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From: Olivia Martin

To: Finance Directors

Date: 02 April 2026

**Copy distribution list below**

Dear Departmental Finance Contacts

**2025-26 Remuneration & Staff Report – HR policy narrative**

1. I wrote to you on 4 March 2026 setting out the approach and timetable for co-ordinating HR information for inclusion in the Annual Report and Accounts.
2. FD (DoF) 01/ 26 Departmental Annual Reports and Accounts 2025-26 sets out guidance in relation to preparing departmental accounts for 2025-26 onwards and refers Finance Directors to the latest version of the Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM).
3. Chapter 6 of FReM provides guidance on the disclosure requirements for the Remuneration and Staff Report section of the Annual Report and Accounts and includes a requirement for disclosure in relation to several HR-related matters.
4. Except for health and safety at work, responsibility for HR-related matters including policy is a centralised function for the NI Civil Service, delivered by NICSHR and People & Organisational Development in the Department of Finance. To ensure consistency of disclosure across NICS departments, attached at Annex A is a standard form of words for inclusion in your department's 2025-26 Remuneration and Staff Report section of the Annual Report and Accounts. Where appropriate, you may wish to add in additional employee-related matters specific to your organisation.
5. Please ensure this note is cascaded to other relevant bodies within your department, such as agencies, where they choose to follow NICS HR policies.

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### **FReM 6.5.1: Disclosure on pay policy**

#### **Remuneration Policy**

The pay remit for the Northern Ireland Civil Service, including senior civil servants (SCS), is normally approved by the Minister of Finance. Following approval of the 2025-26 Budget in the Assembly, on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2025, in which the Finance Minister outlined the overarching approach to public sector pay, the NI public sector pay policy guidance was published on 27 May 2025 in FD (DoF) 04/25.

Annual NICS pay awards are made in the context of the wider public sector pay policy. The 2024 pay award, due from 1 August 2024, was paid in April 2025 for weekly paid staff and May 2025 for monthly paid staff. The 2025 pay award, due from 1 August 2025, was paid in August for weekly paid staff and September 2025 for monthly paid staff.

The pay of NICS staff is based on a system of pay scales for each grade, including SCS, containing a number of pay points from minimum to maximum, allowing progression towards the maximum based on performance and other eligibility criteria.

#### **Service Contracts**

The Civil Service Commissioners (NI) Order 1999 requires Civil Service appointments to be made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. The [Recruitment Code](#) published by the Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland specifies the circumstances when appointments may be made by exception to merit.

Unless otherwise stated, the officials covered by this report hold appointments that are open-ended. Early termination, other than for misconduct, would result in consideration of the individual receiving compensation as set out in the Civil Service Compensation Scheme<sup>1</sup>.

### **FReM 6.5.31(d): Sickness absence data**

#### **Sickness Absence**

As you are aware the official validated annual sickness absence figure for 2025-26 is unlikely to be available in time for the inclusion in the annual report and accounts. As in previous years, it is recommended that Departments use the following approach:

The Department/Agency had an overall sickness absence rate of <Dept to insert relevant figure> days lost per employee in 2024/25. Annual sickness absence figures can be found in the “Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024/25” report at

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<sup>1</sup> [Civil Service Commissioners for Northern Ireland \(nicscommissioners.org\)](https://www.nicscommissioners.org)

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/sickness-absence-northern-ireland-civil-service-202425>

The 2025/26 sickness absence data is not currently available and will be published later this year.

### **FReM 6.5.31 (g): Staff policies pertaining to disabled persons**

#### **Employment, training and advancement of disabled persons**

The NICS is a lead partner of Employers for Disability NI (EFDNI) and is an accredited [Disability Positive](#) employer.

The NICS delivers an annual programme of communications and training on disability awareness and has policies in place to support inclusive workplaces. A review of the NICS reasonable adjustment policy and processes for in-work support, and for its recruitment selection and onboarding processes to deliver improvements was progressed in 2025 and will conclude in 2026/27. Colleagues with lived experience and external independent advocates have been stakeholders in the reasonable adjustment policy review.

The NICS is committed to the employment of Disabled people and offers work experience through its [Work Experience Scheme for Disabled People](#), it has also participated in the previous two phases of the Department for Communities JobStart Scheme which aims to improve the employability and long-term employment prospects of those who face additional barriers to employment. The Civil Service will participate in phase three of the scheme during 2026/27 offering paid work placements to eligible benefit claimants aged 16-65 to address barriers to economic participation.

In order to encourage job applications from Disabled people, positive action advertising and targeted advertising alongside a programme of outreach are used. The NICS operates a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) which ensures a guaranteed number of Disabled applicants who meet the minimum essential eligibility criteria for the role they have applied for, are offered an interview. Further information can be found on the "Information for Disabled applicants" section of the [NICS recruit website](#).

All selection panel members complete mandatory recruitment and selection training, and appointments to the NICS are made on merit on the basis of fair and open competition, adhering to the [Recruitment Code](#).

### **FReM 6.5.31 (i): Other employee matters** **Learning & Development**

The NICS recognises the importance of having skilled and engaged employees and continues to invest in learning and development.

