

Corporate Plan

2017-2020



Contents

Message from the Chairman	3-4
Foreword	5
Our Purpose	6
Our Statutory Responsibilities	7
Our Principles	8
Our Future Direction	9-13
Recruitment & Selection	14
Our People	15
Working with Others	16
Accountability	17
Summary	18
Financial Performance	19
Contact us	20

Message from the Chairman



**It gives me great pleasure to present
NIJAC's Corporate Plan for the next three
years (2017-2020).**

Under the 2014 to 2017 Corporate Plan we have taken great strides in continuous improvement through the work of our Senior Appointments Review Team and the Developing Best Practice in Recruitment project. Targeted comparisons with sister organisations will continue. During this time the representation of women in the senior judiciary has increased and I am confident that the collaborative effects of NIJAC with the relevant professional bodies will continue to encourage a broad diversity in our applicant pool.

There are a number of changes in the wider justice sector that may impact upon NIJAC. Amongst these is the move to a single jurisdiction and continued pressure upon the High Court and Coroner's Court as a result of legacy issues. The difficult financial environment facing the public sector and possible legislative changes will also continue to have an impact as will Tribunal Reform, the Review of Family Justice, and the increasing digitalisation of the courts and tribunals.

NIJAC supports the effectiveness of the justice system through the appointment and recommendation for appointment of those determined to be most meritorious and, therefore, it is extremely important that our Corporate and Business Plans remain flexible

documents – able to adapt to change quickly and to respond to external factors.

The Justice Committee has reviewed NIJAC and we expect that the Committee may wish to revisit their findings and consider the increased diversity in Northern Ireland’s courts and tribunals, particularly in the High Court. Attracting applications from under-represented groups remains a priority. Even though there has been a degree of success we are not complacent about our duty to encourage applications from the widest possible pool.

I would like to thank my fellow Commissioners and the staff of NIJAC who give much to ensure that the assessment and selection process delivers those most meritorious and that this is an organisation which is fit for purpose and consistently delivers sound governance and stewardship of public funds.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Declan Morgan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sir Declan Morgan

Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland and Chairman of NIJAC.

Foreword



The Chairman has outlined the challenges facing NIJAC and I recognise the importance of delivering on our core commitments while ensuring our plans are flexible and responsive.

The changing environment and financial constraints facing all public services requires us to be innovative and open to alternative ways of working, which we will focus on over the next three years. Looking forward I am very much aware of the importance of understanding the environment for courts and tribunals and our applicants.

The continued need to ensure that we provide a high quality service that supports Commissioners in delivering meritorious appointments is also a priority given the potential impact each judicial office holder has on society. Therefore we will continue to benchmark all of our services across both the core business of appointments and the high standards of governance required of public servants, reflecting integrity in all that we do.

This Corporate Plan has evolved through helpful consultation with those with whom we work routinely and we always welcome feedback from representative groups and individuals. The future will be challenging but we are committed to delivering high quality services as we fulfill our statutory responsibilities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mandy Kilpatrick".

Mandy Kilpatrick

Chief Executive

Our purpose

We are 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 over-riding 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, age¹, disability, sexual orientation or dependant responsibilities.

We are committed to continuous improvement and our aim is to ensure that those who apply will undergo an appointment process that assesses their experience, character and personal integrity, knowledge, skills and abilities fairly and openly.

In this way we are confident that those determined to be the most meritorious, those with the requisite abilities, qualities and skills for the position under recruitment, will be appointed.

¹ Under Statute the upper age limit of 70 years applies to judicial appointments

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 for appointment 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 listed² judicial offices are such that those holding judicial office 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 whenever we are 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.

² Schedule 1 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002.

Our principles

The principles which guide and inform our work are:

- **Independence**
We will ensure we fulfil all of our 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

There is a requirement for talented people of sound judgement and character to serve their communities as judicial office holders. To hold judicial office high standards have to be met, as well as giving a commitment to serve the interests of justice. Applicant numbers are generally increasing against a background where our resources have been pared back. However, our programme of appointments continues unabated. There is a need to explore new ways of working that further ensure the merit principle. As an organisation committed to learning we will continue to review, compare, evaluate and improve our policy and practice. Commissioners and staff alike will partake in a programme of continuous improvement; in the next three years we will explore online testing, telephone/video assessments and supporting committees differently by e-working.

