

No.	Recommendation	Comments
PROFESSIONAL SKILLS: POLICY SKILLS		
R1	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full.</p> <p>Some elements are addressed in existing guidance, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the role of the Senior Responsible Officer in respect of the delivery of a project or programme; ▪ existing Business Case guidance; ▪ the obligation upon civil servants under their Code of Ethics to provide objective and impartial advice, and to give Ministers all the facts; ▪ departmental systems to set priorities and targets (consistent with the PfG) to report progress against key targets.
R2	<p>Novel, potentially volatile and untested initiatives should in future be scrutinised thoroughly, well ahead of ministerial and business case approval.</p> <p>The Inquiry commends processes such as a 'starting point Gateway assessment' and, at a suitable point, a 'feasibility signoff' completed by the Department's Accounting Officer.</p> <p>With regard to particular policies driven by unpredictable demand, consideration should always be given, before the policy is implemented, to the inclusion of a clearly drafted statutory power to enable swift action to be taken to suspend and/or close the scheme in order to bring it under control</p>	<p>They have been addressed in work to date through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the review of recruitment and selection policies and practices as part of the NICS People Strategy; ▪ the Review of Business Case and Expenditure Approval processes.
R3	<p>As far as practicable, Northern Ireland Civil Service teams working on policies, particularly new and untested initiatives, should be trained and supported so that they have the skills to do the job, not least the ability to model the policy, the skills to test it in advance under different conditions and scenarios, and the self-awareness to seek and use external challenge.</p>	<p>Further work is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reflect key principles in the guidance relating to policy making, Business Cases, Project Management including Gateway™ guidance, and risk-management;
R4	<p>A lesson from the RHI experience is that action is needed to raise and sustain the quality of advice to Ministers and the clarity with which it is expressed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ address the knowledge and skills of those in policy roles, including training with an emphasis on modelling and testing, by conducting a fundamental review of the

	<p>Options must be properly evaluated and, at the point of formal decisions, advice must be clear, comprehensive and impartial. Risks should be clearly and realistically stated, with an account of the implementation challenges and how the policy will work on the ground. In particular, when relevant because of the nature of the policy, Ministers should be informed at the outset of how the initiative may be suspended or closed if it gets into difficulty.</p> <p>Ministers should in future expect, and Departments should put in place systems to ensure, that officials provide regular and accurate information about how implementation is working in practice, especially when a third party is involved in implementing and/or administering a scheme or policy.</p>	<p><i>Practical Guide to Policy Making</i> through the Policy Champions” Network, and follow through to the <i>Policy Skills Guide</i> and policy-skills training offer.;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ embed NICS ethical standards; ▪ ensure financial and non-financial performance target reporting to the Minister, including outside the budget period.
PROFESSIONAL SKILLS: PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT		
<p>R11</p>	<p>Best practice project and risk management disciplines should be the default practice within the Northern Ireland Civil Service when developing novel and complex policies and managing their implementation.</p> <p>These disciplines can be widely applied and should not be confined only to major or capital projects.</p> <p>They can be tailored to the specific circumstances of an initiative and are especially important when implementing policies designed to change behaviour or to make incentive payments to individuals or businesses.</p> <p>If there is insufficient resource to implement adequate project management then projects should not proceed.</p>	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full.</p> <p>They have been addressed in work to date through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strengthening of policy and guidance relating to project delivery; ▪ work to establish the new NICS Project Delivery Profession; ▪ accredited practitioner-level training in the Management of Risk methodology, available via NICS HR Learning & Development;
<p>R12</p>	<p>The leaders of the Northern Ireland Civil Service should work with Invest Northern Ireland and the Strategic Investment Board to consider how both organisations can better contribute their expertise to the work of mainstream Departments, particularly in relation to good practice on implementation of programmes and project management.</p> <p>This could for example include providing advice at the early stages of policy development; ‘tyrekicking’ and challenge; and joint training and job exchange schemes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ amendment to the Treasury Orange Book (Risk Management); ▪ the Review of Business Case and Expenditure Approval processes;

