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PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS

APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRPERSON AND DIRECTORS TO THE BOARD OF MIDDLETOWN CENTRE FOR AUTISM (MCA)

INFORMATION BOOKLET

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FOREWORD

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Vice Chairperson or Board Director of the Middletown Centre for Autism.

I am delighted that you are considering this opportunity to contribute to the governance and future direction of this unique and important organisation.

As a Vice Chairperson and Board Director, you will provide strategic leadership, effective oversight and constructive challenge, ensuring that the Centre continues to deliver high-quality services and positive outcomes for the autistic children, young people, families and professionals it supports across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The Middletown Centre for Autism occupies a distinctive place within the education landscape as a joint North-South initiative, funded by the Department of Education in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Youth in the Republic of Ireland. The Centre works collaboratively across both jurisdictions to promote excellence in autism practice and support the development and harmonisation of educational and allied services.

As the needs of autistic children and young people continue to evolve, the Centre must remain innovative, evidence-informed and responsive. Effective governance is critical to achieving this ambition. Board Directors play a vital role in supporting good corporate governance, ensuring accountability, overseeing risk management and contributing to the strategic direction and long-term sustainability of the organisation.

We are seeking people who can bring professional expertise, sound judgement, independent thinking and a commitment to public service. Your knowledge, skills and experience will help strengthen the Centre's ability to deliver its vision and remain a recognised centre of excellence in autism practice and specialist education.

If you are passionate about improving outcomes for autistic children and young people and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the leadership and governance of a unique all-island organisation, I strongly encourage you to apply.

Paul Givan MLA
Minister of Education

SECTION 1: DIVERSITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING

Diversity in Public Appointments

1. The Department of Education (DE) is committed to the principles of public appointments based on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process. DE is also committed to providing equality of opportunity for all applicants and to improving diversity and eradicating under-representation.

2. We encourage everyone to apply irrespective of gender, age, marital status, disability, religion, ethnic origin, political opinion, sexual orientation or whether or not you have dependants.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form

3. DE collects monitoring data to assess the effectiveness of its equality of opportunity and diversity measures. Applicants will therefore be asked to complete an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form included in the application pack. The Department is required to monitor the gender, ethnic origin, community background and disability of applicants to ensure that equal opportunities measures are effective. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines a person with a disability as someone who has, or has had in the past, a physical or mental impairment which has had a substantial long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities. This includes sensory impairments, people who have had a disability in the past even though they are no longer disabled, people whose disability is likely to last for twelve months or rest of their life, and people whose condition is likely to progress or recur. Severe disfigurement is also acknowledged as a disability.

4. You are not obliged to answer the questions on the monitoring form, and you will not suffer any penalty if you choose not to do so. Nevertheless, we would encourage you to complete it. The information is used to provide (anonymised) statistical data for all public appointments, and we would encourage you to respond to all sections and return the form. It is not made available to the Selection Panel and does not play a role in the decision-making process.

SECTION 2: INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA)

Middletown Centre for Autism (MCA) was established in 2007 as a joint North/South initiative arising from the inaugural North South Ministerial Council. The organisation is constituted as a company limited by guarantee in Northern Ireland and is jointly funded on a 50:50 basis by the Department of Education (DE) in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Youth (DEY) in the Republic of Ireland.

MCA's statutory purpose is to promote excellence in the education of autistic children and young people across both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It achieves this through the provision of specialist educational support, assessment, training, research and the dissemination of evidence-based practice to support children, families and educational professionals.

The objectives and powers of MCA are set out in its Memorandum and Articles of Association (March 2007) and guide the delivery of its mission to enhance educational outcomes and life opportunities for autistic children and young people across both jurisdictions.

The MCA Board comprises of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and eight Directors. As the Centre is a joint North South initiative, both DE (Northern Ireland) and DEY (Republic of Ireland) are responsible for appointing four Directors to the Board. Appointments are for a period of three years, and the current appointment term is due to expire on 31 March 2027.DE will be appointing two Directors and the Vice Chairperson and DEY will be appointing three Directors and the Chairperson.

Purpose

The Centre's mission is to support the promotion of excellence throughout Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the education of autistic children and young people.
Its vision is to enhance the lives of autistic children and young people, and their families through the delivery of specialist educational services.

Main Services

MCA delivers through three core service areas:
Learning Support and Assessment

- Specialist assessment and intervention for autistic children and young people who continue to experience significant difficulties in educational settings despite existing support.
- Provides advice and practical strategies for schools, parents and professionals.