We also anticipate the next three years as being a very busy period of research and analysis, outreach and recruitment. Each of these aspects will be reflected in our key objectives as set out in the Business Plan year on year.

It is 12 years since our inception and we are pleased with the working relationships which have been fostered, for example, with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, the Office of the Lord Chief Justice, and the legal and medical professional bodies.

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. During the period of this Corporate Plan it is anticipated

that the Department of Justice will be further considering and consulting upon Tribunal Reform. It is likely that the outcome will result in some degree of change in how we operate and our Business Plans will be kept under review to reflect any resulting change. In the next three years we will also examine the roles of Commissioners and staff. We will consider alternative operating models, for example, through the use of third party providers whilst the Commission provides an oversight role. These options will be considered to ensure we represent value for money and are responsive to business need, while maintaining exceptional standards of governance in recruitment and selection for judicial office.

Operationally we need to keep our accommodation provision under review, not only as fit for purpose but also as value for money.

Our diversity data sets have been accruing for over 5 years and are beginning to yield some valuable information on the basis of, for example, gender and community background but also by fee paid and substantive appointments should they be legal, lay or medical. Our findings may lead to commissioning further research and analysis (including on how we are viewed) that will help inform our future direction.

We will continue to support applicants by informing the applicant pools through informal and formal outreach of how to do the best they can when applying and promoting the guidance available on our website. We will also continue to work to manage disappointment by actively encouraging applicants to seek feedback on their applications, in writing or in person as appropriate. Where a complaint is raised we will work to address and resolve any concerns where we can.

Our Corporate Plan is set around our statutory commitments, to appoint and recommend for appointment solely on merit, those with the requisite abilities, qualities and skills for the office under recruitment and 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 offices are reflective of the community in Northern Ireland.

The following diagram identifies four key work areas, each of which interact with the other and work towards delivering the key aim of meritorious appointments.



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. Each annual Business Plan will set out

- what work we will do, how we will do it and by when we will do it.
- how we will work across teams, with Commissioners and with key stakeholders to achieve our key aim.
- how we will work with those responsible for the Courts and Tribunals so that we can best meet their needs and capture their input.
- how we will continue working with other public appointments bodies to identify areas of best practice in appointment methodology which will both encourage applications and inspire confidence in our recruitment methods.
- how we will improve our services, and their impact.
- 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.

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.

We will do what we can to facilitate all who are interested in becoming a judicial office holder to 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.

Recruitment & Selection



Recruitment
& Selection

What we will do

We will strive to meet our statutory duty to ensure a judiciary which is appointed on merit, from, as far as is reasonably practicable, a pool of applicants reflective of the society in Northern Ireland.

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 that meets business needs and supports 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 provide continuing professional development for our staff to ensure we provide a high quality public service across appointments and governance.

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 engage openly and constructively with key stakeholders.
- We will engage positively with the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) and Departmental representatives to ensure timely appointments.
- We will build upon our relationships with Judicial Appointments Commission England & Wales and Judicial Appointments Board Scotland and develop a relationship with the new appointments body within the Republic of Ireland.
- We will work with the Judicial Appointments Ombudsman to build confidence in the appointments process.

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 Executive Office .

Summary

Recruitment & Selection

- 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 that meets business needs and supports 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

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Accountability

- 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 Executive Office (TEO).

Financial Performance

The Annual Report and Accounts sets out our performance each year. The forecast is detailed in our Business Plan.

Expenditure for the years ending 31 March 2016, 2015 and 2014 is shown in the table below.

	2015-16	2014-15	2013-14
Staff costs	617,081	659,132	732,437
Other expenditure	481,412	543,746	624,270
Depreciation, amortisation and revaluation	2,932	3,398	12,754
Income	(130,897)	(157,302)	(139,387)
Total	970,528	1,048,974	1,230,074
Capital	780	3,116	234
Total (including Capital)	971,308	1,052,090	1,230,308
Cost saving on prior year	7.67	14.49	6.39%

The final audited figures for the year ending 31 March 2017 can be found in the 2016-17 Annual Report & Accounts published later in the year.

Contact us

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

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