



NIJAC

*Northern Ireland Judicial
Appointments Commission*

NIJAC Corporate Plan (2020-25)

“Selecting the best people and promoting diversity”

Reviewed June 2022

About the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission

The Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission (NIJAC) is an independent public body established to manage a system for selecting and appointing members of the judiciary, up to and including High Court Judges, in Northern Ireland. We will appoint applicants solely on the basis of merit and are required to ensure that, as far as is reasonably practicable:

- A range of people reflective of the community in Northern Ireland is available for consideration whenever we are required to select an individual to be appointed, or recommended for appointment, to the judiciary.
- Appointments to the judiciary are reflective of the community in Northern Ireland.

NIJAC was established in June 2005. Our statutory duties are set out in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (as amended) which includes provisions in respect of our purpose and activities; the membership, staffing, governance, financing and our accountability.

NIJAC is governed by an independent Board chaired by the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland with 12 Commissioners drawn from the judiciary, the legal professions and lay people. Our Commissioners also sit as assessors on our Selection Committees which are augmented by co-optees with expertise in judicial office. We have a staffing complement of 12.5 people providing professional advice and administrative support to the Commission and its Committees. To support the work of the Board we have three committees - the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, the Business Committee and the Advisory Committee.

As a public body, we work in partnership with The Executive Office supporting the delivery of the Programme for Government. As such, we are required to submit an annual report to the First Minister and deputy First Minister on how we have exercised our functions, governed NIJAC, and managed our risks through effective controls. This includes keeping proper accounts and financial records and preparing a statement of accounts for each financial year which is independently audited.

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Foreword from the Chair of NIJAC



I am delighted to introduce the review of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commissions (NIJAC) Corporate Plan for the period 2020-2025 which sets out the aims and objectives of NIJAC for the remaining three years of the plan.

Having been established in June 2005 the Commission has concluded its first 15 years of operation and is now an established part of the judicial infrastructure in Northern Ireland. NIJAC is a statutory body with defined responsibilities and parameters. Our legislative obligations provide duties upon which all of our activities, aims and objectives must be founded. Those legislative duties provide a pathway for NIJAC to assess its strengths and identify where improvements are necessary.

Whilst our responsibilities are broadened by our role as a public body it is possible to concisely state the core purpose of the Commission. That core purpose, informed by statute, is to select the best people and promote diversity in the judiciary. It is that purpose to which all the Commission's activities must be tailored.

Within the original Plan we sought to assist our many stakeholders to understand the context of, and the basis for, the identification of our aims and objectives. We laid out how the Commission as a Board direct, scrutinise, monitor and report on the achievement of our aims, objectives and the intended outcomes.

NIJAC has recently reviewed its planning and performance management and has adopted the Outcomes Based Accountability approach in keeping with recommendations from the NI Audit Office. Whilst this review has not led to fundamental changes in this Corporate Plan it has been amended to reflect the outcomes based approach.

As individual Commissioners and collectively as a Board, we are bound by the Nolan principles of standards in public life and we shall set an example not just in our own actions but also in the activities of the Commission and those with whom we work.

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.

I look forward to fulfilling our statutory remit to ensure the most meritorious appointments based upon open and fair processes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Siobhan Keegan'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

The Rt. Hon. Dame Siobhan Keegan, Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Chair

Setting the Direction of NIJAC Strategic Plan 2020-2025



I am delighted to have supported our Board in the delivery of this Corporate Plan, as Chief Executive of NIJAC. The mid-term review has afforded NIJAC with the opportunity to update the Plan to reflect progress and new ways of working.

Of course, any plan is only as good as its implementation and I look forward to working with my colleagues, the NIJAC Board, and our partners to put our various activities in place that will help achieve our longer-term outcomes and contribute to the overall Programme for Government (PfG). We can only do this by working effectively together in our management team, our Board, and our partners in The Executive Office, the sector and elsewhere.