Training

- Delivers professional learning programmes for teachers, classroom assistants and other educational professionals.
- Provides training and guidance for parents and carers across Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Research

- Undertakes and disseminates research on autism and educational practice.
- Produces research bulletins, guidance materials and evidence-based resources.

Board Membership

1. The Board consists of eight Directors, a Chairperson and a Vice Chairperson. As MCA is a joint North South initiative, both DE and DEY are each responsible for appointing four Directors to the Board. The Chairperson and/or Vice Chairperson are appointed on an alternating basis by the two Departments. During the appointment term covering the period 1 April 2024 - 31 March 2027, DE was responsible for appointing a Chairperson with DEY responsible for appointing a Vice Chairperson. From 1 April 2027 these posts are rotated with the new Vice-Chairperson being appointed by DE, and DEY appointing a new Chairperson.

Total Board Membership	DEY Appointments	**DE Appointments**
10	5	**5 (3 forthcoming vacancies)**

2. The work of the MCA is supported by a number of standing Committees which are as follows:
    - Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC)
    - Service Planning and Assurance Committee (SPAC)
    - Finance and Personnel Committee (F&P)

    In addition, the Chief Executive Officer and the Company Secretary also attend Board meetings in a non-voting capacity.

Role of the Board

3. The Centre assists in the development and dissemination of high-quality services and will contribute to the Departments achieving a number of its current strategic aims as detailed in its business plan.

    The Chairperson, Vice Chairperson and all Directors of MCA's Board have a duty to ensure that the Centre's activities are consistent with its functions and that it complies with all relevant statutes, including Equality and Human Rights, and for ensuring the safeguarding of public funds, including the promotion of propriety and value for money. The Board has corporate responsibility for ensuring that the Centre fulfils the aim and objectives set by the

sponsor Departments Ministers, and for ensuring the efficient, economic and effective use of staff and other resources by the Centre.

To this end, and in pursuit of its wider corporate responsibilities, the Board will:

- discharge its duties and responsibilities to the company in accordance with Northern Ireland law. In particular the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1986, as amended by subsequent legislation, including the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1990, and subsequently superseded by the Companies Act 2006.

- ensure that the management of the Centre adheres to the rules and guidance outlined in the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum or its new Partnership Agreement agreed with both Departments.

- establish the overall strategic direction of the Centre within the policy and resources framework determined by the sponsor Departments;

- constructively challenge the organisation's executive team in their planning, target setting and delivery of performance and outcomes;

- ensure that the sponsor Departments are informed of any matters, as soon as they are known, which are likely to impact on the strategic direction of the Centre or on the attainability of its targets, and determine the steps needed to deal with such changes;

- ensure that any statutory or administrative requirements for the use of public funds are complied with; that the Centre operates within the limits of its statutory authority and any delegated authority agreed with the sponsor Departments, and in accordance with any other conditions relating to the use of public funds; and that, in reaching decisions, the Centre takes all official guidance into account;

- ensure that it receives and reviews regular financial information concerning the management of the Centre; is informed in a timely manner about any concerns about the activities of the Centre; and provides positive assurance to the sponsor Departments that appropriate action has been taken on such concerns;

- demonstrate high standards of corporate governance at all times, including using the independent Audit and Risk Management Committee to help the Board to address the key financial and other risks facing the Centre; and

- appoint, with the sponsor Departments approval, the Centre's Chief Executive and, in consultation with the sponsor Departments, set the terms and conditions of appointment.

Further information about the work of MCA can be found at www.middletownautism.com

Accountability, Strategic and Financial Planning Responsibilities

4. The Minister of Education is accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly for the activities and performance of all the public bodies sponsored by DE. The DE Permanent Secretary is the Principal Accounting Officer, responsible for the stewardship of resources allocated to the education service, including funding allocated to MCA, and is responsible to the Minister for ensuring that the organisations sponsored by DE operate effectively and to a high standard of probity.

5. Both the Chairperson and Vice Chairperson are accountable to the DE and DEY Ministers for the MCA's performance and delivery. The Chairperson is normally the main point of contact between the Ministers and sponsor Departments and the MCA's Board, in respect of the accountability of the Board and the organisation's performance.

6. The MCA 's Chief Executive is designated as its Accounting Officer by the DE Permanent Secretary and Secretary General of DEY and is personally responsible for safeguarding the public funds for which they have charge; for ensuring propriety and regularity in the handling of those public funds; and for the day-to-day operations and management of the Centre. In addition to being accountable to the DE Permanent Secretary, and DEY Secretary General, the Chief Executive is also accountable to the Centre's Board for the overall organisation, management, staffing and performance of the Centre.

