

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Accountant (SO)

Candidate Booklet



Bronze
Diversity Mark

IOP

Institute of Physics
Juno Practitioner

1. OVERVIEW

The Armagh Observatory was established in 1790 by Archbishop Richard Robinson as part of his vision to see a university in the City of Armagh. It is the oldest scientific institution in Northern Ireland and the longest continuously operating astronomical research institute in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The Armagh Planetarium was founded in 1968 by Dr Eric Lindsay, the seventh Director of the Armagh Observatory. It was the first Planetarium in Ireland and has been the public face of astronomy in Northern Ireland for over 50 years.

The Observatory and Planetarium are located within approx. 21 acres of landscaped grounds known as the Armagh Astropark, in close proximity to Armagh City centre. Together the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) deliver internationally recognised research in astronomy and related sciences and vibrant educational and outreach programmes for all ages.

AOP is grant funded by the Northern Ireland Executive with the Department for Communities (DfC) acting as sponsor department. It is classified as an executive Non-Departmental Public Body and has charitable status.

AOP holds Juno Practitioner status and the Diversity Mark NI Bronze award and we actively support equality, diversity and inclusion and encourage applications from all sections of society. Applications from underrepresented groups are particularly welcome. AOP has a responsibility to ensure that all employees are eligible to live and work in the UK. Therefore, when considering applying for the post, applicants must ensure they will be able to prove their right to live and work in the UK.

AOP is embarking on a rejuvenation project to secure its future for the 21st century, investing in its world-renowned research, education and outreach capabilities as a centre for the public communication of science, creating a dynamic and inspiring visitor experience, and preserving & conserving its outstanding scientific heritage and collections for future generations to see and enjoy.

Further information

Further information on the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium can be found on our website, www.armagh.space

2. JOB DESCRIPTION

AOP are recruiting an Accountant (SO). This is a permanent full-time post.

Location

The postholder will be based at Armagh Observatory and Planetarium, which is located at College Hill, Armagh, Northern Ireland, BT61 9DB.

Reporting

The postholder will report to the Head of Finance.

Salary

Salary will be within the NICS SO Accountant scale £41,272 - £42,570 per annum. Pay progression will be performance related. Applicants can expect to be placed at the minimum of the scale.

Hours of Work

The normal hours of work are 37 hours per week Monday to Friday. There may be requirements for the postholder to work outside of normal hours which can be taken as Time Off In Lieu (TOIL).

Holidays

Annual leave allowance is 30 days plus 12 public and privilege holidays. The holiday year runs from 1st February to 31st January.

Pensions

The postholder will be enrolled in the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Scheme (full details available at www.nilgosc.org.uk).

Vetting Requirements

The level of vetting required for this post is a Basic Check.

Probation

Confirmation of your appointment will be dependent upon the satisfactory completion of a probationary period of 9 months. If your performance, conduct or attendance during this period is not satisfactory your appointment may be terminated. All appointees will be expected to demonstrate a track record of effective service within this period.

Further Information

Applicants wishing to learn more about the post before deciding to apply can email hr@armagh.ac.uk.

3. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

Overall Job Purpose

Support the Corporate Team at Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) in providing sound financial practice in line with Managing Public Money Northern Ireland and other financial protocols.

Manage financial processes and maintain financial records in relation to revenue and capital spend and processing of invoices and payments.

Manage all financial aspects of external grant applications for submission to the UK Research Councils and other grant awarding organisations and administer appropriate systems and controls and financial reporting arrangements in respect of same.

Main Duties:

