



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Appendix A – Relevant Extracts from the RHI Report

Chapter 56 - Summary and Recommendations

Summary

[...]

16. The Enterprise, Trade and Investment (ETI) Committee, whose role on behalf of the elected Northern Ireland Assembly included independent scrutiny of DETI, did not operate as an effective check against departmental error in the case of the RHI scheme. Aside from limitations inherent in its role, reasons for this included its own limited resources and its dependence on the Department for information and analysis to allow it to perform its challenge function robustly – information and analysis which was not always sufficient for this purpose.

Recommendations

- R.1** A new policy at its earliest stage should be subject to a rigorous process to determine whether the Northern Ireland devolved administration has (or is prepared to assign) the necessary skills and resources to deliver the policy safely and competently. The scope for economies of scale through working in partnership with another administration (for example a Westminster Department, another of the devolved administrations or city-regions within the UK or, in appropriate circumstances, the Republic of Ireland) should be thoroughly examined and the assessment of joint working options made visible to Ministers and the relevant Assembly Committee.
- R.36** The Northern Ireland Civil Service should develop a better process to learn from past failures, one that goes beyond the traditional method of revising and circulating internal guidance. Leaders within the Senior Civil Service must be more systematic, persistent and proactive in explaining to staff what changes are needed and supporting staff to adapt their working practices. A tougher level of external scrutiny, such as from the nonexecutives on the boards of Departments and from strengthened Assembly Committees, while no guarantee of success, would increase scrutiny and help ensure that systematic changes are made and sustained.
- R.38** The Northern Ireland Assembly should consider what steps are needed to strengthen its scrutiny role, particularly as conducted by Assembly Committees, in the light of lessons from the RHI. While it will be for the Assembly itself to decide, the Inquiry recommends that such a consideration might include significantly increasing the resources available to statutory committees and, generally, identifying what steps are needed to improve the effective scrutiny of Departments and their initiatives, whether in Assembly Committees or in the Assembly Chamber itself.