

Passionate about Northern Ireland: flexible, empowering, inclusive

# Assistant Private Secretary/Special Advisers to Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

## Grade D

**Closing Date:**  
**23:59 on 2 August 2021**

## Welcome message from Madeleine Alessandri

Thank you for your interest in the Northern Ireland Office.

Whether you are at the beginning of your career, returning after a break or looking for a change of direction, the NIO offers a wide range of exciting opportunities. It is a very special place to work. We are a small department with a lot going on and you will be working with a great team of people supporting the delivery of the UK Government's priorities for Northern Ireland.

For a small department, we have a significant role in a number of policy areas that are at the heart of the government's agenda: from dealing with the legacy of the Troubles to building a strong economic future for Northern Ireland and much more in between. You will find great opportunities with us to learn and develop your professional skills, working on some of the most complex policy challenges to deliver real world outcomes.

We are an organisation whose success is wholly dependent on our people. At the NIO we strive to create an environment where everyone can bring their whole self to work each and every day. We encourage flexible working and have a 'virtual by default' approach to the way we work. We are ambitious to increase our diversity of experience, background and thought to harness the value and benefits that different perspectives bring to the policy challenges we face.

I hope you will consider joining us for this exciting opportunity.

Madeleine Alessandri  
Permanent Secretary

# About the Northern Ireland Office

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) is at the heart of the government's EU Exit and Economic agendas. In addition there are significant policy portfolios on security and dealing the legacy of the past. We also have a full range of corporate services led by qualified professionals.

The Northern Ireland Office supports the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in promoting the best interests of Northern Ireland within a stronger United Kingdom. It ensures Northern Ireland's interests are fully and effectively represented at UK Government level, and the Government's responsibilities are fully and effectively represented in Northern Ireland.

Our key purpose is to make politics work by working alongside the Northern Ireland Executive to help improve the effectiveness and delivery of the devolved institutions; to ensure a more secure Northern Ireland; deliver a growing economy including rebalancing the economy; and ensure a stronger society by supporting initiatives designed to build better community relations and a genuinely shared future.

We are a Department that values its staff. We work hard to create an environment that speaks to our values; **flexible, empowering, inclusive**. We have a range of active staff groups including our Staff Engagement Group, Wellbeing, and Diversity & Inclusion networks. We encourage flexible working and work "virtually by default". We are a small, friendly department, passionate about Northern Ireland and passionate about our people.

# Overview of the SoS Private Office team

Principal Private Secretary

Private Secretary to the Secretary of State

Private Secretary to the Secretary of State

Assistant Private  
Secretary to the  
Secretary of State

Private Secretary to  
the Special Advisors

Assistant Private  
Secretary to the  
Secretary of State

Private Secretary to the  
Minister of State

Diary Manager to the  
Secretary of State

Assistant Private  
Secretary to the  
Special Advisors

Correspondence  
Manager for the  
Northern Ireland  
Office

Diary Manager / Assistant  
Private Secretary to the  
Minister of State

# About the role

An exciting opportunity has arisen to work as the Assistant Private Secretary to the Special Advisers in the Office of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

This fast-paced post is an integral role in the wider Private Office team and directly supports the delivery of ministerial priorities. It also provides an excellent opportunity for anyone who would like to gain a real insight into the work of Ministers, how the department and the wider Government operates, and how the UK Government works collaboratively with the Northern Ireland Executive.

The successful candidate will need to be assertive and confident in their ability to prioritise a busy workload and work with Ministers, Special Advisers and colleagues at all levels. Excellent communications skills, sound judgment, and the ability to remain calm and reliable under pressure are also essential skills. In return, this role offers the opportunity to be at the heart of a busy, friendly team and gain valuable core experience of departmental working at the centre of Government.

# Our Values

We developed our values through extensive engagement across the office, ensuring that we captured the values and behaviours that matter most to us. Our sense of commitment to Northern Ireland and our shared values are at the heart of what we do and how we do it.