1. Oversee the operation of the computerised financial accounting system (Sage 200) to include timely and accurate data input, processing and reports;
2. Maintain the Project Accounting module on Sage 200;
3. Raise purchase orders for goods and services in accordance with AOP Financial Policies and Procedures;
4. Assist the AOP Head of Finance with budgetary control and monitoring of expenditure to include completing the accounting month-end routines and preparation of year end accounts within deadlines;
5. Variance analysis between actual and budgeted operating performance;
6. Preparation of monthly VAT returns and preparing bank and all other control account reconciliations;
7. Assist with procurement and preparation of business cases in line with Central Procurement Directorate (CDP) and DfC guidance as required;
8. Assist with monitoring of business cases/PPEs and recording of invoices against same;
9. Lodging receipts with the bank, processing bank transfers and payments through e-banking and liaising with the bank as required;
10. Hold an AOP credit card for online purchases as required;
11. Assist with the preparation of financial reports, returns and submissions to meet internal and external requirements including ad hoc requests and responses to consultations and Assembly questions;
12. Preparation and submission of monthly cash forecasts and resource and capital grant claims to DfC finance branch;
13. Preparation of the monthly Drawdown Submission to DfC;
14. Provide accurate and timely financial information to assist the preparation of external grant applications and grant claims using appropriate electronic systems in accordance with the rules and regulations of the grant awarding body including liaison with relevant personnel in these organisations as required;
15. Maintain grants database using appropriate systems and procedures for control and prepare periodic and final financial statements on grant income and expenditure as required;
16. Preparation of payroll information on a monthly basis for transfer to AOP payroll providers, for all staff, exchanging information via the secure interface, within tight deadlines;
17. Assist with the annual pay remit submission, and related back pay calculations as required;

18. Liaise with the payroll providers via the interface, ensuring all documents are exchanged on this platform;
19. Update NILGOSC with any staff changes (starters, leavers, change in circumstances), communicating via their secure portal;
20. Prepare returns for the Pension Regulator and Charity Commission;
21. Maintain the AOP Fixed Asset Register;
22. Liaising with Internal and External Audit to provide evidence of compliance with financial policies and procedures as required;
23. Ensure all financial records are maintained, stored and disposed of in accordance with AOP policy.
24. Any other relevant duties required by AOP Management to include providing cover as required to maintain AOP core services.
25. Undertake line management, as required.

4. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

ESSENTIAL CRITERIA

Applicants must, by the closing date for applications:

1. Have successfully passed the final professional examinations, and have met the practical experience requirements for membership of one of the professional bodies detailed below and either be a full current member or be expected to attain full membership of one of these bodies by 31st December 2026:
 - Chartered Accountants Ireland;
 - The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland;
 - The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales;
 - The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants;
 - The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants;
 - The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy;
 - The Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland.

Applications will also be considered from applicants with relevant formal qualifications considered by the selection panel to be of an equivalent or higher standard to those stated.

2. A minimum of one year's relevant post accountancy qualification experience in financial management, management accounting or financial accounting.
3. Be competent in the use of IT systems to include Microsoft Word and Excel.

DESIRABLE CRITERIA

In addition, applicants should be aware that after an eligibility sift, should it be necessary to shortlist candidates to go forward to interview, the following shortlisting criteria will be used in the order listed:

1. Demonstrate sound organisational and planning skills including the ability to work to deadlines with attention to detail.
2. Experience of public sector financial structures and processes including preparation and completion of resource (accrual) accounts.
3. Experience of Public Sector procurement processes and guidance.
4. Demonstrate ability to prepare and present financial management information to non-financial colleagues and board members.

Please note:

- Ensure that you provide evidence of your experience in your application form, giving length of experience, examples and dates as required. It is not sufficient to simply list your duties and responsibilities.
- The selection panel will not make assumptions from the title of the applicant's post or the nature of the organisation as to the skills and experience gained.
- If you do not provide sufficient detail, including the appropriate dates needed to meet the eligibility criteria, the selection panel will reject your application.
- ONLY the details provided by you in your application form (the employment history and eligibility criteria) will be provided to the selection panel for the purpose of determining your eligibility for the post.

5. INTERVIEW CRITERIA

Postholders will be expected to demonstrate the skills and competencies set out in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) competency framework at Level 3 for the purposes of personal and professional development. The following competences will be assessed at interview:

1. Managing a Quality Service

Effectiveness in this area is about being organised to deliver service objectives and striving to improve the quality of service, taking account of diverse customer needs and requirements. People who are effective plan, organise and manage their time and activities to deliver a high quality and efficient service, applying programme and project management approaches appropriately and effectively to support service delivery.

Marks available: 20

2. Making Effective Decisions

Effectiveness in this area is about being objective, using sound judgement, evidence and knowledge to provide accurate, expert and professional advice. For all staff, it means showing clarity of thought, setting priorities, analysing and using evidence to evaluate options before arriving at well-reasoned, justifiable decisions.