R13	Project boards are an essential element of project management oversight and must include individuals who can challenge and who are not directly responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the project. Such boards, in appropriate circumstances, can benefit greatly from the inclusion of individuals external to the Northern Ireland Civil Service, preferably with experience/expertise in the project subject matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ agreement by the NICS Board on the principles and procedures for use of SIB. <p>Further work is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish the NICS Project Delivery Profession ▪ Ensure that all Departments have in place a P3O Office, as set out in DAO 02/20 ▪ Bring forward proposals for the implementation of Portfolio Management ▪ Implement the IPA's 'Get to Green' refresh of Gateway™ and wider Assurance Reviews ▪ reform behaviours and culture to ensure a greater focus on risk management; ▪ improve the way in which departments work with Invest NI and SIB, ensuring that that partnership dovetails with Gateway™ and existing guidance on the obligations of the SRO; ▪ improve the reporting of risks to Ministers; ▪ develop cross-departmental collaboration and coordination through the PfG outcomes-based approach and the promotion of collaborative behaviours; ▪ ensure senior ownership of governance arrangements with third parties.
R14	The risks involved in implementation of an initiative must be tracked, re-considered regularly and used to manage, improve and adjust the project in real time. How the risks are being acted upon should be reported to the Project Board and to the relevant Minister.	
R15	Co-ordination of groups of projects aiming to achieve change in a particular sector – e.g. renewable energy projects – would be stronger through use of high level Programme Boards. Such boards should meet regularly and receive reports of relevant experience as to how the projects are working 'on the ground'. Had such a board existed, taken such reports and met regularly in relation to the NI non-domestic RHI scheme, it could have provided a forum for the exchange of knowledge and communication between the concerned Departments and agencies (DETI/DfE, Invest NI, DFP/DoF, DARD/DAERA and CAFRE).	
R16	<p>Where other government bodies, such as Ofgem, or contractors or other third parties are involved in the implementation of a project, the 'home' Department must retain overall control and overall project management.</p> <p>The governance arrangement between the Northern Ireland Department and the third party must be owned and led at a senior level in the Department.</p>	

MINISTERS AND SPECIAL ADVISERS

<p>R5</p>	<p>One role of Ministers in a democratic system is to decide on policies and they can only do so effectively if they are prepared, in appropriate cases, to question and challenge material put to them in submissions and regulatory impact assessments.</p> <p>Ministers should be given training on their role in relation to policy, legislation and on the working of public expenditure and value for money. More should also be done to provide</p> <p>(a) comprehensive departmental induction and information, which should include frank disclosure of any specific difficulties and problems involved in a particular scheme or policy area; and</p> <p>(b) greater support in the form of a properly resourced Private Office.</p>	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full, with the exception of the consideration of an independent mechanism to assess special advisers' compliance with the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>They have been addressed through work to date, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ revisions to the <i>Ministerial Code of Conduct</i>, <i>Code of Conduct for Special Advisers</i> and <i>NICS Code of Ethics</i>, and the introduction of new <i>Guidance for Ministers</i>; ▪ the publication of new enforcement arrangements for ministerial standards of behaviour; ▪ agreement on the development of a multi-year outcomes-focussed <i>Programme for Government</i>, aligned with the Budget, including stakeholder engagement and consultation; ▪ departmental induction and briefing for Ministers on the return of the Executive, and Executive away-days; ▪ the strengthening of Private Offices including the higher grading of the Private Secretary and Assistant Private Secretary roles; ▪ identification of the team where matters of policy in respect of Special Advisers are to be dealt with. <p>Further work is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ deliver induction programmes for Ministers and for special advisers; ▪ arrange for publication of relevant interests of civil servants.
<p>R6</p>	<p>(i) Under existing arrangements, Northern Ireland Ministers should be responsible for their Special Advisers.</p> <p>(ii) New or returning Ministers should be invited to convey to the relevant Permanent Secretary, and make transparent to the Department, how the Minister expects his or her Special Adviser to fulfil their role in relation to considering submissions and associated background documents.</p> <p>(iii) There should be clarity with regard to the Minister's and the Special Adviser's respective roles in terms of reading, advising and commenting upon submissions, technical reports and other documentation advanced as a basis for ministerial decisions.</p> <p>(iv) The advisory role of the Special Adviser in relation to ministerial decision-making, including the sequencing of consideration by the Special Adviser and the Minister, should be clearly set out for officials to understand.</p> <p>(v) This should include provision for exceptional circumstances in which, and the means by which, the usual procedures may need to be adapted, for example in cases of particular urgency or when a Minister is abroad on official business or on leave.</p>	
<p>R7</p>	<p>There should be a clearly defined induction process for new Special Advisers, shared by the appointing Minister and the relevant Permanent Secretary, in the course of which the</p>	

