

# Information Pack for Applicants

## Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee Member Appointment

**Closing date for applications: 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

## Appointment of Committee members for the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC)

### 1. Information for applicants

Applications are invited for 4 members of the Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee. This note contains details of the Committee, duties involved, including indicative time commitment, remuneration and information on how to apply.

Please note that applications should be received by email no later than 4pm on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Completed applications should be returned to:

[Robyn.McNeilly@food.gov.uk](mailto:Robyn.McNeilly@food.gov.uk)

Completed monitoring forms should be forwarded to [Susan.Monahan@food.gov.uk](mailto:Susan.Monahan@food.gov.uk)

### 2. Background

The Northern Ireland Food Advisory Committee (NIFAC) acts as an advisory body to the Food Standards Agency (FSA). Members of NIFAC are appointed by the Minister responsible for the Department of Health in accordance with the Food Standards Act 1999. The statutory role is defined as follows:

"There shall be an advisory committee for Northern Ireland for the purpose of giving advice or information to the Agency about matters connected with its functions (including, in particular, matters affecting or otherwise relating to Northern Ireland)."

Members appointed to NIFAC should comply at all times with the Seven Guiding Principles of Public Life, laid down by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life (Annex A). Applicants may also wish to note the 'Complaints and Conflicts of Interest Information Guidance'.

### 3. What is the Food Standards Agency?

The FSA is a non-ministerial Government Department, set up in 2000 by the Food Standards Act 1999 to: "protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food, and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food." The FSA is governed by a Board, appointed by Ministers, to act in the public interest. It is a Government Department but is led by a Board rather than directly by a Minister. This enables it to work at "arm's length" from Government. The legislation which established the FSA (the Food Standards Act 1999) reinforced the FSA's position by giving it powers to publish any advice it issues, including advice to Ministers.

One Board member is appointed by the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland and this member also acts as Chair of NIFAC which provides advice and guidance to the FSA on food safety and standards issues, with particular emphasis on Northern Ireland. Mr Colm McKenna is currently the Board Member for Northern Ireland and Chair of NIFAC.

The FSA is equally accountable to the Westminster Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the National Assembly for Wales through their relevant Health Ministers.

The FSA works to protect public health and consumers' wider interests in food and seeks to ensure that food is safe and what it says it is. The FSA in Northern Ireland is responsible for devolved legislation and policy relating to food and feed safety, dietary health, standards, food composition and labelling.

Recognising the range of often conflicting and confusing advice on food, the FSA aims to ensure that it is the UK's most reliable source of advice and information about food, in which the consumer can have confidence. The FSA's guiding principles are:

- putting the consumer first
- openness and transparency
- science- and evidence-based
- acting independently
- enforcing food law fairly

In putting the consumer first, the FSA has made food safety its top priority. It aims to provide consumers with understandable, accurate and reliable information on which they can base their decisions about food, and which will help them understand all the issues surrounding food, food safety and diet and nutrition. The FSA is committed to supporting all consumers in food matters, including the most socially and economically disadvantaged.

The FSA bases its decisions and advice on the best evidence available, aiming to ensure that the decision-making process is as open and transparent as possible, seeking the views of interested parties before reaching conclusions and always explaining the reasons for its decisions and advice in a straightforward manner. It has made a commitment to decide on policy issues in public and after open debate.

The FSA headquarters are in London with regional offices in Belfast, Cardiff, York and Birmingham.

#### **4. Role specification:**

NIFAC was established in 2000 to provide advice and information to the FSA. Such advice and information will be on food safety, food standards and allied subjects, particularly as they relate to Northern Ireland. NIFAC members are appointed by the Minister of Health in accordance with the Food Standards Act 1999, to provide a wide range of expertise, experience and practical knowledge.

#### **The Committee:**

- provides insight and advice on Northern Ireland specific issues
- acts collectively in the public interest

- advises on the development of policy and legislation undertaken by the Agency
- helps to establish priorities for the Agency taking account of consumer concerns; surveillance or research data; topical issues and; committee members' judgement.

**NIFAC is committed to working in an open and transparent way by:**

- holding public meetings in a variety of locations across Northern Ireland
- listening to the views of Northern Ireland stakeholders
- supporting the FSA at public events
- identifying issues that are important to Northern Ireland
- producing thorough and well considered advice.

**In the last year the Committee has:**

- held three open meetings in Northern Ireland
- considered and provided advice on the overarching themes of the FSA's strategy and future strategic plan; the structure and characteristics of the food retail, wholesale and production sectors in Northern Ireland and; the food landscape in Northern Ireland.

**General responsibilities of NIFAC members**

NIFAC acts as an advisory body to the FSA. The Committee's term of reference is:

to give advice or information to the Agency about matters connected with its functions including in particular matters affecting or otherwise relating to Northern Ireland.

**Remuneration**

Members of NIFAC are contracted for **21 days per year** at an honorarium of **£3,885.00 per annum**, paid monthly in arrears at one twelfth of the annual rate by bank credit. The honorarium is non-pensionable, is subject to the deduction of National Insurance and is taxable. The FSA will determine any variation in the level of annual remuneration. The right to this remuneration under the Act ends on the expiry of your term of office or its earlier termination.

