



Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission



**Annual Business Plan
2026 – 2027**

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Introduction

Tonya McCormac, Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments
Commission (NIJAC)



“During 2025-26, NIJAC continued to have a very busy year in terms of making appointments to a number of Senior Salaried roles across our Courts and Tribunals.

These roles are critical to ensuring Access to Justice for all citizens living in Northern Ireland. As an organisation our work is key to Speeding up Justice and supporting people through our Courts and Tribunals.

2025-26 continued to be a challenging time in terms of finances. NIJAC continues to deliver against a backdrop of reduced levels of funding in the public sector and the need for ongoing efficiencies.

NIJAC has continued to collaborate and work in partnership with many organisations to deliver its’ long-term outcomes. Engaging with others in Northern Ireland, the wider UK and Ireland to deliver meritorious appointments to judicial office ensuring our judiciary is reflective of the community. As a public sector body, we are committed to integrity and openness, operating as a well-run organisation.

Throughout 2026-27 NIJAC plans to continue to innovate and collaborate with others, benchmarking best practice and we remain committed to transforming our services and delivering value for money as a public body.

2026-27 will be an exciting year as NIJAC launches the Lay Magistrates Scheme to appoint to over 100 vacancies. It has been over 20 years since this was last advertised. This scheme offers people across Northern Ireland the opportunity to contribute to the justice system and bring community to the heart of justice. Further information on this will be available on the [NIJAC Website](#) where you can also sign up for [Enews](#).

NIJAC remain strongly committed to diversity and inclusion as an organisation and have recently received reaccreditation on our journey with the highly regarded Diversity Mark.

This Business Plan continues to set the framework for our work and is underpinned by NIJAC's corporate values. NIJAC as a public body plays its' part in the wider delivery of the [Programme for Government \(2024-27\)](#).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NIJAC Chair, Board, Staff and our stakeholders for their continued commitment and support in the work of the Commission. I am looking forward to working with them during 2026-27.”

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Tonya McCormac". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Tonya McCormac
Chief Executive Officer

NIJAC VALUES



This Plan incorporates the outcomes we aspire to as an organisation. It includes key actions and measures for the period April 2026 to March 2027. These will tell us if we are delivering our business well and allow us to implement changes and make improvements, ensuring value for money. All of these are underpinned by the NIJAC Values.



The Programme for Government

On 27 February 2025 the Executive agreed a Programme for Government 2024-2027 [‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’](#). It outlines three missions with cross cutting priorities for making a real difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland. This is the environment of which all public bodies work.

NIJAC’s strategy and annual business objectives will be underpinned by and contribute to the following priorities below:

- **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls**
- **Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs**
- **Safer Communities**
- **Reform and Transformation of Public Services**

The Programme for Government sets the context for what we need to do now to make a real difference. As a public body NIJAC has a role in working with others across government and the wider community to support and enable the transformation of public services and improve the well-being of people living in Northern Ireland.



Our Statutory Responsibilities

1. To select, 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 listed 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 recommended for appointment, to a listed judicial office.
5. To publish an annual report setting out the activities and accounts for the past year.

This 2026-27 Annual Business Plan will contribute to us achieving our longer-term outcomes. When implementing the various actions within the plan, we will be identifying and managing any potential risks to achieving these and providing assurances to our stakeholders that these risks are being effectively managed by our people, systems and various controls. Through ongoing monitoring and reporting of our performance, we will continue to measure our success in delivering our outcomes.