7. The Centre assists in the development and dissemination of high-quality services and will contribute to the Departments achieving a number of its current strategic aims as detailed in its business plan.

SECTION 3: ROLE PROFILES

Board Directors

1. The role of the Board Director is to assist the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson in the discharge of their duties.

   Through the Chairperson, the Board Directors are accountable to the DE and DEY Ministers and for ensuring that the Centre fulfils the aims and objectives set by the two Departments.

2. **The Responsibilities of the Board Directors (including Vice Chairperson)**

   Individual Directors shall act in accordance with their wider responsibilities and should in particular:

   - ensure that MCA policies and actions support the strategic priorities of the DE and DEY Ministers and that the Centre' affairs are conducted with regularity and probity and deliver value for money as well as meeting the requirements of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI);

   - contribute to the development of MCA's strategy ensuring that it is consistent with the Ministers' priorities and aims and objectives;

   - challenge and work for consensus in the decision-making processes of the Board and ensure decisions take proper account of official guidance;

   - contribute to the work associated with the discharge of the Centre's statutory functions;

   - act in good faith and in the best interests of the Centre and make a constructive contribution to the work of the Board and its committees;

   - build and maintain effective working relationships with DE and DEY sponsor Department officials

   - undertake induction and further training and make the commitment of time necessary to fulfil the member role;

   - comply at all times with the Code of Conduct that is adopted by the Centre and with the rules and guidance relating to the use of public funds and to conflicts of interest;

   - abide by the Seven Principles of Public Life, set by the Committee on Standards in Public Life;

   - not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political profit, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons or organisations; and to declare publicly to the Board any private interests that may be perceived to conflict with their duties;

- comply with the Board's rules on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality, and of business appointments; and

- comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 – General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Freedom of Information Act and all other reasonable requests for information.

The Additional Responsibilities of the Vice Chairperson

3. The Vice Chairperson shall assume all the responsibilities of the Chairperson in their absence. The Chairperson will ensure that the Centre's policies and actions support the wider strategic policies of the sponsor Departments; and that the Centre's affairs are conducted with probity. The Chairperson shares with the other Board Directors the Board's corporate responsibilities and in particular that the Centre discharges its statutory functions and fulfils the aims and objectives set by the sponsor Departments and approved by the DE and DEY Ministers. The Chairperson has a particular leadership responsibility on the following matters:

    - formulating the Board's strategy and Business Plan;

    - ensuring that the Board, in reaching decisions, takes proper account of guidance provided by the sponsor Departments and their Ministers;

    - building and maintaining effective working relationships with DE and DEY sponsor Department officials, particularly through the Governance and Accountability Review process;

    - promoting the efficient, economic and effective use of resources;

    - encouraging and delivering high standards of regularity and propriety;

    - representing the views of the Board to the general public; and

    - ensuring that the Board meets at regular intervals throughout the year and that the minutes of meetings accurately record the decisions taken and, where appropriate, the views of individual Board Directors.

    Other responsibilities include:

    - ensuring that all Directors of the Board, when taking up office, are fully briefed on the terms of their appointment and on their duties, rights and responsibilities, and receive appropriate induction training, including on the financial management and reporting requirements of public sector bodies and on any differences which may exist between private and public sector practice;

    - advising the sponsor Departments of the needs of the Centre when Board vacancies arise, with a view to ensuring a proper balance of professional and financial expertise;

- assessing the performance of individual Board Directors. Board Directors will be subject to ongoing performance appraisal, with a formal assessment being completed by the Chairperson at the end of each year (and prior to any re-appointment of individual Directors taking place, which is subject to satisfactory performance and Ministerial approval). Board Directors will be made aware that they are being appraised, the standards against which they will be appraised, and will have an opportunity to contribute to and view their report. The DE appointed Vice-Chairperson will also be appraised on an annual basis by the Chairperson;

- responsibility for handling cases involving the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Office. The Chairperson shall inform the Permanent Secretaries of the sponsor Departments of any complaints about the Centre accepted by the Ombudsman for investigation, and about the Centre's proposed response to any subsequent recommendations from the Ombudsman; and

- ensuring that a Code of Conduct for Board Directors is in place which shall commit the Chairperson and other Board Directors to the Seven Principles of Public Life and shall include a requirement for a comprehensive and publicly available register of Board Directors' interests.