	structure and work of the relevant Department, the terms of the Special Advisers Model Contract, the Code Governing Appointment of Special Advisers, the relevant NICS Codes of Conduct and the role, responsibilities, accountability and obligations of advisers should be carefully explained. Such a process should involve practical preparation and training and not be limited to the provision of documents.	
R25	In light of their legal responsibility to direct and control the Department for which they are responsible, and their democratic accountability to the Northern Ireland Assembly, ministerial decisions should be taken by Ministers (in conjunction with other ministerial colleagues, where appropriate) and by no one else.	
R37	In keeping with the spirit of the Ministerial Pledge of Office, the Northern Ireland political parties, supported by the Northern Ireland Civil Service, should together agree a set of actions to reduce organisational silos arising between the government Departments and their linked public bodies and to promote behaviours of collaboration and joined-up departmental working in the interests of the whole Northern Ireland community.	
R39	Any Minister presenting the Assembly with legislation for approval should sufficiently read and familiarise themselves with that legislation and ensure an adequate evidence base is publicly available to demonstrate that the benefits justify any attendant costs.	
R40	Ministers, Special Advisers and officials in Northern Ireland government Departments should declare their interests annually in writing. When any conflict of interest arises during the course of government business each individual should understand that he/she has an obligation formally to declare that conflict and ensure that it has been recorded. Departments, for their part, must have and implement clear policies and procedures so that all those concerned know what they have to do and when. The relevant existing policies and practices should be tightened up and rigorously implemented to ensure they are consistent with best practice. Conflicts of Interest guidance published by the Northern Ireland Audit Office in 2015 is a good baseline. We further recommend that the registers of interests be made public.	
R41	The Special Adviser Code of Conduct should be revised. How these changes are achieved will need to be a matter for the political representatives concerned in the	

construction of a system in which the public can have confidence. The Inquiry's findings suggest the following ought to be considered for inclusion in a revised code:

- the accountability of a SpAd to his/her appointing Minister and clarity as to the responsibilities of each;
- clarity about the working relationship between SpAds based in Departments and SpAds in the Executive Office;
- responsibilities of SpAds to the Executive as a whole;
- with whom and how SpAds should register their interests;
- how SpAds should act when conflicts of interests arise, cross-referencing to departmental requirements on how such conflicts should be identified, reported and managed;
- SpAds' duty of confidentiality, cross-referencing to their employment terms under the Civil Service code;
- expectations and rules for SpAds when handling and emailing official information;
- guidance about use of personal email addresses and personal mobiles for official business;
- protocol for handling disputes between a Minister and a SpAd;
- clarity on the routes for handling grievances and disciplinary matters;
- guidance on dealing with party political matters, and on interacting with party officials; and
- the need for an office to be responsible for periodic updating of the SpAd Code of Conduct.

Any revised SpAd code should be published.

In the meantime, should SpAds come to be appointed before a revised code takes effect, the Inquiry recommends that there should be robust compliance with both the letter and spirit of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the codes emanating therefrom approved by the Assembly.