## Flexible

- We are flexible in how we think and how we work
- We are agile in our approach to emerging situations
- We find solutions
- We are creative and innovative
- We embrace change
- We allow ourselves the flex to think strategically about the future, as well as responding at a pace to the immediate when required

## Empowering

- We empower ourselves through our focus on personal development, seizing opportunities to grow and broaden our experiences
- We empower decisions to be taken at the lowest appropriate level
- We understand our levels of responsibility and accountability
- We are recognised for our expertise and take personal responsibility for developing our skills.
- We empower those around us through responsible delegation and creating an environment where new ideas are encouraged
- We are comfortable to challenge and be challenged

## Inclusive

- We create an environment where everyone can bring their true selves to work every day and flourish
- We ensure everyone has a voice
- We listen to all voices
- We prize diversity of all kinds for the strength it brings to our team
- We are respectful of differences. We create an environment where everyone can bring their true selves to work every day and flourish

# Our Values



# Diversity & Inclusion

The Northern Ireland Office is committed to being an inclusive employer with a diverse workforce. We encourage applications from people from the widest possible diversity of backgrounds, cultures and experiences. We are focused on building an organisation that understands and values staff with a diversity of backgrounds, ideas, skills and experience, as they contribute to greater creativity, innovation and effective decision making in meeting our strategic objectives.

By joining us, you will become part of an all encompassing organisation that is passionate about Northern Ireland and in equal measure passionate about how our behaviours reflect our commitment to our embedded values - flexible, empowering and inclusive.



**Lloyd Ryan - Senior Security Advisor** - I have only been with the Northern Ireland Office for a few months but have felt at home right from the start. I feel like I have joined a family where everyone is positively looking out for each other and genuinely cares about me. I feel valued and respected for my contribution to the NIO, it is a great place to work.



# Job Details

The following sections will provide the detailed breakdown of the role to support your application

**Job title:** Assistant Private Secretary  
to the Special Advisers

**Number of roles:** 1

**Grade:** D

**Salary:** Inner London £26,411 - £30,324  
Belfast £22,566 – 26,901  
PO Allowance of £2,562 payable

**Duration:** Permanent

**Level of security required:** Security Check (SC)

**Location:** 1 Horse Guards Road, London or  
Stormont House, Stormont Estate, Belfast

**Working hours:** 37 hours a week

**Working pattern:** Full-time/flexible working  
arrangements

# Essential requirements and desirable skills

## Essential Requirements – behaviours

- Ability to manage competing priorities
- Excellent oral and written communication skills
- Ability to work effectively within a team
- Strong planning and organisational skills
- Willing to undergo SC clearance

## Desirable Skills

- Previous experience of working within a Private Office

# Selection process details

## Application process

To apply for this post, you will need to submit your application form via the recruitment portal. This should be submitted via Civil Service Jobs and be completed no later than 23:55 on 2 August 2021.

Provide **250** words in the Statement of Suitability section explaining how you meet the essential/desirable criteria. Behaviours form a part of the selection process, you will therefore be required to provide evidence against each of the selected behaviours.

Part of the application process will require you to complete diversity questionnaire, you will have the option to select 'prefer not to say' but this information is very important to the Civil Service.

Should you encounter any issues with your online application please get in touch with:  
[moj-recruitment-vetting-enquiries@gov.sscl.com](mailto:moj-recruitment-vetting-enquiries@gov.sscl.com)

If you do not receive acknowledgement of your application within 48 hours, please contact the above email address.

# Selection process details

## Shortlist

At this stage, the panel, including the hiring manager, will assess your **behaviours** and select applicants demonstrating the best fit with the role by considering the evidence you have provided against the criteria set out in the 'Statement of Suitability' section. It is therefore crucial you ensure all areas of the selection process are addressed as missing information may affect your application.

## The Interview

The interview will consist of questions where candidates will be expected to build on the information provided in their application. These interviews may take place virtually, depending on wider circumstances.

# Interview structure and how to prepare

Behaviour questions – Behaviours relate to whether applicants have the skills to carry out specific tasks by asking for examples of their experience. The following techniques/models may be useful when thinking through responses for interview and demonstrating capability.

An example of a behaviour question would be:

*'Tell me about a time when you've had to deal with a difficult customer requirement.'*

In your preparation for interview, please ensure you refer to the [Civil Service Success Profiles Behaviours framework](#). This will provide you with an overview of the expected performance expectation for this post against the above behaviours at this level.

