ANNEX A

FOI DOF/2026-0498

Request

RE: Staff Officer Recruitment Competition 2026

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I would like to request the following information relating to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Staff Officer recruitment competition 2026 and the operation of the Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS).

1. Please provide a copy of any guidance, instructions, standard operating procedures, assessor guidance, recruitment policies or briefing documents used by staff involved in administering, assessing or quality assuring the Staff Officer 2026 competition relating to the Guaranteed Interview Scheme.

2. Please confirm at what stage of the Staff Officer 2026 recruitment process the Guaranteed Interview Scheme was applied, specifically:

    - Following the assessment/test stage;
    - Following the application sift;
    - Following eligibility checks; or
    - At any other stage.

3. Please provide any documented policy, guidance or business rules that explain how candidates who have declared eligibility under the Guaranteed Interview Scheme are treated during the recruitment process.

4. Please confirm whether candidates applying under the Guaranteed Interview Scheme were required to:

    - Achieve only the minimum qualifying score in the assessment process; or
    - Meet additional shortlisting or sift requirements beyond achieving the minimum qualifying score.

5. Please provide any guidance issued to assessors or recruitment staff explaining how the following statement contained within the Candidate Information Booklet was to be applied:
   "In assessing whether applicants meet the minimum essential eligibility criteria, they are required to undertake a test/assessment. All applicants must achieve the required minimum score in order to be invited to interview."

6. Please provide the total number of:

    - Applicants to the Staff Officer 2026 competition;
    - Applicants who declared eligibility under the Guaranteed Interview Scheme;
    - GIS applicants who achieved the minimum qualifying assessment score;

- GIS applicants invited to interview;
- GIS applicants not invited to interview.

7. Please provide the reason(s) recorded by the recruitment team for GIS candidates not progressing to interview despite achieving the minimum qualifying assessment score, where such information is held in aggregate or policy form.

8. Please confirm whether any quality assurance or review process was undertaken to ensure that the Guaranteed Interview Scheme was applied correctly throughout the Staff Officer 2026 competition.

9. Please provide any internal guidance, business rules or documented interpretation used to determine whether a candidate had sufficiently demonstrated the criterion:

   "A minimum of 2 years' experience of managing the delivery of a quality service including identifying and implementing improvements to meet the requirements of a diverse range of customers."

10. Please provide details of any appeal, review, complaints or reconsideration process available to candidates who believe the Guaranteed Interview Scheme was not correctly applied.

If any part of this request is considered exempt from disclosure, I would be grateful if the remaining information could be released and the relevant exemption(s) cited.

DoF response

I can confirm the department holds the information requested.

1. This information is exempt under Section 21(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 21 applies to information that is already reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Section 21 is an absolute exemption, and the department is not required to consider whether the public interest favours disclosure of this information. The information is available at the following link: Information for Disabled Applicants

2. GIS is applied after eligibility which is test & sift.

3. As part of our commitment to the employment of disabled people, we operate a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS). The GIS does not guarantee a job. However, its objective is to ensure disabled applicants, who meet the minimum essential eligibility criteria for the role they have applied for, are offered an interview.

4. Candidates must meet additional shortlisting or sift requirements beyond achieving the minimum qualifying score

5. No guidance is issued.

6. The information you have requested is being withheld as it is exempt under section 22(1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Section 22(1) protects information intended for future publication. Section 22 is a qualified exemption, and I have considered whether the balance of the public interest favours maintaining the exemption in section 22(1) or disclosing the information. By applying Section 22 Exemption of the FOI Act, we are required to carry out a Public Interest Test. This can be found attached as a separate document (Annex C).

7. GIS candidates who did not progress to interview despite achieving the minimum score in test did not score in the top proportion of candidates to progress to eligibility sift or failed the eligibility sift.

8. NICSHR ensured that the Guaranteed Interview Scheme was applied correctly.

9. Sift panel members all received the L&D panel member training.

10. Appeals, reviews, complaints or reconsiderations regarding the Guaranteed Interview Scheme should be submitted to HRConnect.