R42	<p>The Code of Conduct issued to Northern Ireland Ministers in 2007 (contained within the Northern Ireland Ministerial Code 2006) should be revised and brought up to date reflecting the findings of the RHI Inquiry and drawing on relevant best practice standards from ministerial codes of conduct used elsewhere in the UK and indeed from Northern Ireland's earlier Ministerial Code of 2000. This should be a priority for the Northern Ireland Executive. From the experience of this Inquiry, a revised code would among other things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• explain how Ministers are expected to fulfil their responsibilities when leading a Department and determining a Department's policies;• make clear that Ministers have an active role in questioning and challenging the advice they receive;• cross-reference to Ministers' duties under "Managing Public Money Northern Ireland";• be clear that, unless and until the legislation is changed, each Minister is individually responsible for the recruitment, management and discipline of his/her SpAd, including for observing the Northern Ireland laws and guidance in force in relation to SpAds;• clarify expectations about collaboration and joint working between Ministers of different Departments as well as an individual Minister's responsibility to support the Government in Northern Ireland as a whole;• Consideration should also include whether recent changes to the Westminster, Scottish Executive and Welsh Government Ministerial Codes of Conduct could be relevant to the Northern Ireland context. For example, the Westminster Ministerial Code of August 2019 published by the Cabinet Office specifically provides at paragraph 3.3 that "The responsibility for the management and conduct of Special Advisers, including discipline, rests with the Minister who made the appointment. Individual Ministers will be accountable to the Prime Minister, Parliament and the public for their actions and decisions in respect of their Special Advisers."	
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<p>R43</p>	<p>In addition, the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly ought, in the Inquiry's view, to give due consideration to an independent mechanism to assess compliance with codes of conduct in public life as they apply to Ministers and Special Advisers. Whatever route is chosen, there must in future also be a focus on keeping standards of conduct clear, consistent, up-to-date and reflective of good practice. How this is done will be a matter for debate, but the principles of independence, transparency and periodic reporting to the people of Northern Ireland must be at the core.</p>	
<p>STAFFING AND HUMAN RESOURCES</p>		
<p>R8</p>	<p>A fundamental shift is needed in the approach used within the Northern Ireland Civil Service with regard to recruitment and selection for government jobs. This must involve an up-front assessment of the skills that are required to fulfil the specific role in question, rather than matching a person to a role according to an individual's grade and level of pay. In time the Inquiry believes this should lead towards more job-specific recruitment and selection which must, of course, be fair, transparent and consistent</p>	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full.</p> <p>They have been addressed through work to date, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ job-specific appointments within the NICS generalist grades; ▪ the piloting of Cabinet Office's "Commercial Skills Assessment and Development Centre" to evaluate its potential as a mechanism to improve commercial skills across NI Departments; ▪ the encouragement of senior leaders to access the Cabinet Office / Oxford University Major Projects Leadership Academy (MPLA); ▪ the introduction of a new portfolio of commercial awareness and skills training for all generalist grades; ▪ the introduction of a learning and development framework for economists, including commercial awareness. ▪ assurances sought from Departments that senior managers will, as a matter of course, review the levels of specific expertise required to deliver their business
<p>R9</p>	<p>Commercial and business awareness amongst policy officials, particularly those working in roles relating to the economy of Northern Ireland, must be improved.</p> <p>It is important that the leadership of the Northern Ireland Civil Service also devise and provide clear guidance and training to relevant staff about the identification and handling of commercially sensitive information, including when engaging with third parties. This should include a clear process for escalating queries in relation to, and seeking clearance in respect of, what can be shared by officials, where necessary.</p> <p>In addition, a wider range of opportunities and encouragement for policy civil servants to gain front-line business/commercial and operational experience would be of benefit.</p>	
<p>R10</p>	<p>The Northern Ireland Civil Service should consider what changes are needed to its guidance and practices on the use of external consultants arising from the experience of RHI. Specific recommendations include:</p> <p>(a) that better assessments are needed at the outset of a given policy or project pre-procurement, as to what type of specialist support is to be sought from amongst the</p>	