Consider how you might articulate your experience against the behavioural expectation set out. When preparing and responding to behaviour based questions, we recommend you use the following model:

- The 'STAR' model, (situation, task, action and result)

# Salary and Benefits

## Salary

The salary for this post is set within the Band D pay range:

**Inner London £26,411 - £30,324 / Belfast £22,566 - £26,901**

**PO Allowance of £2,562 payable**

Salary for a serving Civil Servant will be within normal rules of appointment on level transfer or promotion. It is expected that new entrants to the Civil Service will start on the pay band minimum.

## Benefits

Whatever your role, we take your career and development seriously, and want to enable you to build a really successful career with the Department and wider Civil Service. It is crucial that our employees have the right skills to develop their careers and meet the challenges ahead, and you'll benefit from regular performance and development reviews to ensure this development is ongoing. As a Civil Service employee, you'll be entitled to a large range of benefits.

This includes:

- 25 days on appointment increasing to 30 days after 5 years service. Public/Privilege days will be notified locally according to location.
- A competitive contributory pension scheme that you can enter as soon as you join where we will make a significant contribution to the cost of your pension; where your contributions come out of your salary before any tax is taken; and where your pension will continue to provide valuable benefits for you and your family if you are too ill to continue to work or die before you retire.
- Flexible working patterns where possible allow you to vary your working day as long as you work your total hours.

# Salary and Benefits

## Continued:

- Generous paid maternity, adoption and shared parental leave which is notably more than the statutory minimum offered by many other employers.
- Childcare benefits (policy for new employees as of 5 April 2018): The government has introduced the Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) scheme. Working parents can open an online childcare account and for every £8 they pay in, the government adds £2, up to a maximum of £2000 a year for each child or £4000 for a disabled child. Parents then use the funds to pay for registered childcare. Existing employees may be able to continue to claim childcare vouchers, so please check how the policy would work for you here.
- Interest-free loans allowing you to spread the cost of an annual travel season ticket or a new bicycle.
- The opportunity to use onsite facilities including fitness centres and staff canteens (where applicable).
- Occupational sick pay.

# FAQs

## 1. Can I apply if I am not currently a civil servant?

Yes.

## 2. Is this role permanent?

Yes

## 3. Is this role suitable for part-time working?

Flexible working arrangements are available but you should discuss your needs with the hiring manager if you are invited to interview.

## 4. Will the role involve travel?

Some occasional travel may be required for this role.

## 5. Where will the role be based?

If successful you will be based in either London or Belfast. Unfortunately relocation costs will not be reimbursed.

## 6. Can I claim back any expenses incurred during the recruitment process?

No. Unfortunately we will not be able to reimburse you, except in exceptional circumstances and only when agreed in advance.

## 7. What nationality do I need to hold in order to apply?

To be eligible for employment to this role you must be a national from the following countries:

- The United Kingdom
- The Republic of Ireland
- The Commonwealth\*
- A European Economic Area (EEA) Member State
- Switzerland
- Turkey Certain family members of EEA, Switzerland and Turkish nationals are also eligible to apply regardless of their nationality. (\*Commonwealth citizens not yet in the UK, who have no right of abode in the UK and who do not have leave to enter the UK are ineligible to apply.) For further information on whether you are eligible to apply, please visit [Gov.UK](https://www.gov.uk).



# FAQs

## 8. Is security clearance required?

Yes. If successful you must hold, or be willing to obtain, security clearance to SC level. More information about the vetting process can be found [here](#). This is not a reserved post.

## 9. What reasonable adjustments can be made if I have a disability?

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments in order to support disabled job applicants and ensure that you are not disadvantaged in the recruitment and assessment process. Reasonable adjustments could include; allowing extra time during selection tests; ensuring that information is provided in an accessible format or; by providing training.

If you feel that you may need a reasonable adjustment to be made, or you would like to discuss your requirements in more detail, please contact us in the first instance.

If you wish to receive a hard copy of the information, or in an alternative format e.g. Audio, Braille or large font then please contact: (moj-recruitment-vetting-enquiries@gov.sscl.com)

In the exceptional circumstance, citing reasons, that you cannot apply online, please post your application to: The Recruiting Managing, Stormont House, Stormont Estate, Belfast, BT4 3SH.. Please quote the vacancy reference on the envelope.