In this plan we have identified the values for which we as a public body stand. We shall seek to embed these further in all that we do in terms of the behaviours and conduct of our staff and those with whom we work. We have also identified our strategic themes and outcomes within the environment in which we operate. Continuing to deliver our Annual Business Plan will contribute to us achieving our longer-term outcomes. When planning our various activities and outputs, we shall be identifying and managing any risks to not achieving these and providing assurances to our stakeholders that these are being effectively managed by our people, systems and various controls. A challenge for us, as with public bodies generally, is to ensure our controls are working effectively.

At this stage we are not aware of any imminent or planned revisions to our statutory framework which would impact upon this forward strategy. The long standing proposal to unify tribunals within Northern Ireland has the potential to substantially change our approach to and management of tribunal schemes. Although implementation of these proposals is not imminent, we shall maintain a watching brief over such developments.

I would like to pay tribute to our Chair and Commissioners for their guidance and the way they have conducted their oversight role since my appointment. Thanks also to the Executive and broader staff team for their professionalism and dedication in carrying out their duties.

We now have a wonderful opportunity to build upon our success as we seek to achieve our outcomes over the remaining three years of the plan and further improve the important service that we provide to the public.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tonya McCormac". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tonya McCormac, Chief Executive

Our Vision Statement -

“Selecting the best people and promoting diversity”



Our Values –

Given our role and the nature of our work, it is important that we clearly articulate and put into practice our values and what we as a public body stand for. The following underpinning values represent the core behaviours of the Commission across all areas of our activities - engagement, assessment, selection, governance, and financial management.

We have developed these values with our staff and Commissioners who seek to display these when fulfilling their duties and we shall seek to embed these further through our recruitment, induction, training and development and performance activities.

Collaboration

We will work together and with others to be a high quality and effective organisation

Respect

We will treat others with the same dignity and courtesy as we expect to be treated

Integrity

We will be honest, independent, fair and professional

Openness

We will be transparent and responsive in all that we do

Innovation

We will be forward thinking and embrace opportunities for positive change

Strategic Context

Like many other public bodies, we in NIJAC operate in a dynamic and challenging environment with rising expectations about the value and quality of public services. To meet our statutory requirements, this requires us not only to focus on longer-term outcomes but also to understand the changing political, financial and technological landscape in the medium and shorter-term and being able to respond accordingly.

Programme for Government (2021)

The draft Programme for Government (PfG) has a framework of 9 outcomes which provide direction and clarity in delivering public services in Northern Ireland. The Executive Office, as our sponsoring body, have identified NIJAC as contributing directly to the following PfG Outcome:

- Everyone feels safe - we all respect the law, and each other.

NIJAC contributes to this through maintaining public confidence in the judiciary by the selection and appointment of skilled and able individuals to the judiciary which enables respect for the law and builds toward a safe community.

NIJAC has also agreed its own Long-Term Outcomes and they are as follows:

- Increasing confidence in the judiciary through meritorious appointments and reflecting the community (as far as it is reasonably practicable to do so).
- NIJAC is recognised as an open, transparent and well run organisation and valued by stakeholders.

In the context of contributing to the above PfG outcome, we have considered the following strategic imperatives in our forward plan.

The need for continuous improvement

Although our activities and methods are broadly understood by our core customers, we are aware through our evaluation and other research, of a need to continually improve awareness and understanding of our work and in particular how we assess applicants and determine merit amongst the applicant pools. In addition, whilst the volume of applicants to judicial office has increased since our inception, we are conscious that some judicial offices do not attract the level of interest which the scale of the eligible pool of applicants would suggest is possible. Therefore, a longer-term approach to improvement is needed to raise awareness of certain opportunities and to broaden access to applications for those judicial offices, in particular Medical Consultant roles.

Whilst our use of technology has broadened in recent years, it is an area where further improvement is required. We are committed to maximising the opportunities which new technology provides, especially through digitalisation of our activities.

The need for innovation

To achieve our strategic themes and the associated medium and long-term outcomes, we need to take new, different and innovative approaches across all aspects of our work. We must continue to develop and innovate in our approach to assessment through a programme of continuous improvements, for example to seek further validation of the methodologies we use. We are also aware of the need to innovate in the way we communicate information to make that information easier to understand and more accessible.

The need for engagement and collaboration

We have developed positive working relationships with others through the provision of programmes of outreach and information sharing. We have developed contacts with various partners and now seek to progress these relationships to identify and build upon opportunities to improve our service.

