

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Recruitment Policy and Procedures

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this recruitment and selection policy is to ensure:

- a professional and consistent approach to recruitment and selection;
- adherence to Armagh Observatory and Planetarium's (AOP) Equal Opportunities Policy and relevant employment legislation;
- that all recruitment is based on fair, transparent, reliable and objective criteria; and
- all recruitment is based on priorities agreed prior to the selection process.

2 SCOPE

The overall Policy Statement and Principles of this policy are applicable to all recruitment and selection processes, including academic and funded positions and temporary posts. Separate specific procedural arrangements are outlined for each category.

This policy is not applicable to the recruitment of Board and Management Committee membership, which will be dealt with under arrangements agreed by the Board of Governors Chair and where applicable, in accordance with Commission for Public Appointments Northern Ireland (CPANI) guidance.

From time to time for short term and/or urgent needs AOP will use the services of recruitment agencies. The selection processes in these circumstances falls outside the scope of this policy.

3 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

3.1 Vision

Our vision is to be recognised as an international centre of scientific excellence for the pursuit of astronomy and the public understanding of science, for our capacity for innovation and our extraordinary heritage, a place our community can be proud of.

3.2 Mission Statement

Our mission is the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the cosmos, and the sharing of that knowledge in order to inspire future generations and enrich the intellectual, economic, social and cultural life of all.

3.3 Strategic Plan 2021-26

AOP's Strategic Plan is available from our website armagh.space/corporate/strategy.

4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

AOP values and promotes equality and diversity and will seek to ensure it treats all individuals fairly and with dignity and respect. It is opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. AOP has an Equal Opportunities Policy that is reflective of its commitment to develop and fully utilise the talents of all its staff.

The law requires employers with a workforce of more than 10 full-time employees to register with the Equality Commission and monitor the community background and gender of their workforce and applicants for employment.

5 DISABILITY

Disability is defined as:

“a physical or mental impairment which has substantial and **long-term** adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

The 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) prohibits discrimination in employment, access to goods and services and in property and land.

AOP will make reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates at all stages of the recruitment process to allow them to fully participate in the process.

6 SELECTION PANELS

Selection Panels will be set up by the Director or Head of Corporate Services and will include two or more suitably trained people. Occasionally, where AOP do not have a pool of suitably skilled or appropriate staff, external panel members may be agreed.

The selection panel will have a Chair whose role is to ensure this procedure is followed and that all necessary paperwork and decisions are recorded and duly signed by all panel members.

The selection panel will agree the selection criteria, assessment arrangements and the timetable for the recruitment process. Where possible the same panel will undertake shortlisting and interview and selection stages of the process.

At any time during the selection process, if a member of the selection panel has a conflict or perceived conflict of interest this must be declared, and the panel member will withdraw from the process. A conflict of interest form signed by all panel members will be retained on the recruitment file.

A conflict of interest will include, if a member of the selection panel is related to the applicant (i.e. spouse or partner (civil or otherwise), parent, child, sibling, uncle or aunt, first cousin, niece or nephew, fiancée or grandparent or grandchild) has or has had a personal relationship with an applicant.

All selection panel members will have received certified Recruitment and Selection training.

7 PROCEDURES – USE OF SHARED SERVICE PROVIDERS

Permanent appointments may be either provided using appropriate AOP staff or externally managed through a shared services provider, such as HR Connect or other similar providers. Procedures will be in accordance with the processes provided by the shared services provider.

Permanent Research posts may be recruited using shared services or the procedures outlined in Section 10.

8 AOP PROCEDURES - GENERAL

AOP may manage some recruitment processes internally, including temporary and casual appointments, subject to available resources and expediency.

8.1 Advertisement

AOP will advertise vacancies up to EO1 on its website armagh.space and relevant social media. For vacancies at higher grades online recruitment advertising will also be considered including:

- JobCentre Online
- NI Jobfinder
- NI Jobs.com

8.2 Application Procedure

Applicants will be provided with an application pack to include:

- Application form;
- Job Description and any other relevant information about the job and selection process;
- Essential and Desirable criteria against which applications will be assessed;
- A timetable for the selection process, if available (timetables issued are for guidance and may be subject to change);
- Equal Opportunities Monitoring Questionnaire.

The process will be administered by a member of the AOP Corporate team. The date of receipt of all applications and the names of all candidates will be recorded against a unique reference number.

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Questionnaires will be kept separately from Application Forms and will be used solely for the purpose of recording and reporting composite information necessary to fulfil AOP obligations in respect of Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (as amended).

8.3 Shortlisting

Panel members will receive a set of anonymised application forms for shortlisting. Each panel member will assess the applications against the agreed criteria separately before meeting together as a panel to discuss.

The decision of the panel regarding whether or not applicants meet each criteria will be clearly documented and signed by the Chair and each member of the selection panel. Shortlisted candidates will be notified by email of the time and date of their interview and any other arrangements or documentation required to verify identity, qualifications etc. Candidates who have not been selected for interview will also be notified by email prior to the date of interviews.

