

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Finance

SPECIAL ADVISER APPOINTMENTS

Published at 1.00 pm on Monday 20 January 2020.

Mr Murphy (The Minister of Finance): The role of Special Adviser is an important feature of modern government. They can offer politically-informed advice to Ministers, ensure co-ordination across Departments through liaising with other special advisers, and act as a link between the Minister and the party that has appointed them to Office.

It is essential that Special Advisers are subject to, and adhere to, the high standards expected of those in public life. Given the public's legitimate concerns in this regard I have moved quickly to produce and agree strengthened rules. Today the Executive approved a new suite of documents governing the employment and conduct of special advisers.

The Special Adviser **Code of Conduct** has been revised:

- there is a new overarching introduction making clear the critical role special advisers have in supporting ministers and that they are an important part of the team, working closely alongside other civil servants to deliver Ministers' priorities. This section also requires Special Advisers to serve the Executive as a whole, not just their own Minister;
- the Code makes very clear that Ministers are responsible for the management, conduct and discipline of their special advisers;
- it requires special advisers to keep good records and use official email accounts; and
- it requires special advisers to publish their meetings with external organisations, and gifts and hospitality received. There will be an annual statement of the cost of special advisers, including any severance paid and salaries of those in the two highest paybands will be published. Special advisers will also be required to declare any conflicts of interest.

There is a new statutory **Code for Appointment**. Reflecting the personal nature of the appointment, it does not prescribe the process by which the Minister selects a special adviser. The Code for Appointment makes clear that civil service involvement commences at the point at which the Minister advises the Department of the name of the person they wish to appoint as their special adviser

The Special Adviser **Letter of Appointment** clarifies the responsibility of the Minister for the management, conduct and discipline of the special adviser. And it makes clear that the NICS Code of Ethics will apply to special advisers, excluding – as always – the requirements of impartiality and objectivity.

The scheme for the **Remuneration of Special Advisers** transfers responsibility for determining pay to Department of Finance officials, as this department has overall responsibility for determining pay policy and conditions of employment for NICS employees. The Minister of Finance will have no involvement in the setting of salaries including those of Special Advisers. There will be three paybands, and the maximum in the highest payband will be £85k per annum. Starting salaries in paybands 2 and 3 will normally be at the bottom of the payband. No Special Adviser will earn more than a Minister. In addition, Special Advisers who leave their post will not receive severance pay if they take up another publicly-funded role.

These new rules should go some way to restoring public confidence in these institutions. I am pleased that all parties in the Executive have signed up to these codes. It is now essential that these rules and the values that underpin them are put into practice.