Ref No: SPRO/10.26

NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Applicant Information Pack

Senior Policy and Research Officer (Permanent Full-time)

October 2026

Foreword from the Chief Executive

Thank you for showing an interest in joining our team as a Senior Policy and Research Officer.

The Commission is focused on protecting and promoting the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland, by providing high quality independent advice to government, the use of investigatory powers and supporting legal challenges. Our education work helps increase levels of compliance and improves service provision across the public and private sectors. At the same time, we engage with communities to empower individuals to understand and be able to fully exercise their human rights.

By joining our highly motivated, professional and successful multi-disciplinary team, you will have the opportunity to use your skills in an organisation that is an internationally recognised centre of excellence.

We want to add a talented individual to the Commission's staff who is equally effective working alone or as a good team player, committed to quality and continuous improvement for yourself and others. The Commission can provide you with excellent personal and professional development opportunities. We are seeking someone who is flexible and can utilise their talents to support the work taking place across a range of our organisation's functions.

If you are interested in working in an organisation with a broad mandate, working in an often challenging environment, and playing an important part in delivering a better Northern Ireland for all, then I look forward to hearing from you.

Dr David Russell
Chief Executive

1. Role and Functions of the NI Human Rights Commission

The Commission was established as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Our governing legislation is the Northern Ireland Act 1998, as amended by the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 and the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020. It is a National Human Rights Institution with A status accreditation from the United Nations. This recognition means that the organisation operates independently in full accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/134 (the Paris Principles).

The Commission is also a non-departmental public body, and receives grant-in-aid from the United Kingdom government through the Northern Ireland Office. We report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Our primary role is to make sure government, and public authorities protect, respect and fulfil the human rights of everyone in Northern Ireland. We also help people understand what their human rights are and what they can do if their rights are violated or abused. To pursue this objective, we consider the full range of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. Our work is based on the international human rights treaties ratified by the United Kingdom government, domestic legislation and relevant soft law standards.

The statutory functions of the Commission in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998 are:

1. keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness in Northern Ireland of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights;

2. advising the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to protect human rights as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of a general or specific request for advice, and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate;

3. advising the Northern Ireland Assembly whether legislative Bills are compatible with human rights;

4. providing advice to the UK government and Westminster Parliament on matters affecting human rights in NI;

5. conducting investigations on systemic human rights issues. To do so, we may enter places of detention, and can compel individuals and agencies to give oral testimony or to produce documents;

6. promoting understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights in Northern Ireland. To do so, we may undertake or support research and educational activities;

7. providing legal assistance to individuals and initiating strategic cases, including own motion legal challenges;

8. monitoring the implementation of international human rights treaties and reporting to the United Nations and Council of Europe; and

9. working in partnership with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission as mandated through the joint committee created in accordance with the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement.

The Commission is mandated in accordance with Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement, to oversee the UK Government commitment to ensure there is no diminution of rights protected in the 'Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity' chapter of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998 as a result of United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

The Commission's statutory functions for this purpose, in accordance with the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Act 2020, are:

1. monitoring the implementation of Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement (rights of individuals);

2. reporting to the Secretary of State and the Executive Office in Northern Ireland on the implementation of Article 2(1)—as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of a general or specific request for such a report, and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate;

3. advising the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Executive of legislative and other measures which ought to be taken to implement Article 2(1)—as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of a general or specific request for advice, and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate;

4. advising the Assembly (or a committee of the Assembly) whether a Bill is compatible with Article 2(1)—as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of a request for advice, and on such other occasions as the Commission thinks appropriate;

5. promoting understanding and awareness of the importance of Article 2(1); and for this purpose we may undertake, commission or provide financial or other assistance for research, and educational activities;

6. bringing any appropriate matters of relevance to Article 2(1) to the attention of the Specialised Committee on issues related to the implementation of the Windsor Framework, established by Article 165 of the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement; and

7. bringing judicial review proceedings in respect of an alleged breach (or potential future breach) of Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework; or intervening in legal proceedings, whether for judicial review or otherwise, in so far as they relate to an alleged breach (or potential future breach) of Article 2(1).

The Commission is also designated, with the Equality Commission, under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the independent mechanism tasked with promoting, protecting and monitoring implementation of the Convention in Northern Ireland.

We also engage with other National Human Rights Institutions in the United Kingdom on issues of common interest.

Our Annual Statement, published in December each year, records how much progress has been made towards meeting human rights obligations in Northern Ireland. This strongly informs our future work priorities.

