

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission



Guidance for Applicants

For Senior Salaried Legal Appointments (With References)



NIJAC

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Appointments Commission*

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Introduction

This document sets out guidance for legal applicants for judicial appointments. The purpose of the guidance is to demystify the judicial assessment and selection process and to focus applicants on their preparation for assessment. Not all the information in this guide may be relevant to a particular scheme and therefore all applicants should read their scheme's Applicant Information Booklet carefully.

All applicants are reminded that effective preparation for the assessment and selection process is a key step in increasing your chances of success. All applicants are advised to read this guidance and access NIJAC's other guidance through the job portal and other information available on [NIJAC's website](#).



Preparing for Judicial Assessment and Selection

The experience of most organisations involved in appointments is that applicants who make a significant effort in their preparation perform very well. NIJAC's experience is no different. We strongly encourage anyone making an application to prepare thoroughly. In order to assist you in that preparation we set out a number of actions that you can take to increase your awareness of the role you intend to apply for and to inform you about parts of the assessment process that you can make specific preparations for.

There are a number of activities that will assist you in your research and preparation:

- When aiming to secure judicial appointment, it is imperative that you research the judicial office you are interested in. This will also assist in ensuring this is an office in which you wish to serve. Research significant, emerging and/or topical areas associated with the jurisdiction of the court or tribunal.
- Look ahead at the types of judicial office you are interested in. Remember fee-paid office is a great opportunity to develop knowledge, experience and skills.
- A key factor in the process is the Judicial Profile. The Judicial Profile is an overall framework which provides a picture of what is required of those to be appointed to judicial office. It is essential that you examine the Criteria and Elements required (as demonstrated through the Person Specification for each role) throughout each step of the process.
- Develop examples which demonstrate the abilities that the job requires. You can do this by keeping a note of the work you have been involved in, particularly any complexity associated with it. This will assist you in providing examples regarding your skills, attributes, behaviour and effectiveness.

- It is understood that privacy of application is a very important issue. However, you are encouraged to talk to people who may be able to assist you in your research, preparation and application. Use the various informal and formal networks available to you.
- Use the Point of Contact associated with a recruitment scheme (if one is available). The Point of Contact (named in the Applicant Information Booklet) will be a serving judicial office holder who will be able to give a confidential insight to serving in the specific judicial office.



Demystifying the Person Specification

The **Person Specification** reflects what is required to serve successfully in a particular judicial office under recruitment. It is the key information for applicants to make reference to when completing their application and in thorough preparation for the assessment and selection process. The Person Specification is important because it sets out the Criteria and Elements for appointment and is the basis against which applicants will be assessed.

The Person Specification is derived from **The Judicial Profile**.

The Judicial Profile is an overall framework divided between two overarching areas: Skills & Attributes and Behaviours & Effectiveness.

Within both of the overarching areas there are three Criteria:

Skills & Attributes

- Knowledge and Expertise
- Intellectual Capacity
- Exercising Judgement

Behaviours & Effectiveness

- Leading and Collaborating Effectively
- Communication Effectively
- Managing Effectively

The Judicial Profile is a 'living' framework which expands and flexes to the needs of each judicial office at each iteration of recruitment.

The Person Specification is created for each role by the Selection Committee. Each Selection Committee will utilise The Judicial Profile framework to make its own determination on the Criteria and Elements to be used as the measure against which merit is determined.

As well as the Judicial Profile framework there will be two other significant components to that process:

- Job Description
- Co-opted Member - Input of the presiding officer at the relevant tier (or a colleague nominated by them)

Through a process of job analysis the Selection Committee for each scheme will identify the criteria and elements from within the Judicial Profile framework which are relevant to the role and devise a unique Person Specification from which they will determine merit.

The key for you as an applicant is to ensure that you read the Person Specification carefully and are able to evidence how you meet the Criteria and Elements listed.

The assessment of your application will be based on how well you demonstrate each aspect.

The Person Specification relating to the job you are applying for is available in the Applicant Information Booklet for the role.

In summary the criteria outlined in the Person Specification:

- Identifies the necessary skills, attributes, behaviours and aspects of effectiveness that the ideal appointee/s should have.
- Reflects the requirements of the office outlined in the Job Description.
- Are measured throughout the process e.g. in your application form at shortlisting, during your interview and complemented by other methods.



How are you assessed?

Applicants are assessed in a range of ways throughout the process. Assessments provide a comprehensive overview of an applicant's strengths and areas for development. Each assessment is designed to simulate, as closely as possible, the work of the role being recruited to.

An application form containing a Self-Assessment (or a Statement of Suitability which is an abbreviated form of the Person Specification) is normally the first step and is submitted for most recruitment schemes. Meeting the eligibility requirements is the first hurdle. Once NIJAC has assessed that your application meets the eligibility requirements, you will then progress to the shortlisting stage. If shortlisted, applicants will then be invited to the final stage of assessment which is likely to include an interview and another form of assessment e.g. the completion of a situational judgment exercise.

NIJAC uses a combination of methods to assess suitability for judicial office which aim to assess the different elements of The Person Specification. You will be required to participate in different assessment methods tailored to the office under recruitment. A Selection Committee will assess your suitability through your demonstration of evidence gathered by the various assessment methods.

