

**Plenary Minutes**  
**14 December 2023 at 9.30 am.**

**Present:** The Rt. Hon Dame Siobhan Keegan, the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland (Chair)  
Mr Bernard Brady KC  
Mr Colm Donaghy  
Mr Paul Douglas  
Mrs Maureen Eccles  
Judge Michael Humphreys KC  
Mr Brian McTeggart  
Judge Geoffrey Miller KC

**In Attendance:** Mrs Tonya McCormac  
Ms Adeline Frew  
Mr Duncan Greer  
Mr Andrew Millar  
Mr Raymond Donnelly  
Mrs Rebecca Mayes (Secretary)

**1. Apologies and Introductions**

1.1 Apologies from Mr Robinson and Lord Justice Treacy.

1.2 The Chair welcomed everyone to the last Plenary of 2023.

**2. Conflicts of Interest**

No conflicts of interest were declared regarding items included on the agenda.

**3. Confidentiality**

The Chair reiterated to all the need for confidentiality to be maintained.

#### **4. Minutes of meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023**

4.1 Mr McTaggart noted that at point 7.1 in the minutes it should say 'reduction in the number of committee meetings for budgetary purposes'. The Chair agreed to approve the minutes once this is changed.

**Action Point:** Amend minutes of 21<sup>st</sup> September 2023 to reflect the point on reduction in the number of committee meetings.

4.2 Actions arising from previous minutes – Mr Robinson has shared EU Diversity statistics with Ms Frew and Mrs McCormac. SLT will examine these and circulate electronically to Plenary.

**Action Point:** EU Diversity Statistics to be circulated to Plenary.

#### **5. Chief Executive's Report**

The Report having been circulated in advance; members were invited to raise any matters from the report. Mrs McCormac advised several matters would also be covered by the Chairs of the Standing Committees later in the Agenda.

5.1 Mrs McCormac commented on the status of the Commission complaint which is currently with NIJAO. NIJAO has sought legal advice providing clarification on the release of the draft report in terms of the legislation. NIJAO is seeking the Commissions views on the release of the draft report. The Commission have been asked to respond to NIJAO by 19 December 2023. Members again commented on length of time this has taken. In answer to a query Mrs McCormac indicated that a timeline for final outcome of this could not yet be provided as this stage as this is matter for NIJAO and not for the Commission.

**Action Point:** In relation to Commission Complaint NIJAC will forward response on the NIJAO query by 19 December 2023.

5.2 The Chair stated that NIJAC needs to be front-facing with its approach to Reasonable Adjustments. Ms Frew provided assurances that a number of actions had been undertaken. A follow-up internal review of the policy and procedures has increased the focus on this area which together with staff training has raised awareness and levels of vigilance around this.

5.3 Mrs McCormac advised that the Tri-Partite meeting which was hosted by Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland (JABS) on 10 October 2023 and attended by the Chair, herself and Mr Millar, was a very successful event. She commented that NIJAC representatives were able to make a very positive contribution to all the discussions. The Chair echoed this and in particular thanked Mr Millar for bringing his knowledge and expertise of Appointments to proceedings which showed NIJAC in a very positive light. The Chair noted that the 2024 Tri-Partite will be hosted by the Judicial Appointments Commission for England and Wales (JAC) and if funds were available she would like to expand the NIJAC representation for the event to include a number of other NIJAC Commissioners.

5.4 The board had a discussion on the potential implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for NIJAC. It was agreed that both opportunities and threats might exist with the potential increased use of AI by Applicants and by NIJAC. Mr Millar confirmed that AI would be added to the topics for review by the Appointments team and in particular as an item within the scope of the ongoing review of shortlisting. The Chair suggested it might also be useful to add developments in AI to the ongoing information exchanges with JAC/JABS. Mr Greer also undertook to touch base with the Internal Auditors to initiate an early discussion on this area that would be conducted through ARAC.

**Action Point:** Mr Millar to add AI to the list of topics for review by Appointments Team within the scope of the ongoing review of shortlisting.