2. Current Organisational Structure

There are seven Commissioners (a full-time Chief Commissioner and six part-time Commissioners) appointed by the Secretary of State. As far as practicable, the Commissioners, as a group, is representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

The Commissioners are supported by a small staff team. The senior management team consists of the Chief Executive and five Directors working across five teams:

- legal;
- advice to government, research, investigations and international treaties;
- human rights after EU withdrawal;
- communications, information and education, public and political affairs; and
- finance, personnel and corporate affairs.

3. Our Values and What It's Like to Work for Us

A human rights-based approach underpins the Commission's work. This is predicated on the conviction that human rights compliant outcomes require processes that adhere to both the values which underpin human rights laws as well as their substantive content. On this basis, our core principles are:

Participation

People should be involved in decisions affecting their human rights.

Accountability

There should be effective monitoring of how human rights are implemented and meaningful remedies available when things go wrong.

Non-discrimination and equality

All forms of discrimination must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated. People facing the biggest barriers to realising their rights should be prioritised.

Empowerment

Everyone should understand and be able to fully exercise their human rights.

Legality

Policies and services should be grounded in enforceable domestic and international human rights laws.

Partnership

In developing a culture of human rights, the Commission will work with other organisations across a wide spectrum of society.

4. Overall Purpose of the Role

The post-holder will contribute to the Commission's work in reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland. Initially, at least one post is available within each of the policy teams ('Advice to Government, Research, Investigations and International Treaties' and 'Human Rights after EU Withdrawal') but a list of appointable candidates for each role will be retained for one year in case of further opportunities arising.

The Senior Policy and Research Officer roles support the Deputy Director and Director of each team in providing advice on human rights compliance in Northern Ireland to a variety of stakeholders, including the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Westminster Parliament, public authorities, Council of Europe monitoring bodies, United Nations treaty bodies and civil society. In addition, the post-holder will coordinate one or more workstreams within the team and may be required to line manage staff or volunteers.

The post-holder will also support the Deputy Director and Director in other areas, including delivering human rights training and conducting statutory investigations.

The two policy teams work closely together. The 'Advice to Government, Research, Investigations and International Treaties' team primarily engages the European Convention on Human Rights, UN human rights instruments and the international human rights system in its work. The 'Human Rights after EU Withdrawal' team focuses on how rights are protected in Northern Ireland following Brexit, including monitoring the implementation of the UK Government's commitment on human rights and equality. Candidates should indicate on their application form whether they wish to be considered for one or either team.

5. Duties and Responsibilities

a) Reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of law or practice relating to the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.

b) Preparing policy advice for submission to the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly regarding human rights compliance, and representing the Commission before legislative scrutiny or other committees.

c) Preparing policy advice for submission to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on legislative and other measures, which ought to be taken to protect human rights.

d) Preparing policy advice for submission to the Westminster Parliament on matters affecting Northern Ireland regarding human rights compliance, and representing the Commission before legislative scrutiny committees.

e) Preparing policy advice for submission to public authorities in Northern Ireland regarding human rights compliance, and representing the Commission on advisory groups and in meetings.

f) Monitoring and promoting the United Kingdom Government's compliance, in Northern Ireland, with international human rights standards, including representing the Commission before United Nations and Council of Europe treaty bodies.

g) Preparing submissions to inter–governmental and non–governmental organisations.

h) Conducting policy research as required by the Commission including in the exercise of investigatory powers.

i) Preparing papers for, and attending, Commission meetings.

j) Coordinating one or more workstreams within their team such as the civil society engagement programme on Windsor Framework Article 2 or elements of the organisation's work as the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities or with the National Preventative Mechanism under the UN Convention Against Torture.

k) Assisting as required in the provision of secretarial support to the Joint Committee of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and/or work with the Equality Commission and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission under Article 2 of the Windsor Framework.

l) Assisting as required in the provision and delivery of a programme of work on human rights issues on the island of Ireland on behalf of the Joint Committee of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

m) Assisting other members of staff on policy issues arising from their own areas of work, and possible ways in which to proceed.

n) Undertaking training and personal development activity as agreed with the Deputy Director or Director (Human Rights after EU Withdrawal) or Deputy Director or Director (Advice to Government, Research, Investigations and International Treaties).

o) Displaying a commitment to the protection of human rights and to the promotion of equality and showing sensitivity to the diversity of views on human rights issues in Northern Ireland.

p) Undertaking any other duties whenever reasonably required by the relevant Deputy Director or Director, or the Chief Executive. This may include, for example, line management of staff or volunteers as required.