NIJAC has recently re-engaged with its sister bodies in England & Wales and Scotland to develop a tri-lateral approach to learning and development of our activities. It is NIJAC's intention to build upon this engagement to open avenues to learning from different sources.

Making the best use of our resources

As has been reflected across the public sector, we are operating in a challenging financial environment which is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. As well as influencing budgetary allocation to ensure a sustainable future and delivery of statutory requirements, we also need to prioritise what we do and make the best use of our resources.

We set a high value on the skills and knowledge base of our Commissioners and staff who are intrinsic to the achievement of our outcomes (with particular focus on governance, assessment and selection). Ongoing professional development to improve our knowledge and skills base will be essential to the achievement of our business objectives throughout the period of this plan.

Although budgetary pressures have constrained our ability to build upon the existing skills and knowledge base of Commissioners and staff, we intend to invest, where possible, in our people to develop their existing skills and knowledge and to promote recognition of their expertise.

Following the review of the business structure of NIJAC our staffing resources are focussed on delivering our corporate plan and that skills are developed to help its implementation, within a hybrid working environment which makes NIJAC a great place to work.

Sustainability and accountability

Sustainability is about securing the long-term future of NIJAC as well as helping to sustain our environment. We are aware of our responsibility under the Draft Programme for Government to ensure that NIJAC works to protect the environment where possible. Our drive toward modernisation and digitalisation will see improvements in our impact on the environment through reduced paper use and reduced travel mileage incurred.

We do not expect that our normal rolling programme of around ten recruitment schemes per annum will significantly change over the next five years. We still need to react in a timely manner to requests for appointments to new bodies. This will form a key task in the coming years and will need us to further modernise our operations and be more agile and flexible in order to deliver on new and evolving judicial structures in Northern Ireland.

Our Board of Commissioners as well as our Chief Executive as Accounting Officer, the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and The Executive Office Accounting Officer have an important collective leadership role to play ensuring strong public accountability for our performance, our use of resources and our decisions. Over the next five years we want to increase the trust and confidence of our stakeholders and the citizens that we serve. We shall do this by measuring our performance based on the outcomes of our activities, managing our risks, maintaining sound systems of internal control that support the achievement of our objectives, as well as fostering the right culture based upon our values.

When managing our risks, we need to consider those challenges present in the wider environment, for example the opportunities for public services as they arise from the coronavirus pandemic.

To deliver our contribution to the Programme for Government, we look forward to working in partnership with officials in The Executive Office, who we greatly value and with whom we have developed healthy and constructive relationships. The basis of our partnership and our way of working together has been developed in our new Partnership Agreement and engagement plan and the challenge of securing a sustainable funding model for NIJAC.

Key Strategic Themes

We aim to achieve our strategic outcomes in the period 2020-2025 by our commitment to deliver a programme of action and activities which are focussed on the following five key strategic themes and which is then developed further into outcomes and priorities for each theme.

Recognising merit

We shall design and implement continuous improvement of our selection processes through an applicant centred approach and assessment methods which recognise merit, promote fairness and maintain public confidence, delivering an effective judiciary now and in the future.

Reflecting the community

We shall monitor diversity in the judiciary and our applicant pools to enable us to identify underrepresentation so we can engage in activities which optimise the involvement of people meeting the required qualities, abilities and skills in our selection processes. We shall encourage applications from across the community through an applicant centred process to maximise the potential for appointments to be reflective of our community.

Engaging with others

We shall increase awareness of what we do, how we pursue our objectives and provide guidance which benefits all applicants and others with an interest in our work. We shall collaborate with key stakeholders and others to maximise the impact of our activities and we shall optimise our means of communications and engagement by modernising what we do and how we do it.

Valuing our people

We shall create the conditions by which our people (Commissioners, staff and co-opted individuals) feel supported, facilitated and inspired to do their best work.

Delivering sustainability and accountability

We shall deliver an independent, efficient and effective public service with a focus on good governance and sustainable financial management. We shall ensure that we deliver an agile, flexible, open and transparent service that maintains public confidence, underpinned by good risk & quality management and innovation.

