

## Guidance re Paragraph 3.21 of the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments for Northern Ireland

As departments will be aware, CPA NI have been reviewing application forms. We have also carried out research on applicants' experiences of the appointments process and are dealing with an increasing number of complaints. As a result of all this we are issuing the following guidance.

Application forms are long complex documents which can often take hours to complete.

Many applicants are not familiar with the competency based assessment system currently in vogue with the NICS and can be put off applying by the number and nature of the criteria.

However many potential applicants never even get that far because of the other extraneous information demanded on application forms.

The public appointments process should be about encouraging applicants – not frightening them off.

### **Code of Practice 3.21**

***Departments must remember that applicants may not be familiar with completing application forms. Therefore all application forms must be simple, straightforward and ask only what is truly required.***

When designing the application form for your Ministerial appointment we recommend that you ask the following questions.

- Is there anything on this form we are asking for out of habit rather than necessity?
- Are we asking for information which may discourage an applicant e.g. dates and details over a long number of years - 'your working life' which may be 40 years+ - or similar?
- Is this information actually needed to assess the applicant against the published criteria or to allow us to interact with him or her to run the process?
- Why are we asking for the applicant's town or country of birth? What relevance does this information have to the selection criteria?
- Why do we need the applicant's national insurance number? What relevance does it have to the selection criteria?
- Why are we asking for referees and how are we going to use any reference received?
- How will a reference be used to assess the candidate against the published criteria in a competency based scenario?

- What does wording such as ... *"You will be required to provide names and addresses of two referees who are in a position to comment on your suitability for the post. References will not form part of the interview process, and the contents of references will be used only in the final stage of the competition to confirm a proposed selection decision"...* mean? What information will you provide to the referee to enable him or her to provide such comments? What is this final stage?
- Why are we asking for qualifications (including on occasion GCSES and similar) if these are not part of the selection criteria or a requirement of the post?
- Why are we asking for employment history if this is not part of the selection criteria? How will we use this information in the assessment process? Might such information actually enable the panel to identify candidates in an 'anonymous' process?
- Why are we asking for a history of all public appointments held? What are we going to do with this information? What do we mean by the term 'public appointment'?
- How many addresses do we need for the applicant - other than a correspondence address - and what are we going to do with them?

We hope the above will act as an aide memoir when designing applications forms. The questions posed are not exhaustive. Your own experience of previous competitions and applicants' comments may also influence the design and content of future application forms.

CPA NI  
May 2011