Please note this is not an exhaustive list and the duties associated with the post may be subject to reasonable change from time to time according to the needs of the organisation.

6. Employee Specification

Essential Shortlisting Criteria

Applicants ***must*** demonstrate as at the closing date for receipt of applications that they possess:

a) University level degree or equivalent

And ***either:***

b) (i) A postgraduate degree, or equivalent, in a legal, policy or research area with exposure to the field of human rights;

plus

At least three years' practical experience gained within the last 10 years of drafting briefings or submissions analysing human rights compliance of public policy or legislation.

Or

b) (ii) At least four years' practical experience gained within the last 10 years working in a legal, policy or research role with significant exposure to the field of human rights, including three years' experience drafting human rights briefings or submissions on public policy or legislation.

Please note, candidates should set out examples (**including dates**) of how they meet part (a) **and *either*** part (b) (i) ***or*** (b) (ii), clearly demonstrating how they meet each component of the criteria outlined above.

Please note that the following essential criteria will be tested **at interview**:

c) Communicating effectively orally and in writing in a succinct, engaging manner in a policy context.

d) Ability to demonstrate knowledge of domestic, regional and international human rights law, including ECHR and UN instruments, and general human rights issues.

e) Managing stakeholder relationships.

Desirable Shortlisting Criteria

Candidates may be shortlisted for interview on the basis of meeting the essential criteria outlined above. However, in the event of a large volume of applications, the Commission reserves the right to enhance the criteria as it sees fit. In such an event, the Commission will first apply any or all of the following desirable criteria:

- Experience of engaging with and applying the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Experience of engaging with UN human rights instruments and the international human rights system.
- Experience of working within the UK or Northern Ireland constitutional framework, political institutions and legislative processes.*
- Experience of relevant EU law, institutions or legislative processes.

* For criteria marked with an asterisk, evidence of alternative / transferable experience in related areas may be considered, such as knowledge of the UK constitutional framework and political institutions or common law systems.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme and Adjustment Requirements

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. If you wish to apply under the GIS, please contact HeadsTogether Consulting Ltd on 02890 424030 or via email: recruit@headstogether.com

If an assessment or test is used as a shortlisting tool, then applicants applying under GIS will not be required to complete the assessment or test and will be offered a guaranteed interview, provided that they demonstrate in their application form that they meet the essential criteria for the role.

In instances where an assessment or test forms part of the selection process and is not a shortlisting tool, then all applicants must meet the minimum standard required for that assessment or test, including those applying under GIS. Reasonable adjustments will be considered for any assessment or test if required.

If you do not wish to apply under the GIS but do require us to make reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process, you should also please contact HeadsTogether Consulting Ltd on 02890 424030 or via email: recruit@headstogether.com. We will consider all requests for reasonable adjustments for any stage of this recruitment process. Details of any disability are only used for these purposes and do not form any part of the selection process.

If you have indicated on your application that you have a disability, are successful in the selection process and are being considered for appointment, you may be asked to outline any reasonable adjustments you consider necessary in order for you to take up an appointment. If you wish to discuss your disability requirements further, please contact recruit@headstogether.com

7. Application Process

To apply, candidates are required to complete an application form to clearly detail how they meet the criteria outlined in the candidate specification.

Candidates are also asked to complete an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form. Applicants should ensure they return the following items to recruit@headstogether.com by no later than **10:00am, Monday, 16 November 2026**.

Applicants should ensure they have returned:

- **Completed application form**
- **Completed Equal Opportunities Statement**
- **Signed Privacy Notice**

If you have any questions about the role, please direct these via email to our HR providers HeadsTogether Consulting Ltd using the email address recruit@headstogether.com or alternatively telephone 02890 424030.

Please note it is up to the candidate to demonstrate clearly how they meet each of the criteria within the specified word limit. The shortlisting panel cannot make presumptions about information that is not listed directly or that is ambiguous. The shortlisting panel will not make assumptions from the title of the applicant's post or the nature of the organisation as to the skills and experience gained. If you do not provide sufficient detail, including the appropriate dates needed to meet the eligibility criteria, the shortlisting panel will reject your application.

All examples and statements provided must be truthful, factually accurate and taken directly from your own experience. Where the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been identified applications may be rejected. Applicants will be required to confirm that all information provided in the application is complete and correct and that any untrue or misleading information will give the Commission the right to terminate any employment contract offered either on appointment or subsequently with immediate effect.

