a selection list. The selection list will be held confidentially by the Recruitment and Services Unit.

Once the valid selection list has been compiled, specific posts will be advertised in the normal manner and applications will be made on a standard form and the selection list will be used to fill each specific vacancy.

The selection list will be used to fill vacant posts over a specified period as noted in the Selection Implementation Plan (relevant to role).

Appointment from the selection list may be subject to successful completion of an Operational Test of Potential (OTOP) if the successful candidate does not hold an active OTOP.

#### **15 PRE-EMPLOYMENT CHECKS**

The successful applicant will be required to:

- provide documentation to confirm their identity;
- provide evidence of their right to work in the United Kingdom;
- provide documentation to verify information already provided on the application form, eg, confirm employment history, qualifications, employer's consent to attend fire calls, driving licence, etc;
- declare any unspent convictions;
- provide valid identification documents for a criminal record disclosure (as appropriate);
- complete an Access NI Disclosure form;
- successfully complete a medical examination; and
- provide satisfactory references.

In addition to these checks an applicant may be required to provide information for financial background checks; these are not required for all posts and will be dependent on the responsibilities of the role. For more sensitive positions, the successful applicant may be required to provide additional information for National Security Vetting (NSV). Applicants will be made aware of the relevant pre-employment check they will be required to take at the initial recruitment stage.

## **16 NOTIFICATION TO APPLICANTS**

Applicants will normally receive 10 days' notice of the date to attend assessment, tests and interview.

Applicants will be notified in writing, if they have been successful/unsuccessful at each stage of the shortlisting process.

In the case of Firefighter applicants, every effort will be made to keep applicants advised of the progress of their applications during the recruitment campaign.

Applicants will be notified in writing if they have been added to the reserve list and will be asked if they wish their name to be kept on the reserve list. Applicants will also be advised when the reserve list has expired.

## **17 DOCUMENTATION/CUSTODY OF RECORDS**

All papers used during the shortlisting and interview procedure must be signed and dated, and returned to the Recruitment and Services Unit for custody and retrieval in the event of Discovery of documents. These should include all "rough" notes made at each stage.

All participants must ensure that their contemporaneous notes, including rough notes, are clear and comprehensive and are sufficiently legible to allow for meaningful recall in the event of proceedings.

Sensitive personal information will be handled and stored appropriately and kept for only as long as is necessary (usually a maximum of 6 months). Information relating to criminal convictions collected in the course of the recruitment process once it has been verified through an Access NI disclosure will be destroyed unless in exceptional circumstances the information is clearly relevant to the ongoing employment relationship.

All other documents will be retained for at least 3 years by the Human Resources Department.

## **18 APPOINTMENT OF APPLICANT**

The Recruitment & Services Unit will make an offer of employment to the successful applicant outlining any conditions of appointment and the Terms and Conditions of appointment.

## **19 INDUCTION**

It is NIFRS policy for all appointees to receive a relevant induction programme.

**SCHEDULE OF ADVERTISING**

	Internet	National Press	Establishment Instruction	FINDS*	Professional Journal (if required)	Belfast Telegraph	Irish News	Newsletter (as required)	Local Press** (as required)	Other Media	Job Market
<b>Principal Officer</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	As required**			
<b>Area Commander</b>			✓	✓							
<b>Group Commander to Crew Commander</b> (Wholetime & Controls)			✓	✓							
<b>Watch Commander to Crew Commander</b> (RDS)			✓***								
<b>Firefighter</b> (Wholetime/Controls)	✓					✓	✓	As required**			
<b>Firefighter (RDS)</b>	✓								✓	✓	
<b>Operational Assessment Centre</b>			✓	✓							
<b>Director</b>	✓				✓	✓	✓	As required**			
<b>Principal Officer Grades</b>	✓				✓	✓	✓	As required**	As required**		
<b>Senior Officer Grades to Scale 1</b>	✓					✓	✓	As required**	As required**		✓

\* Fire Information National Data Service

\*\* The Recruitment and Services Unit will determine which papers will be used to ensure that as many eligible and suitably qualified applicants as possible have an opportunity to apply. .

\*\*\* To take account of the criteria to live and/or work within 5 minutes' travel time of the relevant Retained station.



**SCHEDULE FOR SHORTLISTING, ASSESSMENT AND INTERVIEWING PANELS**

The following schedule sets out arrangements for shortlisting and interviewing panels for all posts within NIFRS:

**(a) Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive** – Board appointment(s), composition of the panel to be confirmed when structures are agreed.

**(b) Principal Officer/Director (excluding Chief Fire Officer)** – the panel will consist of a minimum of:

- the Chair of the Board; and
- a minimum of 2 non-executive Members of the NIFRS Board as selected by the Chair of the Board;
- the Chief Executive; and
- the Chief Fire Officer (as appropriate).

The Director of Human Resources (or nominated deputy) will be in attendance and an Independent Technical Assessor may also be in attendance.

Chairperson – The Chairperson of the Board or other non-executive Member nominated by the Chair of the Board.

**(c) All posts up to and including Area Commander** - the panel will consist of 3 Officers nominated by the Director of Human Resources, in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer, as appropriate.

Chairperson – The highest ranking Officer or other Officer as nominated by the Director of Human Resources.

**(d) All posts up to and including PO Grade Support staff** - the panel will consist of 3 Officers nominated by the Director of Human Resources.

Chairperson – The Human Resources Officer or other Officer as nominated by the Director of Human Resources

**Shortlisting and Interview Panels** (up to and including Area Commander/PO Grade Staff) will normally be constituted as follows:

- (a) Three Officers 2 roles above the vacancy\*; or
- (b) Chairperson 2 roles above the vacancy and 2 other Officers **one role above the vacancy**, one of whom should **ideally** have line management responsibility for the post holder\*.

**Assessment Panels** will normally be constituted as follows:

- (a) Two Officers - one Officer 2 roles above the vacancy and one Officer one role above the vacancy\*; or
- (b) Two Officers - one Officer one role above the vacancy and an appropriate Officer from the Human Resources Department\*.

NIFRS may alternatively use external sector competent assessors to constitute an assessment panel either wholly or in part for assessment centres or OTOPs.

A Human Resources Officer will be in attendance at all shortlisting and interviewing, either as an adviser or panel member, except for RDS personnel when responsibility for procedures is devolved to Area Command, with direction given by the Human Resources Department.

All participating Officers will be advised, as required, by the Human Resources Department and will be given training on all aspects of Recruitment and Selection.

\*Where a Human Resources Officer is a panel member, they will be at the appropriate grade. Officers may include Members of NIFRS Board.

**DEFINITION OF RELEVANT FAMILY RELATIONSHIP**

For the purpose of this Code a relevant family relationship shall be deemed to exist between an employee or Member and a person who is an applicant for employment (or promotion) within NIFRS if he or she is a husband, wife or partner, including civil partner, or if the person who is an applicant for employment (or promotion) is the:

- parent
- son or daughter
- brother or sister
- uncle or aunt
- nephew or niece
- grandparent
- grandson or grand-daughter
- first cousin\*

of the employee or Member, or of the spouse of the employee or Member.

\* This will be relevant where the relationship between the 2 is close and where there is regular contact.