	<p>different types of available consultancies – for example, contracted-in specialist skills or stand-alone advisory reports or some appropriate combination of both; and</p> <p>(b) that far greater emphasis should be placed upon the resources and capabilities of the relevant Civil Service teams to manage the consultants and to make effective use of their input, including knowledge transfer and retention after any consultancy contract has ended.</p>	<p>and take appropriate steps to secure the appropriate expertise and manage the associated risks;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the issue of corporate guidance on managing handovers for incorporation within departmental procedures;
<p>R24</p>	<p>Senior managers in the Civil Service must take responsibility for guiding and, where necessary, sequencing the timing of staff moves so that continuity of business is secured. This includes allowing sufficient time for transferring staff to hand over, and discuss in person, responsibilities with their successors.</p> <p>The Northern Ireland Civil Service should consider allowing those managers more flexibility in handling the timing of staff moves (e.g. in terms of retention, allowances and promotion in role) to help secure business continuity on complex projects.</p>	<p>Further work is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reform the role and sponsorship of the Civil Service Commissioners for NI ▪ launch and implement talent management products across the NICS; ▪ Deliver NICS Recruitment Plan - phase 1 & 2 ▪ Match to job roles and appoint further staff via SO/DP recruitment competition ▪ Agree scope and timeframe for review of NICS recruitment; ▪ Develop proposals for the review of NICS workforce model (disciplines, occupational groups, professions, job roles, <i>etc</i>) ▪ Develop terms of reference for the review of NICS approach to professions. To incorporate recommendations arising from NIAO VFM report and PAC report ▪ Further alignment of NICS HR resources and operations to deliver on NICS corporate HR priorities including resourcing activities for critical posts. ▪ Ongoing improvement of recruitment and selection processes.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Incorporation of the sequencing and flexibility of handling staff moves to secure business (alongside the ongoing work on talent management and skills development) into the review of resourcing. ▪ Progress implementation of new processes and procedures that enable line managers' capability and confidence in their people-management roles ▪ extend the work of the Policy Community; ▪ develop the role of the SRO in ensuring they have the right skills available to them to deliver the policy, including externally-sourced expertise; ▪ develop the <i>Guidance on the Use of Professional Services including Consultants</i>, including issues of the 'intelligent customer' role and the knowledge transfer needed; ▪ develop the guidance on assessing the need for specialist support within project management / assurance methodologies, in the TEO Guide to Policy Making.
COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION		
R17	<p>The Northern Ireland Civil Service should take steps to draw on best practice from other jurisdictions to provide more support for professions within the civil service. The Inquiry specifically recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the establishment of a project management profession with a named senior leader and a comprehensive programme of professional development; and (b) the development of improved professional opportunities for finance professionals and for economists within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. 	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full.</p> <p>They have been addressed in work to date through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ initial steps to establish a project delivery profession which will, once in place, take forward the recommended programme of professional development;

<p>R18</p>	<p>More generally, we recommend a Northern Ireland government-wide framework for information exchange and, where appropriate, co-operation between the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Whitehall Departments and (where relevant) Departments of other devolved Governments and of the Government of the Republic of Ireland.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the introduction of a Learning and Development Framework for the NICS Economist Profession; ▪ the development and issuing of a new protocol for engaging with HMT. <p>Further work is required to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ complete the establishment of the Project Delivery profession, including the appointment of a Head of Profession; ▪ deliver the strategy under development for the NICS finance profession; ▪ establish a framework for engagement between the neighbouring administrations.
<p>GOVERNANCE AND FINANCIAL CONTROLS</p>		
<p>R19</p>	<p>The processes within a Department for approving new expenditure and business cases including, where it forms part of that process, the role of Casework Committees, should be thoroughly re-designed to be more rigorous, testing and independent. Such processes should be less bureaucratic and pay greater attention to examining the unique features of the project proposed.</p>	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full.</p> <p>It is important to note that public expenditure in NI is governed by the UK Budgeting rules set by HM Treasury. These rules mean that there is limited flexibility available to the Executive in some areas.</p>
<p>R20</p>	<p>Public expenditure rules should be sufficiently flexible so that false economies can be avoided.</p> <p>In order to deliver a policy objective, Departments should not be required to choose a more expensive option in overall terms because they cannot use the available funding in a flexible cost-effective way.</p> <p>The Department of Finance should engage with HMT to determine how such false economies, impacting as they must on the value for money taxpayers receive for the funds they provide, can be identified and avoided in the future in respect of government initiatives in Northern Ireland.</p>	<p>Some elements are addressed in existing guidance, including the stipulation that resources should be utilised in line with regularity, propriety and value for money considerations. Funding for some specific issues may be provided by HMT on a time-limited basis. In addition the HMT public expenditure rules mean that only very limited funding can be carried forward between financial years. However, this does not override the value for money requirement. Departments have the opportunity to revise annual budget allocations through the in-year process.</p>

