I am very supportive of this Bill. The lackadaisical attidude within the Executive regarding the use of special advisors, laid bare because of RHI, has been a disgrace and shows disrespect for the public purse, paid for by many taxpayers who would not expect to get away with similar laxity in their professional life.

I see no justification for these tax payers forking out for the Executive Office having up to eight special advisors and thus support a cull.

For those special advisors who are to be allowed it is essential that their use is properly regulated, and indeed, we should have been able to assume that this was already the case, including proper lines of responsibility and accountability, records of meeting, rules of engagement with Civil Service, register of interests, use of official systems (or more correctly, non use of non official systems) and unauthorised disclosure.

I want to draw particular attention to

"(6) After section 8, insert—

"8A(1) A minister must ensure that only the duly appointed special adviser in the department will exercise the functions, enjoy the access and receive the privileges of the post; and a permanent secretary must ensure that no person other than a duly appointed special adviser is afforded by the department the cooperation, recognition and facilitation due to a special adviser. "

It is vital that those who would not be eligible to be special advisors because of Ann's Law cannot still be operating as if they are.

As far as I am concerned the question is not "Should this Bill be passed|" but rather "Why has this Bill not already been passed long since?.