Strategic Outcomes, Measures and Priorities

Recognising merit

Designing and implementing continuous improvement of our selection processes through an applicant centred approach and assessment methods which recognise merit, promote fairness and maintain public confidence, delivering an effective judiciary now and in the future.

Strategic Outcomes	- To have judicial appointments based on merit using a range of valid and reliable assessment methods
Measures	- Achieving 80% of responding applicants expressing satisfaction (by 31 March 2025) - Achieving 90% of responding stakeholders expressing satisfaction (by 31 March 2025)
Priorities	We will continue to quality assure existing and introduce new valid and reliable assessment methods - We will engage with those who have independent expertise in assessment and those in judicial office to maximise the validity and reliability of our assessment methods.

Reflecting the community

Monitoring diversity in the judiciary and our applicant pools to enable NIJAC to identify underrepresentation so as to engage in activities which optimise the involvement of people meeting the required qualities, abilities and skills in our selection processes. Encouraging applications from across the community through an applicant centred process to maximise the potential for appointments to be reflective of the community.

Strategic Outcomes	- To have a judiciary which is reflective of the community (as far as it is reasonably practicable to do so).
Measures	- Achieving a pool of applicants and appointed judicial office holders which reflects the breakdown of the community in NI across gender, age, ethnic origins, disability, community background and the part of Northern Ireland (if any) with which they regard themselves as being most closely associated
Priorities	- We will monitor the demographics of the respective applicant pools, those who apply and those who are appointed to identify areas of underrepresentation. - We will ensure we have applicant centred processes by identifying and addressing barriers to applications, particularly from underrepresented groups.

Engaging with others

Increasing awareness of what NIJAC does, how we pursue our objectives and provide guidance which benefits all applicants and others with an interest in our work. Collaborating with others to maximise the impact of our activities. Optimising the means of communications and engagement by modernising what we do and how we do it.

Strategic Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To have improved understanding of the work of NIJAC, including using digital platforms to share information and increase applications for judicial office - To have increased levels of engagement with stakeholders to maximise the impact of our work
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieving 80% of responding stakeholders and applicants having an understanding of what NIJAC does and how it does it (by 31 March 2025) - 15 % increase in the number of stakeholders with which we engage/collaborate (by 31 March 2025)
Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will continue to collaborate with the Departments of Justice and Health and other interested parties to identify and address the barriers to interest in judicial appointment for medical consultants. - We will focus our engagement with the professional and other relevant bodies to maximise the numbers of applications for senior judicial appointments. - We will continue to modernise our work through the use of digital platforms.

Valuing our people

Creating the conditions by which our people (Commissioners, staff and co-opted individuals) feel supported, facilitated and inspired to do their best work.

Strategic Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To have people with the knowledge and skills, together with the direction and motivation, to address challenges and deliver our longer-term business objectives
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieving 100% of L&D activity completed for all staff, commissioners and co-opted persons (by 31 March 2025) - Achieving 80% of overall staff and commissioner satisfaction (by 31 March 2025)
Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will continue to review how work is organised and delivered so that staff work within team roles that are optimally aligned to NIJAC's core business and long term organisational needs. - We will address our specific skills and knowledge needs in our Learning & Development plan (including our Board Members) so that our people are effective and feel equipped to meet NIJAC's present and future challenges.

	- We will continue to support a staff Wellbeing programme, demonstrating our genuine interest in their welfare and our desire to provide support in the workplace and beyond where possible.
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Delivering sustainability and accountability

