

FOI DOF/2024-0454

Request

Re: AO competition IRC303169

On the 19 August 2024 the department launched a recruitment campaign for 500 Administrative Officers which closed on the 6th September.

1. How many applicants were there who submitted an online application and how many applicants fully completed the online tests?
2. Please provide a breakdown list of which departments these vacancies were in?
3. Any document including email and communications were the department discussed using this application process rather than test centres and were the department considers and/or accepts that some people may not be able to apply using their demanded method?
4. Did the department consider that their application method would place a bar on applications from for example any of the above groups, if yes please provide all relevant documentation including the documentation showing the decisions they took and why?
5. As part of the application process including equality monitoring did the department record any social background data such as the primary school attended, secondary school attended, the makeup of the family home such as whether either parent attended university, the type of job they were in, their income bracket or other indicators? If yes please provide a breakdown of this data?
6. Using that last major recruitment drive by the department for AO's or EO's where the testing took place at Stranmillis please state the total cost of that campaign, the number of vacancies, the number of applicants, the numbers of those who actually were tested and the total cost of the campaign? Please also confirm the company used to conduct this campaign?
7. Given the apparent cost savings in doing away with the test centre for this campaign and the other costs including expenses and logistics you would expect a considerable cost to ratio benefit. Please state the total cost of the current campaign to recruit 500 AO's? Please also confirm the company used to conduct this campaign?
8. Please disclose the name of the software used to monitor applicants during their online tests and how many applicants were disqualified during the tests?

9. The department has a discrimination policy against Sexual orientation, Age, Gender, Marital status, Race, Disability and Community background. Does the Department have a policy against discrimination based on social factors such as homelessness, household income, wealth, household utilities, household possessions? Given that some applicants could not apply due to their social circumstances it is clear that discrimination could occur, if there is a policy against this type of discrimination please provide a full copy.
10. Please provide a blank copy of the application form and equality form for this post. If you do not have these forms screen shots will do?

DoF Response

I can confirm the department holds some of the information requested.

1. This competition received 9755 validated applications. The number of applicants who completed the test is not yet available as the testing window remains open for some reasonable adjustment candidates.
2. Details of the total vacancies in each department is not held centrally by the Department of Finance. Each Civil Service department is responsible for managing its resources – both financial and staff. Each department determines its individual workforce needs and is responsible for ensuring that any additional staffing resources are affordable. When a department identifies a vacancy that needs filled, the request is referred to NICSHR to initiate the process to fill the post. NICSHR liaises with all departments on an ongoing basis to seek to prioritise recruitment activity within allocated financial and staff resources.

As at the end of September 2024, (the most recent figures available at time of the request), the NICSHR caseload for Administrative Officer vacancies which may be filled from Competition IRC303169 was 532. The breakdown of the vacancies by department is shown in the table below.

Department	Number of vacancies
DAERA	24
DE	19
DfC	280
DfE	11
DfI	13
DoF	82
DoH	1
DOJ	92
PPS	3
TEO	7
Grand Total	532

3. No information held.
4. No information held.
5. No this information is not considered however the NICS is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and welcomes applications from all sections of the community.
6. The department has decided to apply an exemption under section 43(2) to withhold the information in relation to the cost of the competition.

Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act (2000) exempts information whose disclosure would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of any person or organisation, including the department.

The application of Section 43 (2) in this case requires a Public Interest Test (PIT) to be carried out, which can be found attached separately (Annex B). In carrying out the PIT the department contends that disclosure of the requested material would not be in the public interest.

Total number of applications – 15128

Total number who sat test – 11518

Total number of vacancies filled from this competition – 1795 (this competition closed in October 2024)

NICS HR Department of Finance ran this campaign in conjunction with third party data processor HRConnect.

7. As this competition is still ongoing the final costs are not known. NICS HR Department of Finance conducted this campaign in conjunction with third party data processor HRConnect.
8. Proctoring is carried out for these tests. This means that candidate's identity is verified in advance of starting the tests and they are monitored via their webcam during the tests. It is a process built into the test. Proctoring is ongoing at present, so no information is currently held on how many applicants have been disqualified.
9. The NICS is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and welcomes applications from all sections of the community. Further detail can be found in its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy available on the NICS recruitment website [Equal Opportunities - Information for Candidates | Department of Finance \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](https://finance-ni.gov.uk/equal-opportunities-information-for-candidates)
10. A copy of the online application and equality form is attached as Annex C and Annex D respectively.