SECTION 4: PERSON SPECIFICATION

1. The person specification addresses the qualities, experience, and competences sought.

2. The information you provide will be used to determine your suitability for appointment. DE also seeks to bring a wide range of interests and experiences to the membership of its public bodies by drawing in individuals who are not necessarily associated directly with the education service, but who have gained their experience from other backgrounds including business or commercial life and/or voluntary service and involvement in the community. Therefore, in your application form, you may use examples from your working or personal life, e.g. part-time activities or leisure activities, including any voluntary or community work you are or have been involved in**. We would particularly welcome applications from individuals with a lived experience of Autism.**

Essential Criteria

3. Applicants for all posts will be expected to meet the same **four** essential criteria which DE considers provides an appropriate range of skills and experience for effective membership of the Board of MCA.

4. Applicants are required to demonstrate their suitability by providing evidence against the following **four** essential criteria.

1. **Strategic Direction, Planning and Performance.**

2. **Corporate Governance, Risk Management and Financial Oversight.**

3. **Transformation and Change Management.**

4. **Understanding the Role of an Arm's Length Body (ALB) in Delivering Policy.**

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR VICE CHAIRPERSON APPLICANTS ONLY

Applicants for the position of Vice Chairperson will be expected to meet one additional criterion.

5. **Strategic Leadership, Judgement and Influence**

5. Only those applicants who have provided evidence of sufficient quality to meet the eligibility criteria will be considered for interview. More detail is set out below. The following examples of evidence are purely for illustration; although some criteria have more examples than others, this does not indicate any prioritisation or weighting. The panel will consider any examples of your personal or professional experience that meet the criteria.

Essential Criteria

1. Strategic Direction, Planning and Performance

Please provide example(s) from personal or professional experience of your contribution to the achievement of strategic organisational goals; how you identified and managed key strategic issues, formulated workable solutions and evaluated and prioritised information to make decisions in line with the strategic direction of an organisation.

For example:

- **Your** experience of recognising and successfully responding to competing and changing priorities in developing and implementing the strategic direction of a business/voluntary, community or public sector organisation;
- **Your** experience of contributing to and influencing the preparation, monitoring and review of the strategic plans of an organisation with regard to corporate business planning;
- **Your** understanding of the relationship between financial and corporate business planning;
- **Your** experience of making effective decisions on the basis of analysis, experience and judgement;
- **Your** experience of using information to develop effective solutions for difficult problems;
- **Your** experience of identifying current trends using current and relevant information and planning for the future;
- **Your** experience of influencing effective strategy development, to understand the quality of own thinking and decisions and seek feedback where appropriate;
- **Your** experience of actively measuring performance against strategic plans and evaluating results;
- **Your** experience of assimilating complex or conflicting data and different perspectives in order to arrive at a solution/recommendation;
- **Your** experience, knowledge and general understanding of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and Statutory Assessment; and
- **Your** experience and understanding of all aspects of examinations and qualifications.

2. Corporate Governance, Risk Management and Financial Oversight

Please provide example(s) from personal or professional experience which demonstrates applying the principles of corporate governance, including risk management and financial management such as, maintaining budgetary control and delivering value for money, to ensure the proper accountability of an organisation.

For example:

- **Your** experience of constructively challenging decisions, policies or procedures based on relevant evidence;
- **Your** experience of providing a challenge function on the performance of an organisation including the management and accountability of its budget, risk management systems or staffing;
- **Your** experience of dealing with financial statements, costed corporate business plans, budgets and related standards in an organisation;
- **Your** experience or knowledge in the delivery of value for money in an organisation;
- **Your** experience of identifying, evaluating, reporting and managing corporate risks which may have an adverse impact on an organisation's performance;
- **Your** experience in developing, implementing, or monitoring key governance and risk documents / policies;
- **Your** experience of using risk management systems and processes for managing significant risks facing an organisation;
- **Your** experience of ensuring systems of internal and external control work well by effectively monitoring and analysing performance, and addressing underperformance; and
- **Your** experience of making timely and sound decisions based on a range of information.

3. Transformation and Change Management

Please provide example(s) from personal or professional experience of when you successfully managed or implemented a significant organisational change (programme or project) to deliver greater efficiencies and/or improved outcomes within an organisation.

For example:

- **Your** experience of developing and implementing plans for organisational change and recovery;
- **Your** experience of building and developing organisation culture and performance to align with Corporate Strategy;
- **Your** experience of empowering individuals/teams to effect change;
- **Your** experience of organisational change and/or [staff] restructuring;
- **Your** experience of monitoring progress and adapting plans to deal with changing circumstances;

- **Your** experience of dealing with internal and external resistance and influencing direction;
- **Your** experience of communicating change, both internally within the organisation and externally; and
- **Your** experience of monitoring and evaluating the impact of change, including the realisation of benefits/improved performance.

