COMPETITION INITIATION MEETING
AND
SIFT MEETING

Guidance for Panel Members

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Competition Initiation Meeting (CIM)	4
Sift Meeting	6
Sift Meeting Roles	7
Feedback/Appeals	8

Annexes

Annex A – Roles and Responsibilities	10
Annex B – Sift Documentation	11

Introduction

This guidance is provided by NICSHR Resourcing taking account of the extensive experience of HRConnect Recruiters in managing the Competition Initiation and Sift meeting elements of the recruitment and selection process for both internal and external opportunities. It reflects the guidance contained in the NICSHR Recruitment Policy & Procedures Manual and should be read in conjunction with the Manual. Additionally, it reflects policy contained within the NICSHR Career Opportunities and Promotion Policy as set out in the HR Handbook (the Manual and other relevant policy is referenced at appropriate stages throughout this guide).

The purpose of this guidance is to (i) provide a ready reference to the Competition Initiation Meeting and Sift processes, (ii) develop panel member expertise in undertaking their critical role in recruitment and selection to ensure that the best people are selected for all NICS roles. This is in keeping with the NICS commitment to the Civil Service Commissioners for NI principles that:

- appointments should be made on merit
- the appointment process should be fit for purpose
- the appointment process should be fair and applied with consistency
- appointments will be made in an open, accountable and transparent manner

Competition Initiation Meeting (CIM)

The purpose of the CIM is to formally agree and approve the information in the Candidate Information Booklet (CIB) and the next steps in the competition, including:

- the eligibility and shortlisting criteria
- the competition timetable
- the interview process, including assigning questions to panel members, locations etc.
- arrangements for advertising
- the design of the application form

Prior to a CIM taking place, the NICSHR competition lead should ensure that the necessary preparatory work on the draft CIB has been completed to enable appropriate decisions to be made at this meeting.

Panel members must consider and agree the eligibility and shortlisting criteria which must be justifiable against the duties and responsibilities of the post. Panel members must be content that the criteria is unambiguous and measurable and they should have a clear and united understanding of the criteria and how these will be applied at the eligibility Sift.

Where business areas have completed a job analysis, this can be used to inform the development of clearly defined eligibility criteria.

Points to Consider

- Panel members must ensure that they are all in agreement as to the method of application of the criteria against a candidate's evidence to ensure consistency of approach.

- Where professional membership forms part of the eligibility requirements and where alternative professional memberships are offered, HRConnect must validate that candidates hold full membership of professional bodies prior to the Sift taking place. HRConnect will also investigate qualification equivalency issues. The panel must be content that they have suitable knowledge of the professional membership requirements to be able to approve this assessment.

- Where a scored eligibility or scored shortlisting process is to be applied (this is normally only applicable to SCS posts), panel members are required to design a suitable scoring matrix, against which the applications can be assessed. The scoring matrix should be agreed by the panel in advance of the closing date for applications and should be forwarded to HRConnect so that this can be included in the Panel Sift packs (**see Annex B**).

- Where the panel decides to assess the 'depth and breadth' of the application form as a shortlisting mechanism, the panel is required to design a decision matrix, against which the applications can be differentiated. This matrix should identify candidates by candidate number and list each of the eligibility and shortlisting criteria. The matrix should be agreed

by the panel in advance of the closing date for applications and should be forwarded to HRConnect so that this can be included in the Panel Sift packs.

- When agreeing the competition timetable, the panel must ensure that there is sufficient time between the closing date of applications and the Sift meeting, to allow them to complete their independent review of applications in advance of the Sift meeting.

- Dates of panel member training should be recorded in the CIM booklet. Where training is required, the dates of pending training, if known, should be recorded. If these are not yet known, the CIM booklet should record that the Competition Lead is to follow up on this. The Competition Lead should then e-mail the dates the training took place to the HRConnect representative for retention with the competition papers.

