

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE RHI INQUIRY

1. The RHI Inquiry published its report in March 2020, and the Executive published its official response in October 2021. The NI Audit Office published its assessment of progress against the Inquiry's recommendations in March 2022.
2. In 2022 the NIAO judged 18 recommendations implemented, 14 likely to be implemented, and 10 not likely to be implemented on the basis of the evidence provided to the NIAO.
3. The Department of Finance has conducted a further assessment of implementation. Our assessment is that 31 of the recommendations for the NICS are now fully implemented, and there are 11 recommendations that are not yet fully implemented.
4. Of these eleven:
 - a. recommendations 5, 7 and 37, which relate to the induction and development of Ministers and Special Advisers, and to the development of the next Programme for Government, can only be implemented once Ministers and Special Advisers are in post and there is a functioning Executive;
 - b. recommendation 42 was adjudged by the Department to have been implemented, but may be revisited on the return of the Executive in light of NIAO comments;
 - c. recommendations 3 and 18 are being addressed by the Policy Profession Steering Group and will be complete by October;
 - d. recommendations 8 and 24 require the completion of the review of recruitment;
 - e. the review of the Guidance on the Use of Professional Services flowing from recommendation 10 will be initiated in October and should be complete by the end of January;
 - f. the review of MPMNI (rec 29) is not yet complete due to competing pressures, but should be complete by the end of September;
 - g. Of the remaining elements of recommendation 28:
 - i. a thematic audit of compliance with records management policies is to be scheduled for a future date;

- ii. the establishment of a project to replace Content Manager is to be included within the development of the Digital and Data Strategy.

Department of Finance

August 2023

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5	Ministers should be given training on their role in relation to policy, legislation and on the working of public expenditure and value for money.	<p>Plans are being developed to deliver induction programmes to Ministers and Special Advisers to be delivered by the IFG. Discussions with the IFG are continuing and a further date will be offered to Executive Ministers in the near future.</p> <p>Arrangements will be made for induction of new Ministers at the beginning of the new mandate in 2022.</p>	Engagement with the parties entitled to form an Executive is planned over the summer. A programme of sessions is being developed, pending agreement on the appropriate approach.	Further work will need to be done on an ongoing basis to train and induct incoming Ministers on these critical matters, and we believe that attendance at appropriate training and inductions should be regarded as compulsory for Ministers within a reasonable timeframe of taking office. Departments should take all possible steps to encourage attendance by their minister.	<p>Officials are working on the offering to Ministers in the context of preparing for the possible formation of an Executive.</p> <p>It is proposed that induction sessions and information sessions be delivered both centrally and at departmental level, depending on the subject matter. There may also be scope to deliver some sessions to Ministerial/Spad teams.</p> <p>The scope of the material required will vary depending on the experience of the individual Ministers, but will include common elements such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget (DOF) • PFG/'missions' (TEO) • Ministerial Code (TEO) • Operation of Executive (TEO) • Ministers and the media (EIS) • Judicial Review (DSO) • The legislative process (OLC) 	

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					Officials will be engaging with parties entitled to form an Executive to ascertain the preferred method of delivery of such sessions.	
7	<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 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.</p> <p>Such a process should involve practical preparation and training and not be limited to the provision of documents.</p>	Plans are being developed to deliver induction programmes to Ministers and Special Advisers, to be delivered by the IFG. Ministers and Special Advisers have indicated their interest. The date is to be confirmed.	Arrangements for induction of special advisers are in development, to be ready for use at the point at which special advisers are appointed.			
37	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	The revision of the NICS Code of Ethics (issued in February 2022) emphasises collaborative working by setting out that the role of the Civil Service is <i>"to support Ministers and the Executive as a whole in developing and implementing their policies, and in delivering public</i>		While the revision of the NICS Code of Ethics to require more collaborative working and the changes to the Special Adviser Code of Conduct are welcome, in our opinion they do not specifically address the recommendation made by the Inquiry.	A governance model is being developed for consideration by the NICS Board and will be aimed at ensuring that the development of the Programme for Government, and the detailed development of the Missions, will take place in a collaborative fashion which ensures alignment of	

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	public bodies and to promote behaviours of collaboration and joined-up departmental working in the interests of the whole Northern Ireland community.	<p><i>services</i>” and that “<i>all civil servants have a shared responsibility to support the work of the Executive as a whole</i>”. The revised Code of Ethics also extends the definition of integrity to require that civil servants “<i>always act in a way that is ... collaborative</i>”.</p> <p>The NICS Board will be setting up appropriate governance arrangements for the PfG to facilitate collaborative design and delivery.</p>			<p>policies included. Further, the PfG Division is investigating other ways to encourage delivery of a programme on a cross-Departmental, cross-sectoral basis.</p>	
39	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.			<p>We appreciate the practical difficulties of demonstrating the sections of this recommendation concerning Minister’s being familiar with legislation, however we believe making the evidence base for any legislation public and readily available should be addressed.</p>	<p>The new policy guide, <i>Making a Difference</i>, very clearly promotes an evidence-based approach to policy development. The evidence base needs to be properly set out and referenced in the appropriate consultation document, in advance of any legislation. This will be crucial for Ministers who will promote and, if necessary, defend new policies and any legislation flowing from them.</p> <p>The consultation then would normally be examined by the Assembly Committee and, to support proper scrutiny, it is our intention that the policy guide should be brought to the attention of Assembly</p>	