# FAQs

## 10. What is the role of the Civil Service Commission in relation to recruitment into the Civil Service?

The Civil Service Commission has two primary functions:

- to provide assurance that selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition as outlined in the [Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles](#). For the most senior posts in the Civil Service, the Commission discharges its responsibilities directly by overseeing the recruitment process and by a Commissioner chairing the selection panel.
- to hear and determine appeals made by civil servants under the Civil Service Code which sets out the Civil Service values – Honesty, Integrity, Impartiality and Objectivity – and forms part of the relationship between civil servants and their employer.

## 11. What do I do if I want to make a complaint?

The law requires that selection for appointment to the Civil Service is on merit on the basis of fair and open competition as outlined in the Civil Service Commission's Recruitment Principles. If you feel your application has not been treated in accordance with the Recruitment Principles, and you wish to make a complaint, you should contact Alison Logan ([Alison.Logan@nio.gov.uk](mailto:Alison.Logan@nio.gov.uk)) in the first instance. If you are not satisfied with the response you receive from the Department, you can contact the Civil Service Commission at:

<https://civilservicecommission.independent.gov.uk/recruitment/civilservicerecruitmentcomplaints/>

# Further Information

## Terms of Appointment

Appointments through this campaign will be on the basis of a loan or secondment for a period of 2 years for candidates from Other Government Departments.

Fixed-term appointments are temporary appointments often used to employ individuals for a set period of time.

Terms of appointment for a serving Civil Servant would be by agreement between the individual and their current department, and within normal rules of appointment on level transfer or promotion.

The expectation within the NIO is that staff will normally remain in post for a minimum of 12 months for band C, 18 months for band B and 24 months for band A, and you will not be eligible to apply for NIO roles on level transfer during that time.

## Feedback

Only candidates invited to interview or assessment will receive feedback on their application.

If we identify more appointable candidates than we have roles for at this time, we will operate a reserve list for 6 months.

## Equal Opportunities

The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) values equality and diversity in employment. We are committed to being an organisation in which fairness and equality of opportunity is central to the approach in business and working relationships and where the organisational culture reflects and supports these values. In the NIO you have the right to a working environment free from discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation regardless of race, ethnic or national origin, age, religion, sex, gender identity, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, working hours, trade union membership or trade union activity.

## Guaranteed Interview Scheme for Disabled Persons

Disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria in the job specification are guaranteed an interview. Selection will be on merit. If you wish to claim a guaranteed interview under the Disability Commitment, you should complete the Equality and Diversity section. It is not necessary to state the nature of your disability.

# Further Information

## Pension Scheme

The appointment will be pensionable from the outset. The Civil Service offers excellent pension arrangements and pensions are an important part of the reward package.

For detailed information, please visit <http://www.civilservicepensionscheme.org.uk/>.

## Conflicts of Interest

Candidates must declare any interests they may have that might cause questions to be raised about their approach to the business of the Department. They are required to declare any relevant business interests, shareholdings, positions of authority, retainers, consultancy arrangements or other connections with commercial, public or voluntary bodies, both for themselves and for their spouses/partners. The successful candidate will be required to give up any conflicting interests and his/her other business and financial interests may be published.

## Security Clearance

Candidates should have, or expect to undergo SC level security clearance to take up this post. Further information about security vetting can be found [here](#).

**You may wish to be aware that there are various factors (noted below) that may affect the length of time the check takes, or ultimately affect whether a candidate is eligible for security clearance.**

**Lived outside UK:** For meaningful checks to be carried out individuals should have been resident in the United Kingdom for the last 3 years for Counter Terrorist Check (CTC), 5 years for Security Clearance (SC) and 10 years for Developed Vetting (DV).

**Employee records:** Any indication of unreliability, relevant in a security context

**Criminal record information:** It is important to be honest about any offences committed in the past. Having a criminal record is not an automatic bar, each case will be considered individually

**Security Service records:** Concerns arising from checks undertaken by the Security Service.

**Financial irregularities:** For SC or DV clearance only - Poor financial judgment or management, excessive expenditure, or high levels of indebtedness.

**Other factors:** Inconsistencies, discrepancies or gaps in information provided, personal circumstances, personality and lifestyle.