Contact Details

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Theme	Outcomes <i>(Description of intended impact)</i>	Actions <i>(How we will achieve our outcomes)</i>	Measures <i>(How we will measure success)</i>
Recognising Merit	Assurance that NIJAC's Selection Process is fit for purpose and delivers appointments solely on the basis of merit	<p>Identify and implement 6 business improvements to validate and quality assure assessment methods using benchmarking and best practice.</p> <hr/> <p>Develop a scoping paper on the benefits and uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in judicial appointments as part of the ongoing review and modernisation of assessment methods</p>	<p>6 business improvements achieved by 31 March 2027 in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and Planning • Standards • Logistics • Role Competence • Assessment Policy • Delivery <hr/> <p>DRAFT paper presented to Advisory Committee in November 2026</p> <p>Final policy position and recommendations to Plenary by March 2027</p>

Theme	Outcomes <i>(Description of intended impact)</i>	Actions <i>(How we will achieve our outcomes)</i>	Measures <i>(How we will measure success)</i>
Reflecting the Community	To have a judiciary which is as reflective of the community as far as is reasonably practicable	<p>Pilot live reporting of data for large schemes, e.g. Lay Magistrates, informing evidence-based decision making and evaluating benefits for future schemes</p> <hr/> <p>Deliver targeted outreach initiatives for underrepresented groups and in hard-to-reach communities as part of the Lay Magistrates Scheme – e.g. more diverse applicant pools</p> <hr/> <p>Review of Equality Monitoring with focus on ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation</p>	<p>By 28 February 2027</p> <hr/> <p>By 31 August 2026</p> <hr/> <p>Implementation of updated Equality Monitoring Standards by June 2026</p>

Theme	Outcomes <i>(Description of intended impact)</i>	Actions <i>(How we will achieve our outcomes)</i>	Measures <i>(How we will measure success)</i>
Engaging with Others	Delivery of effective services through ongoing collaboration and partnership maximising NIJAC’s opportunity to influence <hr/>	Increase and develop the number of stakeholder networks through the Lay Magistrates Scheme to reach into new applicant groups by 50%. <hr/>	By 31 July 2026 <hr/>
	Increased awareness of the story of NIJAC <hr/>	Create new digital content for the website and social media channels to increase reach and raise awareness and understanding of NIJAC, including the development of Instagram and Facebook for the Lay Magistrates <hr/>	Ongoing (New social media channels by 30 April 2026) <hr/>
		Evaluate the effectiveness of the Lay Magistrates’ outreach <hr/>	Interim Report by 31 March 2027 <hr/>
		Develop the Terms of Reference for an independent research <hr/>	By February 2027 <hr/>

Theme	Outcomes <i>(Description of intended impact)</i>	Actions <i>(How we will achieve our outcomes)</i>	Measures <i>(How we will measure success)</i>
		project on NIJAC's impact on judicial appointments using quantitative and qualitative data	
Valuing our People	People are fully engaged in their work in terms of their skills and levels of motivation towards maintaining a positive culture to meet NIJAC's business outcomes	<p>Continued focus on Professional Learning Development opportunities for staff</p> <hr/> <p>Develop and implement Health and Wellbeing Programme</p> <hr/> <p>Review and implement Board Development Plan</p> <hr/> <p>Implement Diversity Mark Action Plan monitoring progress through the EDI Working Group, working towards resubmission for Silver Accreditation</p>	<p>Ongoing to March 2027</p> <hr/> <p>Throughout 2026-27</p> <hr/> <p>By 31 March 2027</p> <hr/> <p>By 31 October 2026</p>

Theme	Outcomes <i>(Description of intended impact)</i>	Actions <i>(How we will achieve our outcomes)</i>	Measures <i>(How we will measure success)</i>
Delivering a well-run organisation	NIJAC has a strong culture of good governance, accountability and financial stability that supports NIJAC's values	<p>Secure future accommodation for NIJAC headquarters</p> <hr/> <p>Finalise budget with TEO to meet both operational and capital requirements in year</p> <hr/> <p>Implement recommendations and added value comments from the external Board Effectiveness Review</p> <hr/> <p>Review Management of Complaints Handling in line with NIJAO's publication of new statutory requirements in June 2026</p>	<p>By 30 September 2026</p> <hr/> <p>By 30 June 2026</p> <hr/> <p>By 30 September 2026</p> <hr/> <p>Implementation and submission to NIJAO of NIJAC's Model Complaints Handling Procedure by 30 November 2026</p>