4. Understanding the Role of an Arm's Length Body (ALB) in Delivering Policy

Please provide example(s) from personal or professional experience which demonstrate your understanding of the role and working relationship between an Arm's Length Body (ALB), its sponsoring Department and Minister (or equivalent), in delivering policy.

For example:

- **Your** experience of engaging with and/or working in an ALB;
- **Your** experience and understanding of the services that ALBs are required to deliver:
- **Your** experience of developing constructive proactive relationships between an ALB and its sponsor department:
- **Your** experience of ensuring delivery aligns with government and departmental priorities:
- **Your** experience of translating policy into practice;
- **Your** experience of a Board gaining assurance that policies are having the desired impact;
- **Your** experience of risks in delivering policy through an ALB;
- **Your** experience of delivering or measuring policy success in reform;
- **Your** experience of Digital policy on transformation and AI; and
  Your experience of policy changes that have the greatest impact on outcomes.

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR VICE CHAIRPERSON APPLICANTS ONLY

5. Strategic Leadership, Judgement and Influence

Please provide example(s) from personal or professional experience which demonstrate your experience and understanding of providing strategic leadership and organisational decision-making in a complex or challenging context, exercising sound judgement, providing constructive challenge and building consensus among people with different views.

- **Your** experience of balancing differing viewpoints to set strategic priorities aligned to organisational objectives.
- **Your** experience in demonstrating a strong understanding of accountability frameworks and assurance mechanisms and using these to review progress towards organisational objectives and holding those responsible for delivery accountable for achieving those objectives.
- **Your** experience in constructively challenging proposals or decisions, using clear evidence and considering risks and implications.
- **Your** experience of handling sensitive or contentious discussions with sound judgement and respect for differing views.
- **Your** experience of Influencing others and helping build an agreement to achieve shared objectives.

SECTION 5: NUMBER OF POSTS, TIME COMMITMENT, REMUNERATION, TERM OF APPOINTMENT AND TRAINING

Number of Posts

1. DE is seeking to appoint a new Vice Chairperson along with two Directors to fill forthcoming vacancies.

   Should the Minister wish to create a reserve list of eligible candidates to fill any future vacancies on the Board, this list will be operative for one year from the date of the Minister's decision.

Time Commitment

2. The Vice Chairperson is expected to make a time commitment of approximately **two - three days per month** and Directors **one - two days per month**, based on a cycle of approximately seven Board meetings and eight committee meetings per year. There are three Sub Committees which are Audit and Risk Assurance; Finance and Personnel; and the Service Planning and Assurance Committee. Each meeting would normally last approximately two hours. Board meetings and committee meetings are normally held in the Middletown Centre for Autism at 35 Church Street, Middletown, County Armagh, BT60 4HZ during business hours.

Remuneration

3. The remuneration of the Vice Chairperson is based on a daily rate of **£200** and Directors **£175** plus relevant travel expenses (HMRC approved mileage allowance payment rate) necessarily incurred on business travel while carrying out their Board duties. Reasonable actual costs shall be re-imbursed. Processing of remuneration is the responsibility of the Centre and will be paid on submission of the appropriate claim form. The posts are non-pensionable. Remuneration is taxable and it is the responsibility of the Centre to apply PAYE deductions in respect of Income Tax and National Insurance, unless instructed to the contrary by the Inland Revenue. If appropriate, it will be for you to arrange exception from National Insurance contributions by contacting HM Revenue and Customs. There are no pension scheme arrangements in place for the Centre's Directors.

Double Paying

4. Applicants who already work in the public sector need to be aware that no one can be paid twice from the public purse for the same period of time. Therefore, to avoid double payment of remuneration or travelling expenses if any of the successful appointees are employed within the public sector, the Department will agree, with the appointee and the other employer, the arrangements for the retention of such costs.

Abatement

6. Applicants should be aware that if they receive a PCSPS (Northern Ireland) Pension or have taken an Annual Compensation Payment (ACP) and they subsequently take up a remunerated appointment with a public body covered by the PCSPS (Northern Ireland) they may not earn more, by way of remuneration and pension, than they were earning before they retired. Where the new remuneration and pension exceed their previous salary, it may be necessary to deduct the excess from their pension. This is known as abatement. The Department will liaise with Civil Service Pensions if it believes that abatement may be necessary.

Term of Appointment

7. It is anticipated that all appointments will be effective from 1 April 2027, until 31 March 2030 (unless terminated before that time).

   Following this, subject to a satisfactory performance assessment and continued adherence to the principles of public life, members may be eligible for re-appointment. This does not guarantee the members coming to the end of their first term of office an automatic second term. This is entirely a decision for each individual Minister to make according to their preference and in line with the CPANI Code of Practice.