Applications received after the deadline unfortunately cannot be considered. It is the candidate's sole responsibility to ensure that applications are received by the closing date and time provided.

8. Recruitment Process

The recruitment process will include a competency-based interview and an unseen test or presentation. Further details will be provided to shortlisted candidates.

Interviews are envisaged to take place between 2 - 3 December 2026. While the Commission will make efforts to accommodate reasonable requests for alternative dates, such arrangements cannot be guaranteed.

In addition to the essential criteria listed above, the selection process is designed to test the following skills and attributes:

- Seeing the Big Picture
- Changing and Improving
- Effective Decision Making
- Leading and Communicating
- Collaborating and Partnering

- Building Capability for All
- Delivering Value for Money
- Making a Quality Service
- Delivering at Pace
- Achieving Outcomes through Delivery Partners

Seeing the Big Picture

- Alert to emerging issues, legislation and trends which might impact or benefit own and team's work.
- Understands own business area strategy and how this contributes to Commission policies and priorities.
- Contributes to the development of policies, plans and service provision to meet citizens' diverse needs based on an up-to-date knowledge of needs, issues and relevant good practice.
- Ensures own business area/team activities are aligned to Commission activity, policy and priorities.
- Actively seeks out and shares experience to develop understanding and knowledge of own work and of team's business area.
- Seeks to understand how the services, activities and strategies work together in the business area to create value for stakeholder/service users.

Changing and Improving

- Finds ways to improve systems, policy development and structures to deliver with more streamlined resources.
- Regularly review procedures or systems with teams to identify improvements and simplify processes and decision making.
- Prepared to take managed risks, ensuring these are planned and their impact assessed.
- Actively encourages ideas from a wide range of sources and stakeholders and use these to inform own thinking.
- Willing to meet the challenges of difficult or complex changes, encouraging and supporting others to do the same.
- Prepared for and responds appropriately to the range of possible effects that change may have on role/team.

Effective Decision Making

- Makes decisions when they are needed, even if they prove difficult or unpopular.
- Identifies a range of relevant and credible information sources and recognise the need to collect new data when necessary from internal and external sources.
- Recognises patterns and trends in a wide range of evidence/data that may affect policy and draw key conclusions.

- Explores different options outlining costs, benefits, risks and potential responses to each.
- Recognises scope of own authority for decision making and empowers team members to make decisions.
- Invites challenge and, where appropriate, involve others in decision making to help build engagement and present robust recommendations.

Leading and Communicating

- Takes opportunities to regularly communicate and interact with staff, helping to clarify goals and activities and the links between these and Commission policy and strategy.
- Recognises, respects and rewards the contribution and achievements of others.
- Communicates effectively orally and in writing in a succinct, engaging manner; knows when to stand ground when needed.
- Communicates using appropriate styles, methods and timing, including digital channels, to maximise understanding and impact.
- Promotes the work of the Commission and plays an active part in supporting the Commission values and culture.
- Conveys enthusiasm and energy about their work and encourages others to do the same.

Collaborating and Partnering

- Establishes relationships with a range of stakeholders to support delivery of policy and business outcomes.
- Invests time to generate a common focus and genuine team spirit.
- Actively seeks input from a diverse range of people.
- Readily share resources to support higher priority work, showing pragmatism and support for the shared goals of the organisation.
- Deals with conflict in a prompt, calm and constructive manner.
- Encourages collaborative team working within own team and across the Commission.

Building Capability for All

- Identifies and addresses team or individual capability requirements and gaps to deliver current and future work.
- Develops team members, devoting time to coach, mentor and develop others.
- Values and responds to different personal needs in the team using these to develop others and promote inclusiveness.
- Proactively manages own career and identifies own learning needs with line manager, plan and carry out workplace learning opportunities.
- Continually seeks and acts on feedback to evaluate and improve their own and team's performance.

Delivering Value for Money

- Recommends actions to achieve value for money and efficiency and reduce fraud and error.
- Cultivates and encourages an awareness of cost, using clear simple examples of benefits and how to measure outcomes.
- Works confidently with performance management and financial data to prepare forecasts and manage and monitor budget against agreed plans.
- Follows appropriate financial procedures to monitor contracts to ensure deliverables are achieved.
- Monitors the use of resources in line with organisational procedures and plans and hold team to account.

