

October 2011

**Observations/Findings on Public Appointment Recruitment Exercise for the following body:**

***Members of the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland representing Tourism.***

In line with our approach to checking compliance with the Code of Practice, CPANI has reviewed the Information Pack and Application Form for the competition for individuals to represent tourism on the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland being run currently by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

**General Observations**

Overall the Application Form and Information Pack fails to meet the standard required by the Code of Practice.

I have noted my observations below:

**Code of Practice - Section 3.21**

- *Information Pack* – This does not meet the minimum requirement in that there is insufficient information on the process.
  - Little guidance has been provided to assist applicants in completing the Application Form.
  - Candidates filling out the application have nothing to help explain what the Department is looking for in a member of the Drainage Council.
- *CPANI Complaints leaflet* – An outdated CPA NI guidance leaflet on complaints is provided on the DARD website. It lists the previous Commissioner as the relevant contact.
- *Final List* - The Department does not provide information on what format the Minister has requested the final list to be in, as requested by the Code.
- *Interview dates* - The Cover Note from the Secretary of the Drainage Council states that interviews are scheduled to be held in November and December 2011, yet the Job Specification issued by the Department states that the interviews are expected to take place in October and November 2011.

CPA NI would also maintain that it is not sufficient to provide applicants with a two month time frame in which interviews may take place. Departments should be able to provide a much shorter time frame, or actual dates on which the interviews will take place.

- *Travel Expenses* - The Cover Note from the Secretary of the Drainage Council states that travel expenses for attendance at interview are refundable. The Job Specification issued by the Department states that applicants are expected to meet their own travel costs.

### **Code of Practice – Section 3.22**

- *Representative Specifications* - Under Representative Specifications on the Job Specification, the following is included under the heading of General.

*“Applicants for the tourist interest representative appointment will be expected to have experience of the Northern Ireland Tourist industry in either the promotional/development sector or hospitality sector”.*

This is absent from the actual application form. It is therefore unclear to applicants where they are expected to provide this information.

- *General Competencies* – The information provided on the General Competencies in the Role Specification is a direct lift from the application form with no further details included to assist an applicant in completing the form.
- *General Competencies* (application form) – Three out of the four general competencies request information relevant to at least 2 years in the last 5.
  - Why is the Department applying an arbitrary time limit?
  - Does this information assist in the short-listing process?
- The wording used in the General Competencies is inconsistent. Some ask for an example, others ask the applicant to give a description, some both. The wording is potentially confusing for an applicant.
- *Employment history* – The Department asks for full details of all previous employment and/or voluntary work experience in the last 10 years.
  - CPANI would ask why the Department feels it is necessary for an applicant to complete this if such appointments are not a requirement for the post or necessary as a short-listing tool?
- *Business Address* – The application form requests that applicants provide a permanent address, an address for correspondence and also a business address.
  - Would one address suffice?
- *Probity and conflicts of interest – A guide for candidates* – the Application Form contains a section asking candidates to confirm that they have read this booklet;

and it states that the booklet is included in their Information Pack. There is no such booklet included in the Information Pack available from the DARD website listed on the advertisement.

### **Code of Practice – Section 3.23**

- The Department states on the front page of the application form that *“the Commissioner for Public appointments for Northern Ireland requires Departments to monitor the gender, age, ethnic origin, community background, disability of candidates to ensure that equal opportunities measures are effective.”*

Section 3.23 of the Code of Practice clearly states that while monitoring forms may be used they are not a requirement of the Code.

### **Code of Practice – Section 3.46**

- In the Code, it states that the political monitoring form will only be issued to the successful candidate once the Minister’s decision is made.
  - The Department issued the political monitoring form to all applicants for completion.
  - The monitoring form issued is also out of date. Annexe B of the Code was updated in February 2011, the Department received guidance relating to this at the time.

### **Minor and Technical issues**

1. Applicants are asked to indicate how they were made aware of this opportunity by ticking a box. On this page the Newspaper or journal selection is already ticked.
2. Where applicants are asked to list their forenames, and underline by which they are known, the box provided is too small for this.
3. There is no way to fill the form in electronically when accessed online; it must be completed by hand.
4. In the job specification, paragraph 2.a.ii., the sentence reads: *“The appointments carry.”* This is meaningless.
5. Included in the policy for late applications are the various ways in which applications can be submitted. The list includes e-mail. On the website hosting the application form links however; it states that applications must be returned in hard copy. This is contradictory and possibly confusing for applicants.

### **Conclusion**

This Application Form and Information Pack presented by the Department fails to meet the standard required by the CPA NI Code of Practice.

The Commissioner would ask the Department to take urgent note of the issues above and address them before any further competitions are conducted by the Department.

The Commissioner has requested that the Department write and inform him of how they have progressed the issues highlighted.