Marks available: 20

3. Changing and Improving

People who are effective in this area are responsive, innovative and seek out opportunities to create effective change. For all staff, it is about being open to change, suggesting ideas for improvements to the way things are done, and working in 'smarter', more focused ways.

Marks available: 20

4. Delivering at Pace

Effectiveness in this area means focusing on delivering timely performance with energy and taking responsibility and accountability for quality outcomes. For all staff, it is about working to agreed goals and activities and dealing with challenges in a responsive and constructive way.

Marks available: 20

5. Collaborating and Partnering

People skilled in this area create and maintain positive, professional and trusting working relationships with a wide range of people within and outside the NICS, to help to achieve business objectives and goals. At all levels, it requires working collaboratively, sharing information and building supportive, responsive relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, whilst having the confidence to challenge assumptions.

Marks available: 20

The selection panels will design questions to test the applicant's knowledge and experience in each of the areas above and award marks accordingly.

TOTAL MARKS AVAILABLE: 100 OVERALL

PASS MARK: 60

INTERVIEWS

It is intended that interviews for this post will take place **w/c 5th January 2026 in Armagh.**

6. INTERVIEW GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS

If this is your first experience of a competence-based interview, bear in mind that it does not require you to:

- Talk through previous jobs or appointments from start to finish;
- Provide generalised information as to your background and experience; or
- Provide information that is not specifically relevant to the competence the question is designed to test.

A competence-based interview does however require you to:

- Focus exclusively, in your responses, on your ability to fulfil the competences required for effective performance in the role; and
- Provide specific examples of your experience in relation to the required competence areas.

In preparation for the interview you may wish to think about having a clear structure for each of your examples, such as:

- Situation – briefly outline the situation;
- Task – what was your objective, what were you trying to achieve;
- Action – what did you actually do, what was your unique contribution;
- Result – what happened, what was the outcome, what did you learn.

The panel will ask you to provide specific examples from your past experience in relation to each of the competencies. You should therefore come to the interview prepared to discuss in detail a range of examples which best illustrate your skills and abilities in each competence area. You may draw examples from any area of your work / life experiences.

7. SELECTION PROCESS

The Merit Principle

Appointments to AOP are made under the 'merit principle', where the best person for any given post is selected in fair and open competition.

Guidance for Applicants

- We will not accept CVs, letters, additional pages or any other supplementary material in place of or in addition to completed application forms.
- Information in support of your application will not be accepted after the closing date for receipt of applications.
- AOP will not examine applications until after the closing deadline;
- Do not use acronyms, complex technical detail etc. Write for the reader who may not know your employer, your branch or your job.
- State clearly your personal involvement in any experience you quote. State "I" statements e.g. I planned meetings, I managed a budget, I prepared a presentation. It is how you actually carried out a piece of work that the panel will be interested in.
- The examples you provide should be concise and relevant to the criteria. This is very important as the examples which you provide may be checked out at interview and you

may need to be prepared to talk about these in detail if you are invited to interview. It is your unique role the panel are interested in, not that of your team or division.

Application Form Submission

You can apply online at www.armagh.space/opportunities

- Please refer to the Candidate Information Booklet before completing an application.
- **All** parts of the application form **must** be completed by the applicant before this application can be considered. Failure to do so may result in disqualification.
- All applications must be received by the advertised closing date. Late applications will not be accepted.
- Completed applications are to be emailed to hr@armagh.ac.uk by the closing date of **Monday 1st December 2025**.

8 DISABILITY REQUIREMENTS

If you require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability, to enable you to attend any part of the assessment process, please contact hr@armagh.ac.uk.

If you have indicated that you have a disability and are successful in the selection process and are being considered for appointment, you may be required to outline any adjustments you consider necessary in order for you to take up an appointment.

8.1 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MONITORING FORM

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 public bodies are required to report on equal opportunity monitoring.

It is the policy of Armagh Observatory and Planetarium to ensure that all eligible persons have equal opportunities for employment and advancement in the Armagh Observatory and Planetarium on the basis of their ability, qualifications and aptitude. AOP select those suitable for appointment solely on the basis of merit without regard to an individual's religious belief, political opinion, trade union membership, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, colour or ethnic origin.

In order to ensure that the equal opportunity policy is effectively implemented, the equal opportunity information provided with application forms will be monitored.