Managing a Quality Service

- Makes effective use of project management skills and techniques to deliver outcomes, including identifying risks and mitigating actions.
- Develops, implements, maintains and reviews systems and service standards to provide quality, efficiency and value for money.
- Work with team to set priorities, goals, objectives and timescales.
- Establishes mechanisms to seek out and respond to feedback from stakeholders and service user about policy and service provided.
- Promotes a culture that tackles fraud and error, keeping others informed of outcomes.
- Develop proposals to improve the quality of service with involvement from a diverse range of staff, stakeholders or delivery partners.

Delivering at Pace

- Successfully manages, supports and stretches self and team to deliver agreed goals and objectives.
- Shows a positive approach in keeping their own and the team's efforts focused on the goals that really matter.
- Takes responsibility for delivering expected outcomes on time and to standard, giving credit to terms and individuals as appropriate.
- Plans ahead but reassess workloads and priorities if situations change or people are facing conflicting demands.
- Regularly monitors own and team's work against policy, milestones or targets and acts promptly to keep work on track and maintain performance.
- Coaches and supports others to set and achieve challenging goals for themselves

Achieving Outcomes through Delivery Partners

- Considers, in consultation with experts, alternative ways of working with partners and contractors to identify more efficient outcomes, balancing cost, quality and turnaround times.
- Works with experts in engaging effectively and intelligently with delivery partners in order to define and/or improve policy and service delivery.
- Gathers and uses evidence to assess the costs, benefits and risks of a wide range of delivery options when making decisions.
- Identifies and understands relevant legal and commercial terms, concepts, policies and processes (including project approvals and assurance procedures) to deliver agreed outcomes.

Adjustment Requirements

If you have any adjustment requirements to enable you to participate in the selection process, please make this known on the application form provided.

Transgender Requirements

Should you currently be going through a phase of transition in respect of gender and wish this to be taken into consideration in confidence to enable you to attend any part of the assessment process please contact Joanne Kane of HeadsTogether Consulting Ltd on 02890 424030. Details of this will only be used for this purpose and do not form any part of the selection process.

9. Terms and Conditions of Employment

Duration of Contract

This is a permanent full-time post.

Start Date

The person appointed will be expected to take up duty as soon as is practicable.

Eligibility to work within the UK

Job offers will be subject to appointed candidates successfully supplying proof of eligibility to work in the UK.

If you do not already have the legal right to work in the UK, you are still welcome to apply for a job with the Commission. We strongly recommend that you use the **Home Office website** to review the legal requirements of working

in the UK as this will give you an indication of whether you may be eligible to work in the UK.

We will assess all job applications using criteria as outlined in the Employee Specification. It is a condition of any offer of employment we make to you that you have, or gain, permission to work in the UK. By law, you will not be able to start working with the Commission until you are able to provide evidence that this permission has been granted.

The Commission will consider Sponsorship where applicable. Please note a Certificate of Sponsorship may not be guaranteed as it will be subject to criteria and requirements as set out by the Home Office.

Working Hours

The normal office hours are from 9.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday, however there may be the requirement to work outside of these normal hours. The job requires a considerable degree of commitment, flexibility and adaptability on the part of the post-holder to meet quality standards and working deadlines. He/she/they will maintain at all times such availability, flexibility and mobility as is necessary to the pursuance of the job.

The Commission operates a hybrid working model and flexible working hours arrangements.

This post is suitable for job share.

Probation

Satisfactory completion of a twelve-month probation period is a condition of continued employment in the position.

Salary

The Commission operates its own pay policy which has a current fixed salary of £51,248 for this grade. The fixed salary is subject to an annual pay award each year.

Allowances

Travelling and subsistence expenses will be paid at approved Northern Ireland Civil Service rates to the holder of this post when she/he/they is absent from the Commission's premises on Commission business.

Notice

The appointment may be terminated by either party with at least three months' notice in writing.

Holidays

In addition to the usual public and privilege holidays, currently 12 per annum, there is an annual leave allowance of 25 days (April to March) rising to 30 days on five years' continuous service.

Location

We are located at:
Fourth Floor,
Alfred House
19 – 21 Alfred Street
Belfast
BT2 8ED

Pensions

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission operates the Civil Services Pension Scheme. Further details of the pension can be found on the Civil Services Pension website at http://www.civilservicepensionscheme.org.uk/

Policies

The Commission recognises the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) for the purposes of collective bargaining. It is intended that so far as is reasonably practicable the Commission will seek to mirror the policies and procedures adopted and amended from time to time by the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS).

Employees should refer to the NICS policies and procedures at https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-civil-service-handbook