Location

8. The Centre is based at 35 Church Street, Middletown, County Armagh, BT60 4HZ. However, the location for individual Board and Committee Meetings may vary.

Training

9. Successful applicants will be required to attend induction training and further training events which are considered necessary

Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities

10. Every effort will be made to provide whatever reasonable support any Director of the Board may need to help them carry out their duties.

SECTION 6: APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

1. The appointments will be made following an open, transparent and merit-based competition conducted in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland. DE operates a criteria-based selection process, which is currently the most common method of making public appointments.

Application Procedure

2. Applicants may apply for appointment to more than one position. Only one application form is required and applicants are asked to specify on the form which position(s) they wish to be considered for.

3. Applicants should demonstrate their knowledge, experience, skills and competences by way of specific practical examples, as to how they meet the essential criteria through completion of the application form. This form contains the Essential Criteria which reflect the knowledge, experience, skills and competences required by applicants in order to be eligible for appointment.

4. You must demonstrate clearly on your application form how and to what extent your experience is relevant to the published essential criteria for the post(s). There may be several aspects to a criterion, so ensure you provide evidence that shows how you meet all aspects. It is not enough simply to list the various posts that you have held. The Panel will not make assumptions from the title of your post or the nature of the organisation as to the skills or experience gained.

5. Only those candidates who have provided evidence of sufficient quality to meet the eligibility criteria will be considered for interview.

6. Electronic or legible, handwritten versions of application forms are acceptable. **We cannot accept** CVs, letters, additional pages or any other supplementary material in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms, or applications where the format of the form has been altered. Continuation sheets may only be used to continue a response within the 400-word limit. Any continuation sheet must clearly identify the relevant criterion and be securely attached to the application form.
   Please complete your application form in **black ink**, in either typescript Arial, font size 12 or handwritten. **You are limited to a maximum of 400 words per each criterion; any words over the limit will be redacted and not provided to the selection panel.**

7. Applicants will be tested against the essential criteria both in their application forms and at interview stage.

The Selection process

8. A three-member Selection Panel has been appointed, comprised of:

   - Mrs Deirdre Ward (DE Director of SEN Strategic Policy Legislation) Panel Chairperson;
   - Mr Pearse McCann (DE Deputy Director of Governance) Panel Member, and
   - Dr Audrey McKeown– (CPANI Independent Assessor). Panel Member

   The Independent Assessor is appointed from a pool of suitably trained independent Assessors managed by the office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (CPANI). Independent Assessors provide independent scrutiny as part of the appointment process to help ensure that appointments are open, transparent, based on merit and command public confidence. Independent Assessors are fully involved in the selection process.

Sift and Short-listing Process

9. Following the closing date for applications, an anonymised sift and short-listing process will be carried out by the Selection Panel to assess each applicant against the selection criteria.

10. When assessing each application against the selection criteria, the Panel will use a marking framework to determine how an applicant's experience, skills and competencies meet each of the criteria. Applicants will be awarded a score out of **5** for each criterion and must meet a minimum standard of **3** or above in each criterion in order to be invited for interview. All criteria will be weighted equally. Applications which do not meet the minimum standard will be sifted out at this stage.

11. In order to encourage diversity, DE is committed to interviewing as many eligible applicants as practicable without further short-listing being applied. However, in the case of a high volume of applications the Panel may decide to limit the number of applicants it invites for interview in a proportionate manner. If this happens, the Selection Panel will agree a higher acceptable requirement (i.e., a higher overall pass mark) prior to commencing the eligibility sift. The purpose of this will be to identify those applicants whom the Selection Panel considers best meet the essential criteria from the written evidence provided in their application forms.

12. Should the Panel need to limit the number of applicants invited for interview DE will operate a **Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS)** for this appointment process. The GIS has been developed for applicants with disabilities or those with a long-term impairment or health condition, which is expected to last for at least 12 months. In these circumstances, provided that the applicant has demonstrated in their application form that they have met the criteria, the applicant will be offered a guaranteed interview. If you wish to apply under this scheme, you must indicate this and sign the declaration. You must be considered as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. DE reserves the right to request relevant information from the applicant to confirm they are eligible.

Criteria-based Interviews

13. The Department is aware that not all potential applicants will be familiar with the criteria-based selection process which is employed. To seek to address this, a Guidance Note is included in the Application Pack which provides information about this type of interview i.e. what they are, how to prepare for them and what candidates can expect at interview.