**Action Point:** Mr Greer to discuss the area of AI with Internal Auditors and report back to ARAC.

5.5 Tonya McCormac provided an update on the performance dashboard, advising that all Outcomes and Targets are currently on track for delivery. Mr McTeggart asked if the applicant survey results of 38.5% were being examined with the aim of improving this percentage. Mr Millar indicated that he is currently doing a review in this area and that this would feed into the discussions of Outcomes and Actions for the 2024-25 Business Planning workshops.

## **6. Selection Committee updates**

6.1 An update paper for each scheme was presented.

### **6.2 Appeals Tribunal Medical Member 2023**

Mr Douglas, Chair of the selection committee, provided an update. This was noted by Plenary.

### **6.3 ITFET 2023**

Mr Donaghy, Chair of the selection committee, provided an update. This was noted by Plenary.

### **6.4 Master EJO & Taxation**

Mr Douglas, Chair of the selection Committee, provided a verbal update. This was noted by Plenary.

## **7. Business Committee**

7.1 Mr Donaghy presented the minutes of the Business Committee meeting of 28 November 2023. He confirmed that an improving financial position can now be reported for 2023-24. He directed members to the Finance Report in the Business Committee minutes. This contained a note of caution for 2024-25 since the savings in 2023-24 are expected to be non-recurring. He emphasised that the priority now is the ongoing communication with TEO on how critical it is that NIJAC be provided with an Opening Budget Allocation at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 that stabilises NIJAC's financial position.

7.2 Mr McCormac confirmed that this key message on the stabilisation of NIJAC Finances has been relayed to the TEO Sponsorship Unit through financial

presentations and single issue meetings. She now plans to meet with the TEO Accounting Officer.

7.3 Mrs McCormac indicated decisions on additional work being taken on by NIJAC will require Departmental / Ministerial agreements and will not happen in 2024-25. However NIJAC would need adequately resourced for any increase in schemes undertaken.

7.4 Mr Donaghy advised that there will be a follow-up review of the Staff Structure by BCS to take place in January - February 2024. This will examine how the revised structure is operating and if further refinement would further enhance the organisation.

## **8. Advisory Committee**

8.1 Judge Miller presented the minutes of the Advisory Committee meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023. He advised that a number of pieces of work were in progress and these would culminate in reports to Plenary in March 2024.

8.2 Mr Millar confirmed that he is drafting the reports for the Feedback and Shortlisting reviews and these will be considered by the Advisory Committee in March 2024.

8.3 Judge Miller advised Plenary that Mr Millar will be the Interim Director of Appointments and Communications from 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024 to allow for a handover with Ms Frew before her retirement on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024.

## **9. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

9.1 Mr Douglas presented the minutes of the meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and guided members through the document.

9.2 Mr Douglas confirmed that he attended the TEO ARAC Chairs meeting and had discussed at ARAC a number of items from this meeting. This included the importance of ALBs supplying timely information to TEO Finance for the

Consolidated Accounts exercise at the financial year end which will be added to the NIJAC year end timetable.

## **10. Any Other Business**

10.1 The Chair confirmed that KC Interviews would be held in Headline next Tuesday and Wednesday (19 Dec and 20 Dec 2023) and requested that staff ensure the heating was operating in the rooms on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor.

10.2 The Chair gave an update on the appointment of the two new Judicial Commissioners. She confirmed her Office would plan to send the nominations to TEO in January 2024 with a view to either the Lord Chancellor or the TEO Ministers considering these for Approval.

10.3 The Chair advised the Board that her Office has written to invite NIJAC to appoint The Honourable Mr Justice Rooney as a Coroner effective as soon as possible. The Board approved this appointment.

10.4 Mrs McCormac reminded Members that three of the Lay Commissioners complete their first term in April 2024, one ends his second term in June 2025 and one position remains vacant. Discussions are ongoing with TEO on the timing of a future Lay Commissioner Appointment Scheme.

10.5 The Chair advised that this would be the last Plenary meeting for Ms Frew as she is retiring on 31 January 2024. The Chair and Members thanked Ms Frew for her expertise and commitment to NIJAC for the last 16 years and wished her luck in her future endeavours.

**Date of next meeting:** 21 March 2024 at 9.30am

**Signed:**



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**The Right Honourable Dame Siobhan Keegan, the Lady Chief Justice of  
Northern Ireland, Chair of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments  
Commission**

**Dated:** 21-03-24