While we welcome applications from Civil Servants and other public sector workers, Executive Office Public Appointments Guidance states: "Applicants who already work in the public sector need to be aware that no one should be paid twice from the public purse for the same period of time. As a result, applicants who already work in the public sector may not be entitled to claim remuneration for a public appointment if the duties are undertaken during a period of time for which they are already paid by

the public sector.” These principles will apply in appointing members to the Committee.

### **Meetings held in public**

As part of its commitment to openness, a minimum of four meetings per year are held in public, and any interested member of the public or press can attend. NIFAC will also hold a closed strategic session each year. During the course of each open meeting there is an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions of speakers and Committee members. These meetings are usually held at the FSA’s office in Belfast, however Committee meetings may also be held throughout Northern Ireland, and members must be willing to travel accordingly. As these meetings are held in public, and to a tight timescale, Committee members need to be able to speak clearly and confidently in public and be able to make their contributions succinctly. Discussions that deal with internal Committee business such as organisational issues and future workplans, are generally held at the Committee’s annual retreat and are conducted in closed session.

Due to Covid-19, it may not be possible to meet in person, instead meetings may be held virtually.

### **Time commitment**

The role involves a time commitment of 21 days per year, including Committee meetings and preparation time. The Committee meets 4 times a year in open session and also meets 4 times a year in closed session to consider Board papers and provide comments and advice ahead of FSA Board meetings.

All reasonable expenses for travel and subsistence will be reimbursed.

The appointment will be for 2 or 3 years, renewable for a further term on the recommendation of the Chair and subject to satisfactory performance during the initial period of office. The final decisions on appointments and re-appointments are made by the Minister of Health. No one can normally serve for more than two terms under the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (CPA NI) guidelines.

## **5. Person specification:**

The Committee is looking for individuals who meet the following criteria:

### **Essential skills and knowledge:**

- Ability to think and act both strategically and analytically
- Have good judgement, a high level of integrity and public responsibility, coupled with the ability to participate in making difficult decisions
- Ability to interpret and communicate information effectively orally, in writing and through a variety of media channels

- Candidates are expected to have substantial background experience in 1 or more of the following areas:
  - Consumer
  - Industry
  - Public Health
  - Education (in a relevant subject matter)
  - Food and Agricultural Science
  - Nutrition

**Desirable skills and knowledge:**

- Commitment to food or consumer issues within the Northern Ireland context
- Understanding of the role of a Committee member of a major public organisation and the associated collective responsibilities

In all of these, preference will be given to those most able to help deliver the Agency's Strategic plan as part of a collegiate structure. The appointment will take into account the balance of skills on the Committee. The FSA Strategy and Strategic Plan 2015-2020 as well as the Northern Ireland Annex and Science, Evidence and Information Strategy 2015-2020 Delivery Plan can be found on the FSA's website at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/who-we-are>

## **6. Equal Opportunities**

Public appointments are based on the principles of merit and equal opportunities, with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process. NIFAC is committed to achieving diversity amongst its members. Applications are welcomed from suitably qualified people, regardless of race, religion, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age or disability, who are able to represent the interests of the public of Northern Ireland.

Applications are particularly welcome from people under 30 years of age, members of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, as these groups are currently underrepresented in the Committee.

## **7. The Appointment Process – How to apply**

The recruitment process will be carried out in line with guidance issued by the CPANI. One of the key principles of this guidance is selection based on merit, and

with the aim of achieving a balance of relevant skills and backgrounds on the committee concerned.

The process will be overseen and evaluated by a panel which will select a number of candidates for interview. Candidates will be advised whether they have been selected for interview following a sift. It is planned that the interviews will take place on 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Depending on the public health situation at the time, interviews may take place virtually via Microsoft Teams or in person. This will be determined closer to the time.

After interview the panel will make their recommendation to the Minister of Health who will decide whom to appoint from amongst those considered to be appointable. The successful candidate will commence their appointment at an appropriate time thereafter as agreed with the Committee Chair. Successful applicants who are not appointed immediately may be kept on a reserve list for 1 year to help fill future vacancies on the Committee.

The selection panel will identify for interview those who most closely fit the criteria. Where it is appropriate to shortlist for interview, the desirable criteria will be applied. At each stage the selection panel will have regard for the need for a balanced Committee in terms of diversity, skills and experience.

All applications should be submitted on the enclosed form. Please note that reference to a C.V. instead of providing an answer is not an acceptable response.

**The Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland must receive these by 4pm on 17<sup>th</sup> December.** Full details of how to submit are on Page 10 of the application form.

Should you have any queries, please contact **Robyn McNeilly, Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland**, on **07870362457** or by email [Robyn.McNeilly@food.gov.uk](mailto:Robyn.McNeilly@food.gov.uk)

## **Annexe A**

### **THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE**

#### **Selflessness**

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

#### **Integrity**

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

#### **Objectivity**

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

#### **Accountability**

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

#### **Openness**

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

#### **Honesty**

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interests.

#### **Leadership**

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.