

Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission



Guidance for Applicants on Judicial Assessment and Selection

For Salaried Legal Appointments

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Introduction

1.1 This document sets out guidance for legally qualified applicants for judicial appointments. The purpose of the guidance is twofold, firstly to demystify the judicial assessment and selection process and secondly to focus applicants on their preparation for that assessment. Applicants should note that not all the information provided in this guide will be relevant to their particular scheme, or the level of judicial office to which they are applying and therefore all applicants should read their scheme's Applicant Information Booklet carefully.

1.2 Judicial office is one of the most important roles in society. A judge or tribunal member's decisions affect our diverse society in areas such as human rights, judicial review, family life, mental health, immigration, welfare and employment. It is clearly in the interest of the public that applications are strongly encouraged from those who consider that they can step up to the challenges encountered in these positions of trust in our courts and tribunals.

1.3 It is essential that those with a high level of intellectual capacity, knowledge & expertise, quality and ability apply, but that those high calibre applicants are also able to demonstrate an understanding of human nature and the society which they aspire to serve.

1.4 NIJAC aims to secure the best possible appointments so attracting talented people and assessing solely on the basis of merit are at the heart of what we do.

1.5 It is recognised that in a small jurisdiction such as Northern Ireland, it can be difficult for applicants to come forward. We actively encourage a diverse range of high calibre applicants, both women and men to come forward for consideration. We hope this guidance will assist and encourage you to make that first step to making an application for judicial office.



Preparing for Judicial Assessment and Selection

2.1 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.

2.2 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 Personal Profile. It is essential that you examine the criteria 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 intellectual capacity, knowledge, experience, skills and personal qualities. It will help when making an application and through the interview process.
- 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 will be a named serving judicial office holder who is not on the Selection Committee and will be able to give great insight to serving in judicial office. This means you can obtain helpful information in a confidential way. The Application Information Booklet will advise how you can contact the Point of Contact.



Demystifying the Personal Profile

3.1 What is a Personal Profile? The Personal Profile reflects what is required to serve successfully in the judicial office under recruitment. It is a key document for applicants to make reference to when completing their application and in thorough preparation for the assessment and selection process. The Personal Profile is important because it sets out the criteria for appointment and is the basis against which applicants will be assessed throughout the selection process.

3.2 The Personal Profile used for judicial office in Northern Ireland reflects two aspects of judicial office, firstly those skills, abilities and qualities which are uniform across all judicial offices and secondly, specific attributes required for the particular role. These two aspects are incorporated into one single profile.

3.3 The key for you as an applicant is to ensure that you read the profile carefully and are able to evidence how you meet the criteria listed. The assessment of your application will be based on how well you demonstrate each aspect.

3.4 The Personal Profile relating to the job you are applying for is available in the Applicant Information Booklet for the role.

3.5 What does the Personal Profile look like? There are five key areas included in the Personal Profile. These normally are:

- intellectual capacity, knowledge and expertise
- personal qualities,
- understanding and fairness
- communication skills, and
- management skills

3.6 How was it developed? It has been developed through analysis and consultation to determine the necessary skills, personal qualities, knowledge and if required, specific experience for judicial office.

3.7 In summary the criteria outlined in the Personal Profile are:

- **Based on ability:** identifying the necessary skills and qualities that the ideal appointee should have.
- **Job related:** it specifically reflect the requirements of the office outlined in the job description.
- **Measured throughout the process:** e.g. in your application form at shortlisting, and during your interview complemented by other methods such as a written exercise or a role-play.



How are you assessed?

4.1 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.

4.2 An application form containing a self assessment 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 case-study.

4.3 NIJAC uses a combination of methods to assess suitability for judicial office which aim to assess the different elements of the Personal Profile. 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.

4.4 NIJAC's principle methods of assessment are;

4.4.1 A **paper sift** may be used for shortlisting of applicants for invitation to the final assessment stage. The **self assessment part of your application** is assessed for evidence against the Personal Profile. The Selection Committee seeks information on the self assessment section which provides them with a real insight to the range and depth of your intellectual capacity, knowledge, skills and potential ability. In the self assessment section you need to:

- Show your ability to fulfil the criteria set out in the Personal Profile. The Personal Profile reflects what is required for performing effectively in the judicial office under recruitment.
- Provide clear examples of how you meet the criteria set out in the Personal Profile. 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.**

- Examples set out in your self-assessment may be referred to during the interview. You will need to be prepared to talk about the examples you have provided.

The following approach may be helpful to allow you to map out the examples provided in your self assessment and also at interview stage.

Situation – Briefly outline the situation.

Task – What was your objective? What were you trying to achieve? What is the context of the example?

Action – What did **you** (not we) actually do? What was your unique contribution and role? This is what to concentrate upon the most.

Result – Describe what the outcome was. What happened? What did you learn? Did you achieve, or not, what you set out to do? What difficulties and challenges did you face? Did you have to adapt your approach?

4.4.2 **A test** is normally a written exercise carried out in a group setting to shortlist applicants in higher volume schemes. This written assessment 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. 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.

4.4.3 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 assessors 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 to dealing with a range of tasks quickly.

4.5.4 A **role based exercise**, normally in the format of a Situational Judgement exercise, is based on past or adapted decisions or judgments. The typical objective of setting a Situational Judgement exercise is to assess your skills of analysis and making decisions. It may also assess knowledge, for example, your ability to apply

the law. Analysis and making decisions relates to an applicant's critical reasoning skills – how you analyse and evaluate complex information, identify the key and important points and reach an outcome quickly and accurately. Situational Judgement exercises may require a written response and may occur prior to the interview date; alternatively it may be used within an interview with questions to probe and challenge your perspective, rationale and considerations.

4.5.5 A Role-Play, 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-play is a common method and it is deemed one of the most effective in the field of recruitment. It provides applicants with a great opportunity to demonstrate how they could perform in the role. 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.

4.5.6 Interview questions will focus on the assessment of some or all of the criteria set out in the Personal Profile. 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. Some questions may combine one or more areas of the Personal Profile.

4.5.7 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 AIB closely for the relevant detail.