

**Plenary Minutes**  
**2 December 2021 at 9.30 am**  
**Online**

**Present:** The Rt. Hon Dame Siobhan Keegan, the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland (Chairperson)  
Mr Eoin Doyle QFSM  
Mr Colm Donaghy  
Mr Paul Douglas  
Mrs Maureen Eccles  
Mr Justice Horner  
Ms Noelle McGreenera QC  
Mr Brian McTeggart  
Judge Miller QC  
District Judge (Magistrates' Courts) Rosalie Prytherch  
Mr Michael Robinson  
Lord Justice Treacy

**Apology:** None

**In Attendance:**

Mrs Tonya McCormac  
Mr Raymond Donnelly  
Ms Adeline Frew  
Mr Duncan Greer  
Mr Andrew Millar  
Ms Caitríona Roberts (Secretary)

**1. Apologies and Introductions**

1.1 No Apologies were received.

1.2 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and confirmed that today's Plenary was switched to a virtual meeting via Zoom in response to the advice from the Executive Office which states:

“employees to work from home where they can and [the Executive Office] advise employers to support this where possible,” as “safer choices that will protect you, your family, the wider community and the health service”

The Chair continued, stating that an email has been sent to all staff from NIJAC's CEO advising all employees to work from home where they can. She further noted that Courts will continue working in a hybrid fashion. The Chair advised that NIJAC will need to remain cautious over the next few months to ensure risks concerning Covid-19 are kept to a minimum.

1.3 Mrs McCormac confirmed that NIJAC have indeed requested that all employees work from home and highlighted that NIJAC's main cause for concern is in relation to the running of high volume schemes. Mrs McCormac continued stating that low volume schemes could potentially accommodate face to face interviews, however high volume schemes would need to be done virtually, either with applicants and the Selection Committee (SC) joining virtually or with the SC gathering in one room and the applicants joining virtually. Ms McGreenera discussed her experience conducting interviews virtually and strongly endorsed the option of having the SC meet face to face, to carrying out the interviews with applicants appearing virtually in high volume schemes. Lord Justice Treacy echoed Ms McGreenera's endorsement and advised that the Judges Assembly room could be utilized to help facilitate interviews if required. Mrs McCormac confirmed that the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor in the Headline office could be used for interviews, as the windows can now be opened offering free air flow, in line with Covid-19 health and safety recommendations. Mrs McCormac further confirmed that the SC could meet in this room and the big TV could be used to facilitate applicants attending the interview virtually. Mrs McCormac confirmed that a guidance paper will be drafted and shared with Commissioners shortly.

**Action Arising:** Ms Frew to provide guidance paper on interview process for high volume schemes under the current restrictions for Covid.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

No conflicts of interest were declared regarding any of the items included on the agenda.

### **2. Confidentiality**

The Chair reiterated to all the need for confidentiality to be maintained.

### **3. Minutes** of meeting of 7 October 2021

3.1 The minutes were approved, and it was confirmed that all actions points arising had been completed or were work in progress.

3.2 Cyber security is being brought forward by Miss Roberts.

3.3 Dr Martin no longer a Commissioner however, this action point will be actioned by the Advisory Committee when they review medical schemes in the upcoming year 2022.

3.4 Mr Millar confirmed that a review of the Expression of Interest form for medical schemes will take place alongside the review of all medical schemes in 2022.

3.5 The Chair confirmed that there will be an opportunity for her to raise the feasibility of the compilation of a bank of questions for shortlisting testing in advance of future schemes, at the next presiders meeting.

### **4. Chief Executive's Report**

4.1 Mrs McCormac delivered her report and there are no actions arising.

4.2 Mrs McCormac confirmed that all actions in relation to NIJAC's Business Plan were on track, however she highlighted one delay has been identified in relation to engagement with the Department of Health, due to the demands of Covid

4.3 The status of risks on the Register have been considered and will be kept under review by Business Cte; the implementation of the Staffing Structure was highlighted as NIJAC have moved this to the 'Business as Usual' stage. NIJAC now carries one vacancy which is the result of a member of staff leaving.

4.4 Financial sustainability remains a high risk, as the opening position does not cover core costs; meaning some scheme and staff costs having to be met through in-year bids. This position could be further affected by the rent review of Headline Building.

4.5 Mrs McCormac stated that heating in the Headline Building has all but broken down, and as the system is very old engineers are unable to fix this. NIJAC have bought some oil heaters and the Department Finance –Properties Division- has written to the landlord in an effort to rectify the situation.

4.6 Mrs McCormac shared positive trends in terms of engaging with others, including an increase in the use of social media with 33.6K impressions in the last 28 days and that there has been an increase of 42 in Twitter followers. It was noted that the ‘top Tweet’ related to opening of the ITFET President Scheme.

## **5. Selection Committee Scheme updates**

5.1 An update paper for each scheme was presented.

5.2 Mr Douglas updated Plenary on the Review Tribunal Medical Scheme.

5.3 Mr Robinson updated Plenary on the VPB Legal Scheme.

5.4 Mr Robinson updated Plenary on the ITFET President Scheme

5.5 Judge Miller QC updated Plenary on the District Judge (Magistrates’ Court) Scheme.

## **6. Advisory Committee**

6.1 The draft Minutes of 11 Nov 2021 were presented.

6.2 Mr Robinson confirmed that following discussions on Feedback during the last Plenary the committee agreed that the policy as is shall continue. It was noted that the quality of feedback recorded could be improved to enable staff members to draft better quality applicant feedback for Selection Cte Chair approval.

6.3 The Lessons Learnt Report (LLR) was noted by Plenary and the Chair confirmed that the use of Online testing would be kept under review.

6.4 The Chair thanked the Advisory Committee for their work in relation to Feedback and LLR.

## **7. Business Committee**

7.1 Mr Doyle presented the draft Minutes of 9 Nov 2021, with an emphasis on risk, finance and staffing.

7.2 Mr Doyle confirmed that staff had undergone Outcome Based Accountability training and confirmed that the date of training for Commissioners has been postponed and a new date will be confirmed once finalised.

7.3. Mr Doyle confirmed that a paper on scheme budgets vs actual cost was reviewed and that a recommendation has been by the Committee to add scheme budget as an item on the Chair's Checklist at the Pre-Scheme Stage.

**Action Arising:** Mr Millar to confirm new dates for OBA training.

## **8. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

8.1 Mr McTeggart presented the draft minutes of the 16 Nov 2021.

8.2 NIJAC Code of Conduct for Commission Members Policy was noted by Commissioners and it was confirmed that following some terminology corrections, the policy could be re-circulated and approved electronically.

**Action Arising:** Miss Roberts to re-circulate modified NIJAC Code of Conduct for Commission Members policy.

## **9 Any other business**

9.1 Mr Donaghy updated Plenary on the VPB Ordinary Scheme.

9.2 The Chair updated Plenary on the High Court Judge Scheme.

9.3 Mrs McCormac confirmed that a half day of Governance training will be arranged for early 2022, with the half day OBA training occurring on the same day.

9.4 The Chair closed the meeting and wished everyone (Staff & Commissioners) a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

**Date of next meeting:** 3 March 2022 at 9.30 am

**Signed:**



**The Right Honourable Dame Siobhan Keegan, the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Chair of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission**

**Dated: 03-03-22**