

## Appendix 1 – Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

### SECTION 1 – Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

**1A. Name of Public Authority**

The Department of Finance

**1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.**

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Recruitment Policy- Advertising Review.

**1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.**

Developing a Policy  Strategy  Plan

Adopting a Policy  Strategy  Plan

Implementing a Policy  Strategy  Plan

Revising a Policy  Strategy  Plan

Designing a Public Service

Delivering a Public Service

**1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.**

Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) Recruitment Policy

**1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.**

The aims of the policy are to ensure NICS recruitment advertising supports the organisational need to attract the widest potential applicant pool of candidates with the best skills and abilities to meet the job opportunities being advertised, while at the same time representing value for money.

**1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

**Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.**

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

**Reasons why a definition of rural is not applicable.**

N/A

## **SECTION 2 – Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

### **2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?**

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

### **2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.**

The proposed policy revision would remove the requirement that every external recruitment competition is advertised in the three local daily newspapers (Newsletter, Irish News and Belfast Telegraph) print editions.

The proposed revised policy approach would: (i) remove this mandatory policy requirement; (ii) provide that the default recruitment advertising approach be via the NICS recruitment website; and (iii) allow a flexible advertising approach, where a variety of advertising channels could be used, as appropriate, (including print media), to deliver a tailored advertising, marketing, and outreach strategy based on the job role/recruitment competition and value for money considerations.

The proposed policy revision would have a potential impact on people in both rural and urban areas as it would end the current policy position where a reader of one of the three daily papers would be able to learn about all NICS recruitment opportunities. In future, advertising of recruitment opportunities in newspapers would be on a case by case basis, determined by the job role and subject to value for money considerations.

### **2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.**

It is recognised that the proposed policy revision has the potential to impact people in rural areas differently. Given the differences in broadband connectivity between urban and rural communities, the revised advertising policy has the potential to have a negative impact on rural communities as the outworking's of the revised policy would see an increase in the use of digital channels for recruitment advertising, including the use of the NICS' recruitment website as the default source for all NICS recruitment opportunities.

**2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.**

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Rural Businesses                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Tourism                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Housing                                       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Education or Training in Rural Areas                | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas       | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Poverty in Rural Areas                              | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Deprivation in Rural Areas                          | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Crime or Community Safety                     | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Rural Development                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Agri-Environment                                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Other (Please State:                                | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.**

**2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.**

## SECTION 3 – Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

**3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

**3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?**

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Consultation with Rural Stakeholders   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Consultation with Other Organisations  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Surveys or Questionnaires  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Published Statistics   | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Research Papers  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Publications   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below). | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

**3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc**

The Department considered information from the Northern Ireland Executive's Project Stratum team. Project Stratum's overarching objective is to extend access to high speed broadband coverage in Northern Ireland by increasing provision in areas which are currently poorly served and not capable of attracting wholly commercial investment. Rural premises will be the primary beneficiary of this project.

NISRA's Continuous Household survey statistics were considered, which indicate an increase since the beginning of the millennium, with around 90% of all households now with access to the internet at home. Information contained in NISRA's bulletins '*Usage of online channels to access public services*' covering 2018 and 2019/20 was also considered as part of the policy review process. The bulletins noted the percentage of survey respondents in rural areas who accessed public services in 2018 to be 74% (73% in urban areas); the 2019/20 bulletin noted the same percentage for

people in rural areas (and a decrease to 70% in urban areas.) Ofcom's News Consumption surveys for Northern Ireland for 2021 and 2022 was also considered- which highlighted that 17% of respondents used print editions of the Belfast Telegraph and Irish News to access news, this figure falling to 11% in 2021 (the Newsletter was not specified). Figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC)<sup>1</sup> highlighted that local daily newspaper sales in the UK fell by an average of 19% year-on-year in the second half of 2022. The Irish News (average daily circulation per issue of 25,398) reported the smallest decline at 8%, with the Newsletter (7,809) reporting a 13% decrease in circulation during the period July to December 2022. Figures were not available for the Belfast Telegraph.