Development and delivery of generic staff training is centralised in NICSHR<sup>[1]</sup>. Training is delivered using a variety of learning delivery channels (including classroom delivery, on-line, and virtual classrooms), providing flexible access to learning. Coherent learning pathways are aligned to both corporate need and the NICS People Strategy 2025-30.

NICSHR L&D contributes to the delivery of the Strategy's three priorities:

- Skills and Capacity – Building capability and future-ready skills
- Experience and Environment – Creating inclusive, high-quality working environments
- Leadership and Inclusion – Developing leaders who collaborate and innovate

A portfolio of learning products is developed in consultation with customers and subject experts internally and externally, accessible by staff through the [LInKS](#) learning management system icon on all NICS desktops. The themes covered in our portfolio of training are:

- Policy and Government
- Leadership & Management
- Collaborative & Collective Working
- Innovation, Improvement & Transformation
- Health & Wellbeing
- Digital Skills Development

### **Application of Business Appointment Rules (BARs)**

The NICS Standards of Conduct Policy, (Section 8 and Annexes 4) sets out the rules on the acceptance of outside business appointments, employment or self-employment for staff after they leave the NI Civil Service, including procedures to make staff aware of these rules and provides that the Permanent Secretary of the Department is responsible for the effective operation of the Business Appointment Rules within their Department. Further detail is available in the [NICS Standards of Conduct Policy](#).

The Department must include a summary statement on their compliance with business appointment rules. Example statement (where the reporting entity is compliant):

“In compliance with Business Appointment rules, the Department is transparent in the advice given to individual applications for senior staff, including special advisers. Advice regarding specific business appointments has been published on [insert Department]'s website [insert link].”

### **Employee Consultation and Trade Union Relationships**

The Department of Finance (DOF) is responsible for the NICS Trade Union Arrangements Policy. People & Organisational Development within DOF consults and/or negotiates with

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<sup>[1]</sup> NICSHR is the NICS' centralised human resources operational delivery function, falling under the responsibility of the Department of Finance

the NICS recognised trade unions on matters such as pay, promotion, and annual leave which are relevant across the NICS. Local issues relevant only to a particular office or area of work is handled by local managers, and branch trade union representatives, through agreed Local Whitley procedures/constitutions. Each department will have their own Departmental Whitley structure, to consider matters unique to individual departments and their agencies across business areas. Business areas may also have a Whitley arrangement in place dealing with issues specific to that business area.

## **Employee Engagement**

The NICS People Survey is now conducted every other year. The 2025 survey results can be accessed at <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/publications/nics-people-survey-results>. The next survey is scheduled for 2027. Standardised wording for staff engagement score disclosures is set out in FD (DOF) 01/26, Annex A paragraph 8.19, issued on 5 March 2026.

## **FReM 6.5.46: Best Practice Disclosures – Diversity & Inclusion**

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

The NICS values and welcomes diversity and is committed to creating a truly inclusive workplace for all. As part of this commitment, leadership and inclusion is a key pillar within the new five-year NICS People Strategy 2025-30 which launched in April 2025. The strategy was developed with a range of stakeholders including NICS staff networks and through its delivery the NICS aims to foster a culture of leadership, inclusivity and diversity that will help drive better outcomes for its workforce and the public it serves.

The NICS Diversity Champions Network comprises senior colleagues as designated Diversity Champions for each of the nine NICS departments, as well as four thematic leads for gender, race and ethnicity, disability and LGBTQ+. The network works in partnership with the NICS corporate HR function, People and Organisational Development and the seven NICS staff networks (LGBTQ+, Women, Disability, Race & Ethnicity, Cancer Support, Carers and Students), to develop and deliver actions to help promote and embed equality, diversity and inclusion across the Service.

Equality is a cornerstone consideration in the development and review of all HR policies which determine how staff are recruited and appointed, their terms and conditions, how they are managed and developed, assessed, recognised and rewarded. Further information is available in the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#). A strategic HR policy renewal programme is underway as part of the new People Strategy to modernise NICS people policies, ensuring they are user-centric and have a positive impact on employee experience.

As part of the NICS' efforts to ensure equality of opportunity, the NICS continually conducts comprehensive reviews into the composition of its workforce and recruitment activity, publishing a wide range of data. The statistics are available on the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)'s website](#).

The NICS continues to meet its statutory obligations under the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998, which includes submission of an annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return and a tri-annual Article 55 Review to the Equality Commission for NI (ECNI), both of which assess the composition of the NICS workforce and the composition of applicants and appointees. Although not a statutory requirement, the NICS also conducts a similar formal review of the gender profile of its workforce. The findings from both tri-annual reviews are published in the NICS [Workforce Review](#). The next review was submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland in 2025 and will be published in 2026.

The NICS uses the findings of all the equality monitoring and analysis to inform its programme of targeted outreach activity to address any areas of under-representation.

As a public authority, the NICS has due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in carrying out its functions. Further information on the department's equality scheme is available on its website [*insert relevant departmental web address – see list below*]

[Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs](#)

[Department for Communities](#)

[Department for the Economy](#)

[Department for Education](#)

[Department of Finance](#)

[Department of Health](#)

[Department for Infrastructure](#)

[Department of Justice](#)

[The Executive Office](#)