8.4 Interview and Selection Process

Applicants who have been shortlisted and invited for interview will be asked a set of core questions agreed in advance by the panel. Supplementary questions to clarify or expand on a candidate's answers may also be asked.

If appropriate, applicants may be asked to prepare a presentation or participate in other selection tests relevant to the post. Full information will be provided in advance if additional selection methods are being used. All candidates will be allocated the same amount of

time for their interview and the panel Chair will manage timekeeping to ensure this is the case.

8.5 Selection Decision

During the interview panel members will take notes on the candidate's responses to questions. At the end of the interview each panel member will independently allocate marks to the candidate in accordance with a marking scheme agreed in advance of the interviews.

At the end of the interview process the panel will discuss each candidate's performance and record an agreed panel mark for each question. Total marks will provide a rank order of candidates and those who meet/exceed agreed minimum standard will be included on a list of "suitable candidates". The Chair will record the selection decisions and each member of the panel will sign the decision documentation.

A list of suitable candidates may be used to make appointments to the same or similar posts for up to 12 months from the date of interviews.

8.6 Appointments

Where pre-employment checks are required, a job offer will be made on the condition that these provide a satisfactory outcome and an offer may be withdrawn if the conditions are not met. A pre employment medical may also be required prior to employment.

All candidates will be informed in writing of the outcome of the selection process at the earliest opportunity.

9 INTERNAL RECRUITMENT

9.1 Internal Recruitment Policy

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium is committed to open and transparent recruitment practices, open to both internal and external candidates to attract the widest field of candidates available and ensure equality and fairness. However, in some instances internal recruitment may be appropriate. The criteria for consideration of internal recruitment are:

- Migration to a new structure within existing resources where more than one staff member may be eligible to apply;
- Temporary promotion arrangements to cover maternity leave, prolonged periods of absence or other interim staffing arrangements.

Normally the applicant pool for internal recruitment will be restricted to staff at the same level or one level below the grade of the vacant post. However, in the absence of a sufficient pool of candidates at this level the pool may be widened to two grades. In some circumstances staff at a higher grade may be permitted to apply for a lower graded post, where they are willing to accept a lower grade of pay.

Staff wishing to be considered for internal promotion may request consideration of Job Share, part time or other flexible arrangements. Requests will be considered within the context of how this would impact on service delivery.

This policy is applicable to newly created posts within the structure. Regrading of existing posts, where there is a named postholder(s) interviewed as part of the JEGS review will be confirmed, subject to management committee approval and in accordance with any applicable requirements from DfC.

9.2 Internal Recruitment Process

9.2.1 AOP Director and SMT will consider posts to be filled by internal recruitment in accordance with the criteria outlined above. A record will be kept of decisions and the pool of staff eligible to apply.

9.2.2 Eligible staff will be informed by email and invited to apply. Provision will be made to ensure that eligible staff members on maternity leave or other absence are not disadvantaged.

9.2.3 Staff members not included in a pool who feel they meet the eligibility criteria may appeal in writing to the AOP Director. The process will be paused while the appeal is being considered. The Director's decision in respect of the appeal will be final.

9.2.4 Applicants will be asked to complete a short application form.

9.2.5 All eligible internal applicants will be invited for interview.

- 9.2.6 An interview panel will include, as a minimum, a member of the SMT and one other trained staff member (at a higher grade than the post being filled). AOP may request a panel member from outside the organisation to assist the process.
- 9.2.7 Interviews may include a presentation if this is considered appropriate to the role.
- 9.2.8 Where there is only one applicant or one member of staff eligible to apply AOP may appoint using a paper sift only. This will be subject to previous satisfactory performance appraisal.
- 9.2.9 Appointment effective date will normally be 1st of the month following appointment.
- 9.2.10 Feedback will be given to unsuccessful candidates.

10. APPOINTMENT OF RESEARCH POSTS

10.1 Fixed Term Research Fellow or Post Doctoral Research Assistant (PDRA)

Fixed Term Research opportunities are intended for early career researchers. These positions are advertised via various means including the RAS jobs email circular, the AAS Job Register, the EAS Job Register, email circulars and the AOP website and social media.

These posts are open to applicants of any nationality provided the applicant is eligible to work in the UK or access a visa to work in the UK and recruitment will be in accordance with the Home Office Skilled Worker Route (effective from January 2021). This guidance will be reviewed for each recruitment process.

The application period will be open for at least 30 days.

Applications must fall within the remit of AOP's research priorities and/or the terms of any grant funding as stated in the job information.

10.2 Selection Process

Applicants must complete a short application using a standard template. This must be submitted together with a list of publications.

Applicants must also arrange for two references to be submitted directly to a named contact in AOP by the closing date for applicants or other agreed deadline for all applicants.

A selection panel will be assigned by the AOP Director, which may include an independent member from another research institute. Every effort will be made to ensure gender balance on selection panels.