A **paper sift** may be used for shortlisting of applicants for invitation to the final assessment stage. The Self-Assessment (or Statement of Suitability) part of your application is examined for evidence against the whole Person Specification (or specific elements within the Person Specification in the case of the Statement of Suitability). The Selection Committee seeks information within this section which provides them with a real insight to the range and depth of your skills, attributes, behaviours and aspects of effectiveness. In this section you need to:

- Show your ability to fulfil the criteria set out in the Person Specification (or specific elements within).
- Provide clear examples of how you meet the criteria and elements set out in the Person Specification. Ensure the examples link to the criteria.
- You need to **provide sufficiently detailed examples or you may not be shortlisted**.
- Recognise that it is a skill to précis the detail and volume of examples into a succinct and informative narrative within the allocated word allowance. Your spending time on your application will help the Selection Committee learn as much about you as possible.
- Address simply **WHAT** you do, and what you have done; and importantly **HOW**.
- Ensure that you make clear statements in writing your narrative. **The Selection Committee will not make any assumptions from the title of your role or the nature of your work as to the level of knowledge and skills you possess**. You must detail **WHAT** you did and **HOW**.
- Examples set out in your self-assessment may be referred to during the interview so need to be prepared to talk about the examples you have provided.

In some competitions you may also be provided with an additional word allowance to provide in depth evidence in relation to one specific example to demonstrate a particular Criteria.



The **STAR** tool may be helpful to allow you to map out the examples provided in your self-assessment and also at interview stage. If you can quantify any results or impact you made, even better. Focus mainly upon 'Action' and 'Result' as this is where to elaborate on your actions and decisions, and the impact they made.

Using the STAR tool is not an end in and of itself, rather it is a useful mechanism to structure your Self-Assessment (or answers at interview) in a way which enables the reader to better understand the example.

Situation

Explain the situation that you were in. This should be a short description, it could be: 'during my time as a solicitor', 'whilst working in private practice', or 'whilst working in the public sector'.

Task

You need to briefly explain what you did and how you met the criteria. If you were working in a group or as a member of a panel, explain the overall objective but focus on your own role.

- What was the objective?
- What were you trying to achieve?
- What is the context of the example?

Action

This is the most substantial part (around 60-80%) of any example and you want to include:

- What you did.
- Why you did it.
- How you did it.
- Which skills you used.

*Tip: In this section you really need to focus on **your** unique contribution to the task at hand. The example scenario needs to be written for a lay reader (lay representation on Selection Committees is a statutory requirement).*

Result

There is little point in explaining the situation, task and action if the assessor is left wondering whether what **you** did made any difference. So be prepared to explain, for example:

- What happened as a result of the actions you took?
- Did you achieve the objective?
- What difficulties and challenges did you face?
- Did you have to adapt your approach?
- What would you do differently or improve?

Checklist:

- Only use a real example of your own work
- It must be set in the context of an example or multiple examples and must include reference to your specific actions in the example(s)
- If it is a group task focus on **your** actions

- In the action part of the example, make sure you cover the skill, attribute, behaviour or aspect of effectiveness that you are addressing
- Be concise

A **Test** is normally knowledge based but can extend to skills such as analysis and making decisions (or critical thinking). It is frequently a multiple-choice type test but essay type responses can also be sought. It is normal practice to set a threshold, particularly when there are a high volume of applications anticipated, and to invite only those with the highest scores to the next stage of the assessment and selection process.

An **In-Tray exercise** can be used to assess knowledge and your ability to prioritise and organise your time effectively. It can often reflect typical tasks expected in the office being recruited for.

Examples of what evidence the Selection Committee may look for:

- how well you plan and prioritise tasks;
- how well you identify a key theme or issue; your analysis, interpretation and evaluation of information;
- how quickly you can arrive at an outcome or decision in a robust way;
- how effective and robust your recommended actions are in dealing with a problem;
- how you deal with working under pressure or in stressful conditions;
- your oral or written communication style;
- how easily you can identify the key points from the volume of information;
- how adaptable and flexible your approach is in dealing with a range of tasks quickly.

A role-based exercise, normally in the format of a **Situational Judgement Exercise**, is based on past or adapted cases or judgments. Situational Judgement Exercises may require a written response and may occur prior to the interview date; typically though it is used within an interview with questions to probe and challenge your perspective, rationale and considerations. Examples of Situational Judgement Exercises are available on the NIJAC website.

A **Role-Play** is normally but not exclusively set in a court-based scenario. A role-play is intended to assess your ability and potential through a simulated activity. Role-plays can come in different formats. You may be presented with a list of cases and be asked to take on the role of a judicial office holder. Alternatively you may role-play a particular situation to assess your skills and personal qualities on a one-to-one basis. Often experienced professional actors are used.

Interview questions will focus on the assessment of some or all of the criteria set out in the Person Specification. Examples that you have provided in the self-assessment may be questioned further by the interviewer so be prepared to expand on the information that you have provided. It may also examine how you may deal with specific challenges should you be appointed (i.e. not all questions may be about

what you have done previously but may seek you to indicate how you would deal with scenarios which can arise in the role applied for). Some questions may examine one or more areas of the Person Specification.

The Selection Committee may look at your demonstration of skills and attributes through **Written Pieces of Work** of substance and how these could potentially transfer to that expected at the level of the role applied for. The Selection Committee will have regard to the written work presented, your role in it, the degree of challenge and how you dealt with it. The Selection Committee will draw a distinction between 'run of the mill' work which may present limited legal or other professional challenge from work which presents unusual, novel or unforeseen complexities or has far reaching consequences.

The Selection Committee may provide the applicant with a topic on which to make a **Presentation** to the Committee at Interview. The presentation will be designed to assess areas across the range of The Person Specification. The topic title may be advised to the applicant some days before the assessment or immediately (e.g. 30 minutes) in advance of the interview commencing.

The Selection Committee may seek **References**. These are only sought for Senior Judicial Appointments. The Applicant Information Booklet will provide the detail of the referee arrangements when they are applicable.

Personal Integrity – The Applicant Information Booklet (AIB) sets out the range of Pre-Appointment checks that all successful applicants will be subject to prior to appointment. All applicants for office are required to declare a range of convictions and other issues upon application for judicial office. Please check the Applicant Information Booklet closely for the relevant detail.