14. Those applicants who remain in the process following short-listing will be invited for interview. **Interviews will be held in person**. Applicants invited for interview are eligible for reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses, to and from the interview, incurred within the UK and Ireland only. Travel should be based on the use of the most economic method of travel, and reimbursement will be paid at public transport rate.

15. Where travelling from outside Northern Ireland is required, flights and one overnight hotel accommodation (costs of which must be approved by the Department prior to booking) may also be reimbursed. Childcare costs, meals and any other incidental expenses will not be reimbursed.

16. Applicants who are invited to interview will be tested and scored on all completed criteria. Applicants will be awarded a score out of **7** for each criterion and must meet a minimum standard of **4** or above in each criterion. There will be a set of short questions probing your understanding of integrity, probity and conflicts of interest which are not scored. (see Point 21).

17. Applicants who are not offered an interview will be provided with written feedback based on the Selection Panel's agreed assessment of their application. If an applicant wishes to contest not being short-listed for interview, they must do so within the timescale stated in their feedback letter, setting out in writing their reasons for contesting the decision. Further details about the process will be provided in the feedback letter.

18. Applicants who are deemed by the Selection Panel as disqualified will be informed by letter.

19. The Selection Panel will score candidates at interview against an agreed pass mark for each criterion. Those who pass the interview will be recommended to the Minister as suitable for appointment and presented to the Minister as a pool of candidates in an unranked (alphabetical) list i.e. they will not be ranked in order reflecting the scores at interview.

20. An applicant summary agreed by the Selection Panel will also be provided to the Minister with an objective analysis of each applicant's experience, skills and competencies based on the information provided by each applicant and the panel's assessment of that applicant during the selection process. It will also include (for each candidate) details of other public appointments held and any current commitments. The Minister will decide who should be appointed.

Integrity, Probity and Conflict of Interest

21. DE must ensure that the individuals appointed have an understanding of, or a clear commitment to, the principles and values of public service. These principles are *Selflessness; Integrity; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Honesty;* and *Leadership as established by the Nolan Committee*. These are described more fully in the enclosed information leaflet "*Probity and Conflicts of Interest: Guidance for Candidates*". The conduct of those appointed to serve on public bodies must be above reproach. To this end, applicants, in their application form, must disclose whether or not they are involved, or have been involved, in activities that could damage their own reputation or that of the relevant organisation if raised in public. As part of the selection process, you will be tested on your commitment to maintaining high standards in public life with particular emphasis on probity issues and conflicts of interest. These are not scored. Some examples to help applicants evaluate whether or not they have a potential conflict are also included on the above leaflet.

22. DE must take account of actual, or perceived, conflict of interest. Therefore, applicants, in their application form, must disclose all appointments held whether or not they are remunerated. In addition, information on personal connections, which, if they were appointed, could lead to a conflict of interest or be perceived as such, must also be disclosed on the application form.

23. It is very important, therefore, that all applicants provide appropriate details on their application form of any interests which might be perceived as being in conflict with the appointment for which they are applying. If it appears from the information provided on the application form a possible probity and/or conflict issue exists, or may arise in the future, these will be fully explored with the applicant with a view to establishing whether they are sufficiently significant to prevent the individual from carrying out the duties of the post. The Selection Panel will do this at interview stage.

Political Activity

24. All those selected for appointment will be asked to complete a form indicating if they have undertaken any political activity in the last five years. The Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland requires that the information provided on political activity is included in the press release announcing the appointments.

Announcing the Appointment

25. In the interests of openness and transparency, information on the individual appointed as a result of this process will be made public in a press release. If you are appointed, some of the information you supply – that is, your name, a summary of your experience, the skills you bring to the organisation, other public appointments held with any related remuneration, if appropriate, and your response to the political activity question (see above) – will be included in the press release.

Disqualification from MCA Board Membership

26. Applicants will need to confirm on their application form that they have the legal right to work in the United Kingdom.

27. Applicants will be asked to declare whether they are an undischarged bankrupt or are subject to an arrangement with creditors from which they have not been discharged. This information is requested as part of the assessment of an applicant's suitability for appointment because Board Directors are responsible for the governance and financial stewardship of the Centre. The information will be considered in accordance with public appointments requirements and will not automatically preclude an applicant from being considered for appointment.

28. A person will be disqualified from being a DE appointed Vice Chairperson or Director of the MCA Board if they:
    - have been adjudged bankrupt or have made a composition with their creditors;
    - have, within the last five years immediately preceding the day of their appointment or at any time, thereafter, been convicted by a court in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic or elsewhere in the British Islands of any offence and ordered to be imprisoned for a period of not less than three months without the option of a fine or been guilty of any conduct which the high court has declared to be reprehensible.