R21	The Department of Finance's distinctive role in scrutinising business cases should be searching and sceptical, guarding against over-reliance on the assurances offered by the applicant Department.	<p>Value for Money is already a requirement in the NICS core competency framework.</p> <p>These recommendations have been addressed in work to date through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Departments' response to the lessons learned following PWC's Heat Reports; ▪ the major and fundamental Review of the Expenditure Approval and Business Case Processes, incorporating many of the recommended elements; ▪ the delivery of an online package of Public Expenditure training for both budget holders and general-service grades; ▪ the initiation of a review of MPMNI; ▪ re-establishment of DoF-led Finance Director meetings ▪ the issue of a formal protocol for engagement with HMT. <p>Further work is required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ give consideration to the role of Casework Committees to ensure that they are rigorous and deliver the necessary scrutiny and independence, in line with the existing role of Gateway™ reviews; ▪ Implementation of Five Case Model guidance ▪ Engagement with the Treasury around 'false economies' ▪ Consideration by DoF of the introduction of an Approval Panel for the highest cost and most complex proposals
R22	Particularly where a policy initiative is demand-led, novel, complex and/or likely to be lengthy, consideration should be given to increasing Department of Finance involvement from an early stage and on an ongoing basis, including a more proactive role in monitoring the financial progress of the relevant initiative, rather than merely reactively dealing with periodic requests for additional expenditure or approval.	
R23	<p>Ministers should always be advised of any conditions attached to the approval of a policy or project by the Department of Finance.</p> <p>The Department of Finance should also require, and be kept informed of, regular reviews to ensure compliance with such conditions by the spending Department.</p>	
R29	<p>The finance function within a Department should exert the necessary authority and capability to fulfil the requirements of 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland', namely to retain a firm grasp of the organisation's financial position and performance.</p> <p>The Inquiry recommends that the Department of Finance take action to review and, if necessary, strengthen the leadership of and support for the finance functions within Departments of the Northern Ireland Government.</p>	
R30	<p>Civil servants who are responsible for holding and monitoring a budget should have to demonstrate core requirements in financial literacy and an understanding of how public spending operates, including what is expected of them according to the core guidance contained in 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland'.</p> <p>The Inquiry recommends that the financial training requirements for budget holders be reviewed and updated.</p>	
R31	Any imperative to spend a budget within a given timeframe should not be allowed to take precedence over how that budget is used and the longer term benefits and overall value	

	<p>of such expenditure. Ministers, Special Advisers and the Northern Ireland Civil Service all share responsibility for ensuring best practice in the use of taxpayers' money.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ As part of the Annual Assurance Statement, departments will be asked to confirm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – that the appropriate approvals process has been followed for all expenditure; – that Ministers have been made aware of conditions that apply to all expenditure approvals as standard and specifically have been made aware of any non-standard conditions that had been applied to expenditure; and – that they are content all expenditure activity has adhered to the conditions of its approval. ■ Supply shall: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – include a line in non-standard approval letters to say that Ministers should be made aware of the additional conditions; and – issue a Finance Directors letter to advise this change is coming in and that it would be for departments to determine the most suitable method for advising their Minister of such conditions. ■ Progress and finalise the review of MPMNI ■ deliver the strategy currently under development for the NICS finance profession; ■ Gauge the demand for a further classroom-based training course. As part of that process DoF will engage with Finance Directors on departmental requirements. Should there be demand for such a course DoF will develop in conjunction with CAL.;
<p>R32a</p>	<p>The checks and balances within a Department designed to catch problems early failed over many years in DETI to identify certain of the risks of the RHI or their materialisation.</p> <p>All Departments would benefit from reviewing how their governance systems work in practice in order to ensure that they are widely understood and actively used by staff.</p> <p>Leaders should set the tone and expectation for strong governance and risk management.</p>	
<p>R33</p>	<p>The protocol for relations with HMT, namely that the Northern Ireland Department of Finance must be the sole conduit of formal communication, should be reinforced and widely understood across the Northern Ireland Civil Service.</p> <p>The Department of Finance, for its part, must recognise that its unique relationship with HMT places on its officials a responsibility to be alert to, and act expeditiously upon, the requirements of all other Departments in matters relating to HMT; and to communicate clearly and effectively with those Departments as to HMT's position in respect of the spending Department's financial envelope.</p>	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ keep the information sharing and knowledge transfer protocols under review, engaging with HMT and departments on their effectiveness and revising where necessary. ▪ assess position with both HMT and departments and review any breaches for lessons learned as part of its first review.
RECORD KEEPING		
R26	Notes of significant meetings between officials and ministers, particularly those affecting decision-making and spending, must be taken and retained. The responsibility for ensuring this is done should be clearly identified and compliance should be ensured in practice.	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full.</p> <p>They have been addressed through work to date through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ revisions to the <i>NICS Code of Ethics</i> and production of the <i>Guidance for Ministers</i>; ▪ new corporate guidance developed for Private Offices; ▪ the strengthening of Private Offices by the redefining and higher grading of the Private Secretary and Assistant Private Secretary roles; ▪ planned induction, training and ongoing support for Private Office staff; ▪ existing practices such as reviews of retention and disposal schedules and Information Asset Registers; ▪ the project to review how the NICS carries out its Records Management responsibilities and improving its current electronic storage system (HPRM) for all users; ▪ the launch of an NICS data-protection and information management hub.
R27	<p>Ministers' responses to submissions should be formally and timeously recorded and disseminated to officials by the Minister's Private Office. That responsibility should not be left to policy teams.</p> <p>One clear corollary is the need for a better system to carry out these essential administrative tasks and the Inquiry recommends a much stronger role for ministerial Private Offices which should be staffed by officials capable of supporting Ministers in this and other tasks to a high standard.</p>	
R28	<p>The culture and practice of record keeping and access to records within the Northern Ireland Civil Service needs to change so that staff responsible for a given area of work have easy access to the analysis and decisions underpinning the policy or initiative on which they are engaged.</p> <p>Regular audits of record keeping should be undertaken so as to ensure that important information is recorded, is easily identifiable, is readily accessible and remains so for as long as is necessary in respect of any policy or initiative.</p> <p>In addressing this recommendation, there should be a review of the NICS electronic information management system and how it is used by civil servants. Steps should be</p>	