Following consideration of applications against pre-agreed criteria outlined in the applicant information a shortlist of candidates for interview will be compiled.

In exceptional circumstances the panel may revert to making an offer of employment without interview, however this will be rare and only in circumstances where the panel are agreed that only one applicant fully meets the requirements of the post.

Interviews may be held via Zoom or similar video conference facilities.

Shortlisted applicants may be required to deliver a talk at AOP as part of the selection process. Although this may include an audience, only the selection panel will mark/rank the talk against agreed criteria. A copy of panel members notes and markings, which form part of the final ranking of candidates will be retained on file.

All paperwork must be signed by all panel members and submitted to Corporate Services for secure filing and retention and disposal in accordance with agreed time limits.

A list of suitable candidates may be used to make appointments to the same or similar posts for up to 12 months from the date of interviews.

Any job offer to a successful applicant may be time limited due to the nature of the funding and the needs of the business.

10.3 Exceptions to a competitive process

AOP may receive funding from a grant awarding body for a particular research project where a named individual has been included in the application, due to their expertise and/or current research, and the grant will be dependent on that individual's contribution. In these circumstances AOP will appoint the named individual without any competitive external process. However, grant applications that include a named researcher must only be submitted when the rationale for excluding a competitive process has been considered and approved by the Director and/or Head of Research.

In most cases vacancies must be advertised, at a minimum, on AOP's website to ensure that a fair and transparent process is followed and, importantly, that staff at AOP have the opportunity to apply. However, in some circumstances AOP may recruit without advertising. This is referred to as 'direct appointment'.

Whenever a direct appointment is to be made:

- Care must be taken to ensure that there is no other member of staff concerned who could consider themselves to be a suitable candidate. Where this may be the case it is advisable to advertise the post internally, enabling all candidates to be fairly considered.
- The usual procedures must be followed before confirming the offer of appointment, including Right to Work checks, grading of the post, interview, seeking references, completion of an equal opportunities monitoring form, etc.
- Under the Skilled Worker visa rules it can be possible to sponsor a chosen candidate without advertising if the reasons for making the 'direct appointment' are justified but this should be discussed and agreed with SMT.

10.4 Applicant Expenses and Relocation Costs

AOP will meet reasonable travel expenses of applicants attending for interview and/or to deliver a talk.

Dependent on the number of candidates, AOP reserves the right to hold preliminary interviews via Zoom or similar video conference facilities.

AOP will reimburse applicant expenses to attend interview and/or attendance to give a talk, subject to provision of receipts and value for money assessment (See Appendix 1).

Where an applicant is offered employment and declines to accept, AOP may limit its reimbursement of monies claimed under the above arrangements to 50%.

Relocation expenses will be reimbursed, subject to provision of receipts and value for money assessment. An upper limit will be capped in accordance with HMRC guidance.

11. CASUAL EMPLOYMENT (SEASONAL AND SHORT TERM)

AOP recruit casuals to assist staff, mainly in the Planetarium, during peak times such as summer holidays, half-term and weekends. This is different to normal recruitment processes due to the nature of the work and the difficulties AOP have had in recruiting casual staff.

The process is as follows:

- Advertise on AOP website and social media on a rolling basis with no closing date for applications. The advert may be taken off line from time to time when a sufficient pool of casuals are appointed.
- A short application form will be available to download and return to HR@armagh.ac.uk
- As applications are received they will be reviewed by the Corporate Policy & HR Officer and Planetarium Operations Manager to consider:
 - Candidate experience & suitability for the role
 - Candidate availability
- Candidate will be contacted for an informal meeting and tour of the Planetarium to discuss the job role.
- This may be followed by a trial shift to ensure both parties are satisfied.
- If the candidate is suitable and agrees to be placed on the casual pool they must:
 - complete an Access NI check (basic) the cost of which will be refunded by AOP
 - be issued with a letter of offer to be signed and returned to HR for filing.

Armagh Planetarium and Observatory Policy on Applicant Expenses

Armagh Planetarium and Observatory will reimburse applicant expenses up to the following limits:

Within the United Kingdom (excluding Northern Ireland)

Expenses will be reimbursed for:

Air Travel	Return air fare (economy class)
Rail and Sea	Return fares by rail (economy class) and sea, including berths if appropriate.
Car	Mileage allowance, in accordance with approved rates. In exceptional circumstances AOP will meet the costs of renting a car at point of arrival.
Car Parking	Airport parking, etc. may be claimed.

Accommodation It is normally expected that applicants will make return journey on the day of the interview. If, however, the timing of the interview necessitates an overnight stay AOP will reimburse one overnight stay and a small amount of incidental expenses.

In all cases original receipts must be provided before payment can be processed. If receipts are not forwarded payment will not be guaranteed. The maximum amount which can be claimed for any one visit is £350.

Applicants from Outside the UK

The principles contained in the above apply however where travel commences from outside the UK the absolute maximum amount which can be reimbursed is:

Europe:	£650
Rest of the World	£1500