- Records of CIMs must be fully completed. This is important as an audit trail for the decisions made in relation to the competition and to ensure that training requirements and conflicts of interest are fully considered. Whilst the onus is on the HRConnect official to accurately complete it, the Competition Lead and the Panel Chair should review the booklet to ensure it is complete before they sign and date it.

Sift Meeting

What is Sifting?

- The Sifting of applications refers to the formal consideration of anonymised applications to determine if they (a) meet the eligibility criteria and, if appropriate, (b) meet the shortlisting criteria.

- Shortlisting refers only to that part of the process where it has already been established that candidates meet the eligibility criteria and where consideration is being given to applying additional criteria so that only the most suitable candidates are invited to interview. Any criteria used to shortlist candidates, together with the order in which shortlisting criteria will be applied, must have been made clear in the CIB.

- It is the HRConnect role to chair the Sift meeting and provide professional advice in relation to NICS policy and procedures. The panel, and ultimately the panel chairperson, must ensure that decisions reached adhere to NICS policy and procedures. The panel must provide **clear and meaningful reasons and rationale** when making Sift decisions, which the HRConnect Recruiter should record. This information will subsequently be used to advise applicants of Sift decisions therefore it is important that the panel justifies the decisions made. Where a panel considers that there is 'insufficient evidence to demonstrate how the criterion was met', such statements should be qualified with specific explanatory details relating to the individual application.

- The Commissioners' principle 3, 'appointment processes should be fair and applied with consistency' underpins all operational policies in determining if candidates meet eligibility or shortlisting criteria.

Sift Meeting Preparation

- Before attending the formal Sift meeting, all panel members must individually consider each application against the eligibility criteria and shortlisting criteria (if applicable).

- Should a panel member fail to complete their independent review in advance of the Sift meeting the HRConnect Recruiter may defer the meeting if considered necessary. The Sift meeting will then be rescheduled to a suitable future date to allow the panel member(s) sufficient time to complete their Sift preparation. Deferral risks delaying the competition timetable and appointment.

- When reviewing candidate application forms panel members should consider <u>all</u> sections of the forms to determine if a candidate meets the required criteria, (i.e.) they must review the entire application form to ensure that a candidate hasn't provided appropriate evidence elsewhere that would enable them to meet a specific criterion against which they would otherwise would be rejected. Where the panel decision is that the candidate has not demonstrated a criterion, the reason for this must be agreed by the panel and recorded by HRConnect in a way which is **meaningful and unambiguous**. This will be communicated to the applicant in the Sift outcome letter.

- Within the Sift pack panel members will be provided with a Sift matrix form. Panel members are required to complete the Sift Matrix form with their individual decisions. When completing this form panel members should record notes/points for discussion for all applications, regardless of whether it has been determined that the applicant meets or does not meet the criterion. Should a panel member identify that an applicant does not meet the eligibility requirements the reason/s should be recorded on the Sift matrix. This record will assist in facilitating discussion at the Sift meeting and may be used to advise applicants of sift decisions.

<u>Sift Meeting Roles</u> (see also Annex A)

- It is the HRConnect Recruiter's role to lead the Sift meeting and provide professional advice in relation to the process and recruitment policy. It is important to note that the HRConnect Recruiter has no decision-making role at the Sift meeting. Panel members are responsible for all decisions made.

- At the Sift meeting, the HRConnect Recruiter will record the agreed panel decisions on a master Sift Matrix form.

- Where the panel decision is that the candidate has not demonstrated a criterion, the reason for this must be agreed by the Panel and recorded by the HRConnect Recruiter on the master Sift Matrix form. To ensure that the decision reached by a selection panel to reject any candidate is proper it is recommended that, before the conclusion of the Sift meeting, panel members validate (where possible) any information provided as evidence in the eligibility/shortlisting criteria with that provided in the candidate's employment history. This reason will be communicated to the candidate in the Sift outcome letter.