	<p>taken to ensure that the systems which civil servants are expected to use are fit for purpose and facilitate the easy saving, storage and subsequent location and use of relevant material.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Completion of NICS reviews of records management and HPRM optimisation; ▪ upgrade of the current records management software; <p>Further work is required to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ review and update Private Office guidance in light of recent experience; ▪ further address the culture and behaviours surrounding record keeping in the NICS; ▪ Complete a reporting exercise to ensure that products designed to address these recommendations have been appropriately embedded within all Departments
RAISING CONCERNS		
R32b	<p>Civil servants should be encouraged not to feel in any way inhibited about disclosing possible or emerging problems, raising concerns, negative aspects or adverse criticisms of a project as necessary to ensure that decisions are properly informed.</p>	<p>These recommendations can be accepted in full.</p> <p>They have been partially addressed through:</p>
R34	<p>The Northern Ireland Civil Service should have regard to best practice elsewhere about how to respond effectively when serious problems emerge, such as those that did so with the non-domestic NI RHI in the summer of 2015, by, for example, establishing a parallel investigatory team and/or developing a specialist capacity within the internal audit service that can be rapidly deployed to assess the situation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the revision of the <i>NICS Code of Ethics</i>; ▪ the GIAFIS review of whistleblowing; ▪ the Leadership Development training for senior officials. <p>Further work is required to</p>
R35	<p>Better systems are needed for spotting early warnings and concerns from the public and businesses that something unexpected could be happening or going wrong with an initiative. Simply updating existing complaints and whistle-blowing policies, although helpful, will not be sufficient, since relevant intelligence often does not come through these routes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ implement the remaining recommendations of the GIAFIS review; ▪ Launch and promote the revised NICS Code of Ethics

	<p>The default response amongst officials should be one of curiosity rather than assuming the concern is misplaced.</p> <p>We recommend that all Northern Ireland Departments review their processes for obtaining, handling and responding to information from multiple routes, to ensure that they have robust systems to pick up early warnings and repeated signals, as well as evidence that a policy is working as intended.</p> <p>Consideration should be given, in appropriate cases, to encouraging relevant officials to investigate the implementation and operation of a scheme in practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ develop an encompassing ‘Raising Concerns’ policy informed by the NIAO Good Practice Guide; ▪ Provide appropriate guidance to managers, staff and the public about addressing concerns in the NICS ▪ endorse a culture of curiosity and challenge; ▪ enhance the role of Departmental Boards, including the role of NEDs and Ministers, and review the remit and agenda of Boards.
<p>R36</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	