Information gathered by HR Connect (the Civil Service transactional HR service provided) on how applicants for jobs in the NICS found out about the recruitment opportunity. This data showed that in the period 2018 – 2023 2.36% of applicants learned about NICS job opportunities in one of the three local daily newspapers, compared with 50% who used the NICS' recruitment website. In addition, the Department of Finance carried out some initial stakeholder engagement when developing the revised policy proposal and the associated impact assessments, including contacting the Rural Community Network. We also consulted with colleagues in DAERA and DfE. In addition, a public consultation on the revised policy proposal will be undertaken in summer 2023, and key stakeholders will be notified of the planned consultation exercise. This will provide an opportunity for groups representing people in rural communities to consider the revised policy and provide any input they deem to be appropriate. The results of the wider public consultation will enable the Department of Finance to evaluate the impact of this revised policy.

**3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?**

The Department is conscious that people in rural areas may have more difficulty accessing online information due to issues with the availability of reliable broadband and therefore may rely more on print editions of newspapers to learn about jobs in the NICS. However, while we want to ensure people in rural areas can avail of the employment opportunities offered by the NICS and the social and economic benefits which they bring, we must also ensure value for money is achieved when advertising and promoting NICS employment opportunities.

We are also conscious that many people now have smart phones which also provides greater individual access to online content. (Deloitte's Report on Digital Consumer Trends 2022 found that in the UK, out of a nationally representative sample of 4,160 people aged between 16-75, surveyed

A Guide to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 for Public Authorities  
(Revised) April 2018

between April and May 2022: 92% of respondents owned a smartphone and 78% owned a laptop).

**If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A**

**3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?**

N/A

## **SECTION 4 – Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

### **4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

The rise of better broadband connectivity, with initiatives such as Project Stratem, (which represents the largest ever public investment in telecommunications infrastructure in Northern Ireland), will help transform rural broadband and create the opportunities for many people in rural communities to have broadband speeds as fast as it is in urban areas. Other initiatives, such as the use of libraries to help people access online services will also lead to increased access to broadband for people in rural areas, which it is considered will mitigate any potential negative impact of the proposed policy change. Of note, NISRA bulletins indicate that a higher proportion of people in rural areas accessed public services online than those in urban areas (in 2018 and 2019/20).

The removal of the mandatory policy requirement to advertise all NICS recruitment opportunities in the three local newspapers also creates the potential for advertising spend to be redirected to other advertising channels relevant to the job role being recruited, helping to support the attraction of the widest possible applicant pool and deliver value for money on advertising spend.



## **SECTION 5 – Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service**

**5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?**

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

**5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

The Department is conscious that people in rural areas may have more difficulty accessing online information due to issues with the availability of reliable broadband and therefore may rely more on print editions of newspapers to learn about jobs in the NICS. However, while we want to ensure that the widest applicant pool can avail of the employment opportunities offered by the NICS, (which includes people in rural areas), and the social and economic benefits which they bring, we must also ensure value for money is achieved when advertising and promoting NICS employment opportunities.

It is considered that the ongoing rise of connectivity and transformation of rural broadband speeds, and the falling numbers of people using print media as their main source of information should mitigate against any negative impacts of this particular policy change. It is also considered that the use of a variety of advertising channels, as opposed to just print media, will help support attracting the widest applicant pool and achieve better value for money in terms of spend of recruitment advertising and marketing spend.

**If the response to Section 5A was YES GO TO Section 6A.**

**5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

N/A

## SECTION 6 – Documenting and Recording

**6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.**

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:</b>	Brian O'Rourke
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	Grade 7
<b>Division/Branch:</b>	HR Policy Division
<b>Signature:</b>	Brian O'Rourke
<b>Date:</b>	29 June 2023
<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:</b>	Aisling Quinn
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	Grade 5
<b>Division/Branch:</b>	HR Policy Division
<b>Signature:</b>	Aisling Quinn
<b>Date:</b>	14 July 2023