- The panel should assess **all** eligibility criteria for each candidate. A candidate may fail the first criterion and whilst it is clear from that point that they will not progress to interview, there is still a requirement for a panel to assess each of the remaining eligibility criteria so that **full** and **meaningful** feedback can be provided to applicants. Panel notes must be **legible** throughout all stages of the recruitment and selection process.

- Should a candidate fail one or more eligibility criteria, there is **no** requirement to assess them against any shortlisting criteria.

- At the end of the Sift meeting, all participants must sign the master Sift Matrix form as confirmation of agreement of the decisions reached.

- All panel members' completed Sift Matrices, together with the application forms will be returned to the HRConnect Recruiter at the Sift meeting. Completed Panel Sift Matrices will be kept on file for audit purposes.

Feedback / Appeals

- 'The Northern Ireland Civil Service is committed to ensuring that the processes used to recruit and select staff are fair and in accordance with the principles of the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code. We are consequently committed to providing feedback in respect of decisions taken in determining eligibility/shortlisting as well as at interview. Feedback in respect of eligibility/shortlisting will be communicated automatically to those candidates who fail to satisfy any criteria. All requests for feedback are welcome'.

  This statement is included in all Candidate Information Booklets for all NICS vacancies.

- Where a Panel decides that a candidate has failed to demonstrate a criterion, the explanation given should provide reference to the specific criterion requirement and the specific weakness in the evidence provided by the candidate.

- Should a candidate disagree with their Sift result they may submit a request for a review of the decision. Upon receipt this will be sent to the panel (by email) for consideration and formal response via HRConnect.

- The panel (co-ordinated by the chairperson) will be required to review the candidate's application form against the relevant criteria and consider again whether or not they meet the criteria. The panel can uphold their original decision or determine that the candidate does meet the criteria. In their review request a candidate can provide clarification on the evidence they provided in their application form but cannot provide additional evidence. If the panel uphold their decision they should provide additional feedback for the candidate as to why that is the case.

- For internal recruitment competitions, the deadline for submission of a review request is 5 working days from the date on which the Sift result letter issues. Should an appeal be

received after the deadline, it is for the Panel to decide if they wish to consider a late appeal.

- All review requests received for internal recruitment competitions must be answered before the assessment process completes. Assessment results cannot be issued where review requests are outstanding.

- While there is no specified timescale for responding to review requests for external recruitment competitions, panel members are encouraged to respond to these as soon as possible. All review requests should be answered before the assessment process completes. **Selection decisions by panels cannot be appealed**.

- The panel is responsible for providing a response to all review requests. Panel members 'must provide input to any reviews of Sift decisions/complaints etc.'

- The full Complaints Procedure for externally advertised competitions is available on the NICS Recruitment website.

Roles & Responsibilities

Panel Members

- Should determine if shortlisting is to be applied (ultimately the panel chairperson). HRConnect can provide advice regarding whether shortlisting is necessary and/or likely to be discriminatory – for example based on community or gender;
- Must ensure that the decisions made at Sift are accurate and in line with NICS policy and procedures
- Must prepare for the Sift by considering each application prior to the Sift meeting and provide meaningful explanations for all candidates especially those who have failed to meet eligibility/shortlisting
- Must provide input to any reviews of Sift decisions/complaints etc.
- Should consider and bring draft lead questions to the Sift meeting as appropriate

HRConnect

- Prepares all applications for eligibility/shortlisting Sift and issue to panel members together with invitations to attend Sift meeting
- Validates membership of professional bodies prior to Sift
- Attends and chairs Sift and pre-board meeting, in line with NICS policy and procedures
- Records all panel decisions at Sift
- May defer a Sift meeting if a panel is not prepared.

Sift Documentation

The following documentation should be included in the Sift pack and must be copied to each person attending the Sift meeting;

- Candidate Employment History and Eligibility / Shortlisting criteria
- Candidate Information Booklet
- Decision Matrix
- Sample Candidate Interview Assessment Booklet
- Sample Marking Frame (Chairperson only).