

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION – PUBLICATION SCHEME

TITLE OF BODY

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland

STATUS & ROLE

Ministers make a large number of appointments to public bodies each year. These bodies, often referred to as ‘Quangos’, have a role to play in the running of Northern Ireland. They act to a greater or lesser extent at arms length from Ministers, although Ministers remain accountable for the bodies’ performance.

Public bodies are diverse. They range from local NHS Trusts to bodies such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland, or more specialised bodies such as the Agricultural Research Institute or the Mental Health Commission.

The skills and experience required of board members are equally varied. They include being able to contribute to decision making at a strategic level, having professional experience in a particular field, or representing consumer interests on matters such as health.

The terms of appointment also vary considerably. Some require a full time commitment, others just a few hours each month. The majority of appointments are unpaid, some attract a daily fee, others an annual payment.

In 1995, the Nolan Committee made a series of recommendations intended to increase public confidence in the way in which appointments to ‘Quangos’ are made. The principal recommendation was that an *independent* Commissioner should be appointed. This Commissioner’s role would be to establish a Code of Practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies, and monitor the process to ensure those appointments are made on merit after fair and open competition.

The office of Commissioner for Northern Ireland was created by an Order in Council on 23 November 1995.

PURPOSE

This publication scheme responds to the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, which requires all public bodies to adopt and maintain a scheme for the proactive publication of information. The schemes are intended to ensure that information is made available without the need for a specific request. It has been approved by the Information Commissioner. Information

which would be exempt under Part II of the Act, for example, because it is sensitive or confidential, is not included in our scheme. Such information may be edited out of documents published under the scheme.

In practice, the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland has, throughout its existence, been committed to an open and transparent appointments process, whilst treating information provided by candidates in confidence, except where consent has been given for this to be released.

The scheme sets out the classes under which information will be made available, how to obtain it and at what cost.

Responsibility for administering the scheme rests with Martina Hanna. She should also be contacted regarding more detailed enquiries about the Commissioner's publication scheme.

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CLASSES OF INFORMATION AND DESCRIPTION

- **Role and membership of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland** – information about the appointment of the Commissioner and his/her remit; information on the business objectives and performance indicators of the Office of the Commissioner; and information on the members of the Office of the Commissioner.
- **Information about Ministerial appointments to Public Bodies.** This includes information relating to the principles and process of selection and appointment (i.e. the Commissioner's Code of Practice), the auditing and monitoring of such appointments' processes, complaints about any process, and independent scrutiny. It also includes information relating

to areas of research conducted on the instruction of the Commissioner in areas considered relevant and important in assessing past performance or framing future policy decisions. This excludes information which might breach the confidentiality of candidates.

- **Press notices** – press notices released by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland relating to its work.
- **Annual Reports** – text of the Commissioner’s Annual Reports.
- **Documents placed in the libraries of the House** – documents placed by the Commissioner in the libraries of either House of Parliament, and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- **Evidence to Parliamentary and other committees** – evidence given in public examination by the Commissioner to committees of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Committee on Standards in Public Life.
- **Keynote speeches** – Formal keynote speeches given by the Commissioner or members of the Office on the work of the Office of the Commissioner.
- **Summaries of meetings** – Summaries of meetings held by the Commissioner or her staff
- **Details of OCPA staff** – Contact details of officials working in the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

CHARGES

Most of the information contained in our scheme is available free of charge on our website. Other information is available by post, also free of charge, by contacting the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland on 028 9052 8187. The Office reserves the right to charge for the production of multiple copies of documents, which are otherwise free of charge. The Office also reserves the right to review the position on charging at any time.

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COMPLAINTS

If you wish to make a complaint about this publication scheme, or lack of access to information held by this Office, we would be pleased to hear from you.

You should send or e-mail your complaint to the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland, who will personally review each complaint. The Commissioner will aim to investigate your complaint and reply within 15 working days.

If OCPA NI has not resolved the matter to your satisfaction, you can refer your complaint to the Information Commissioner, who is completely independent from this Office. The Information Commissioner will normally expect you to have used our complaints procedure before considering your complaint. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

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Water Lane
Wilmslow
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SK9 5AF

Tel : 01625 545700
Fax : 01625 524 510

E-mail : data@dataprotection.gov.uk