29. Appointments to the same position are restricted to two terms. Those who have served two appointment terms - of whatever length - on the Centre's Board are ineligible to apply for the same position.

Civil Servants – Rules on the acceptance of outside business appointments

30. Serving or former civil servants are not debarred from applying for public appointments. However, serving civil servants will require their Department's approval and former civil servants may require the approval of their last Department (depending on their grade and whether they left within the last two years) before taking up an appointment. Further information is available from Education Governance Team.

Timeframe for Process

31. The deadline for return of applications is **4pm GMT** on **Thursday 19 November 2026.** The eligibility sift and any short-listing required is expected to be completed by **18 December 2026**; interviews are expected to be held between the **25 January and 5 February 2027** with the successful candidates being notified in the week commencing **8 February 2027** (subject to the satisfactory outcome of the necessary pre-appointment checks and Ministerial approval).

Pre-appointment Checks

32. Criminal History Record Check – These appointments are subject to a criminal history record check and will require an **AccessNI Basic Disclosure Certificate**. If you are selected by the Minister of Education for appointment, you will be asked to apply to AccessNI for a Basic Disclosure Certificate, using their online system. This disclosure is sought to assist with the decision-making process; however, a criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining a position. Copies of DE's Storage and Retention of Disclosure Policy together with the Policy on the recruitment of Ex-offenders for DE public appointments, are available to all applicants on request. If you do not apply for the Basic Disclosure certificate through the AccessNI online system within the specified time, we will regard you as no longer interested in the post and your application will be withdrawn.

33. Other Public Appointments – Departments have a duty to satisfy themselves, as far as practicable, that those they appoint to their public bodies will carry out their duties in an efficient and effective manner. For candidates who hold other public appointments, this means that we may approach other departments for confirmation that their performance in other public roles has been satisfactory.

34. The Vice Chairperson and Directors should expect their performance to be appraised on an annual basis by the Centre's Chairperson.

35. For your appointment to continue your performance appraisal report must be satisfactory. An unsatisfactory appraisal report may contribute to certain actions being taken, which could ultimately lead to termination of your appointment.

Privacy

36. Your privacy is important to us and DE will process your personal data in line with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). A copy of DE's Public Appointment Privacy Notice, which should be read in the context of the Department of Education's Privacy Notice is available on our website www.education-ni.gov.uk

How to Apply

37. An application pack can be obtained from the Department's website - https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/public-appointment-opportunities or by contacting us by telephone or e-mail:

Contact names:	**Richard Fulton or Lynne Hackworth**
Telephone:	(028) 9127 9226 **or** 07783828893
Email:	egt1@education-ni.gov.uk
Website:	www.education-ni.gov.uk

38. If you require an application pack in a different format e.g. large print, please contact us as detailed above.

Closing date

39. The closing date for applications is **4pm GMT** on **Thursday 19 November 2026.** It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the form is received by the closing date. Late applications will not be accepted unless there are extenuating circumstances. Applications must bear the correct amount of postage as any shortfall may lead to delay in delivery and the closing date may be missed. All electronic applications must also be received by the Department by **4pm GMT** on **Thursday 19 November 2026.**

40. Applications will normally be acknowledged within one working day of receipt. If you do not receive an acknowledgement, either by email or by post, within three working days of submission please contact the Education Governance Team - see contact information above.

41. Any general queries about this public appointment competition should be addressed in the first instance to Lynne Hackworth, Educational Governance Team, Department of Education

Telephone: **07783828893**

Email: Lynne.Hackworth@education-ni.gov.uk

SECTION 7: COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Complaints Procedure

1. DE is committed to getting this appointment process right first time. However, if you are not entirely satisfied with any aspect of our service, please tell us and we will do our best to resolve the matter. Our aim is to resolve any complaint quickly and you are invited to bring any matter of concern to the attention of the DE official named below. However, if you still feel dissatisfied after this approach, you may initiate a formal complaint in writing. Please direct your concerns in the first instance to:

   Jeremy Gardner
   Director of Corporate Services and Educational Governance
   Department of Education
   Room G12, Rathgael House
   43 Balloo Road
   Bangor
   Co Down
   BT19 7PR

   E-mail: Jeremy.Gardner@education-ni.gov.uk

   Telephone: 028 91279340

2. If after receiving a comprehensive response from DE, you remain dissatisfied, you can write to the office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland, using the contact details below:

   Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
   E5:09 Castle Buildings
   Stormont Estate
   Upper Newtownards Road
   Belfast
   BT4 3SQ

   Email: info@publicappointmentsni.org

   Tel: 028 90765620