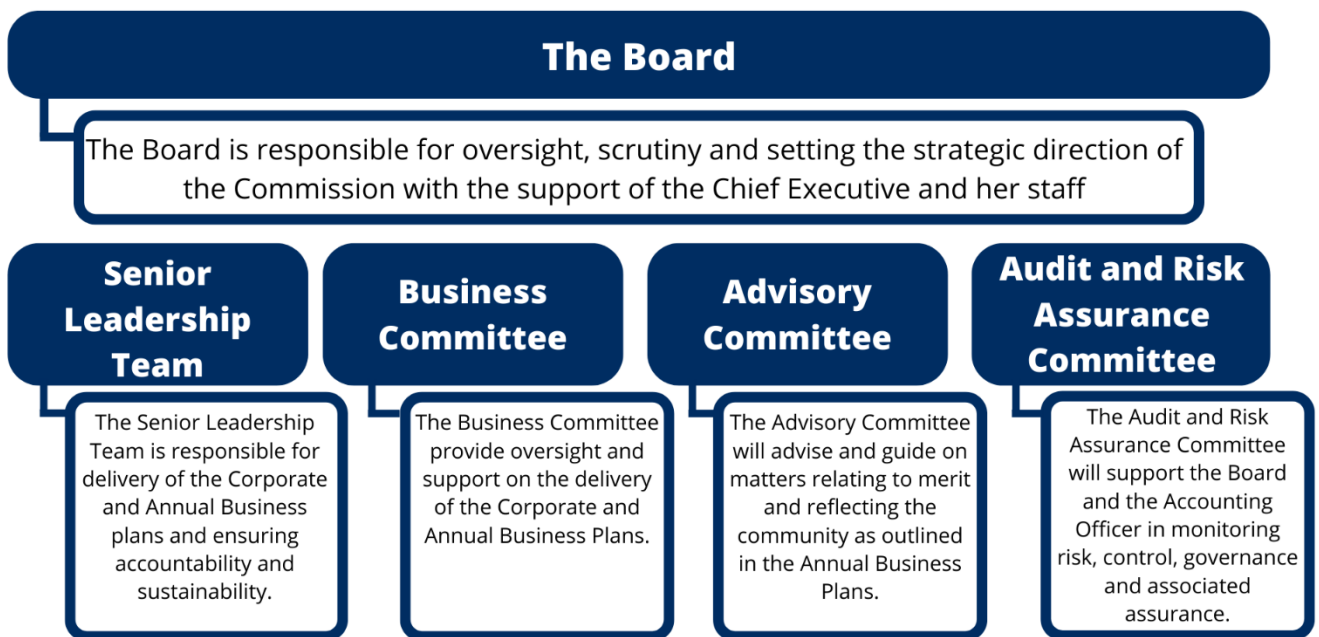
Delivering an independent, efficient and effective public service with a focus on good governance and sustainable financial management. Ensuring that we deliver an agile, flexible, open and transparent service that maintains public confidence, underpinned by good risk & quality management and innovation.

Strategic Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To have a sustainable funding model in place for the Commission. - To have an organisation that is open, transparent and maintains public confidence.
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 15% increase in in-year starting budget position (by 31 March 2025) - Achieving 80% of those responding having confidence that the judiciary is fairly appointed (by 31 March 2025) - Achieving 80% of those responding having confidence that the judiciary is reflective of the community (as far as it is reasonably practicable to do so) (by 31 March 2025)
Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will develop a funding model that ensures sustainability for the Commission’s work. - We will deliver a quality public service through our Partnership Agreement. - We will innovate, modernise and deliver efficient and effective services within our risk appetite parameters.

Implementation – Our Strategic Performance Management Framework

Any forward strategy is only as valuable and effective as its implementation. Monitoring and reviewing performance against this Corporate Plan will be integrated into our governance arrangements so we understand the extent to which we are achieving our intended outcomes. Delivery of the Plan will be supported each year by an Annual Business Plan which sets out in detail our activities and outputs.

Through the Board, its Committees and the Senior Leadership Team as depicted below, regular reports monitoring delivery against key elements of our work will be scrutinised with a formal assessment of our Annual Business Plan in the Commission’s Annual Report and Accounts.



Our Corporate Risk Register is also aligned at all service delivery levels providing linkages between identified risks/threats to Corporate Plan outcomes and Annual Business Plan measures. We will implement the following framework of strategic management to ensure that:

- all Commissioners, staff and those others assisting the Commission are aware of our aims and outcomes of the Corporate Plan and their contribution;
- there is open and transparent monitoring of the achievement of our outcomes;
- responsibility for decisions and quality of our delivery is clearly allocated;
- accountability for delivery is part of the regular review of business; and
- risk management processes are in place which enable us to monitor and control those risks which arise, with appropriate scrutiny and oversight by the Board.

Contact us

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

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