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					<p>Members and Committees at the restoration of devolution. Where necessary, further evidence may be sought by the Committee.</p> <p>The publication of the relevant evidence base, for the purpose of supporting the subsequent work of the Assembly in examining the basis for legislation, will also be underlined as good practice in the guidance to officials on preparing and introducing legislation. The decision to publish an evidence base as an aspect of introducing legislation will be a matter for Ministers in individual cases, recognising that in some case that evidence will already be published as official statistics and research.</p>	
40	Ministers, Special Advisers and officials in Northern Ireland government departments should declare their interests annually in writing.	[deemed implemented]		We would recommend that the NICS Group Internal Audit and Fraud Investigation Service (GIAFIS) monitor on an ongoing basis compliance by all departments with appropriately disclosing declarations of interest.	<p>Ongoing monitoring of compliance with the relevant processes is a matter for departments.</p> <p>GIAFIS will be requested to conduct a one-off audit of the declarations of interest process implemented by departments within 24 months of the next Executive being formed.</p>	

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42	From the experience of this Inquiry, a revised [ministerial] code would among other things ... make clear that Ministers have an active role in questioning and challenging the advice they receive	Issues such as this are expected to be addressed in planned ministerial development sessions.		We believe that the “active role” suggested by the recommendation was required to be in the Ministerial Code of Conduct and anticipated more from a minister than the “fair consideration” to be given to advice from civil servants included within the Guidance for Ministers.	The definition of the role of Ministers in relation to official advice will be one element in a range of matters to be referred to future Ministers for review in relation to their function, role and conduct.	
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.	<p>This, and following recommendations, will be addressed through the revision of the Guide to Policy Making.</p> <p>The revision process will also be the context within which the issues highlighted in the RHI Inquiry are discussed within the wider policy community.</p> <p>An NICS learning needs analysis will be conducted by the end of March 2022 to ensure appropriate development support is available to assist with any capability issues identified within departments.</p>	<p><i>Making a Difference (the new, short guide to the policy function) was published 1 February. RHI recommendations were referenced in the launch presentation to 900+ policy officials.</i></p> <p><i>The NICS Learning Needs Analysis (LNA) was completed in 2022. An overall NICS report was shared with the NICS Board in April 2022 followed by the issue of Departmental LNA reports. NICS HR is in ongoing consultation with Departments to support the development needs identified in the reports.</i></p>	In our view, in order for this recommendation to be regarded as implemented, it is essential that the NICS can demonstrate that a rigorous assessment of whether there are sufficient skills and resources to deliver the policy safely and competently has been carried out.	<p>The approach to policy development set out in <i>Making a Difference</i>, makes it clear that the level of resourcing should be assessed from the beginning. It also makes clear that policy development should not move forward unless adequate resources are available. Furthermore, the approach in the guide was developed to be in line the principles of good practice in programme and project management. (This applies whether or not a formal programme or project approach is being adopted).</p> <p>Project or programme management provides for an assessment of the resource required from the beginning through the conduct of an independent Gateway assessment. Otherwise, the need for sufficient resource to</p>	

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					develop and deliver a policy is a matter for assessment within the business area, and for assurance to the Minister and, as appropriate, to the Assembly Committee.	
	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>Work to establish a framework between neighbouring administrations is being developed (refer to recommendation 18 under the Collaboration and Communication theme). The opportunity for joint delivery is expected to be included in this framework.</p> <p>The place of partnership between jurisdictions will be referenced and developed in the context of the revision of the Policy Guidance.</p>	<i>Making a Difference</i> emphasises using what works in other places (p.13) This new guide was published 1 February. The RHI recommendations were referenced in the launch presentation to 900+ policy officials.	We believe that a thorough examination of the potentials for partnership working with other administrations should be built into the development of all new policies and evidenced for visibility as suggested.	<p><i>Making a Difference</i>, makes it clear that there may be times when a Minister will choose to ensure that their policy aligns with that in a neighbouring jurisdiction, including for the purposes of implementation. The expectation that this must be considered as an option will inform the nature of the advice given by officials.</p> <p>The form in which policies are articulated, evidenced and explained will depend upon the nature of the policy and the scrutiny given by the Assembly; it is not prescriptive.</p> <p>Guidance to policy teams on collaboration with neighbouring jurisdictions is being prepared in the form of extension material from <i>Making a Difference</i>.</p>	
2	With regard to particular policies driven by unpredictable demand, consideration should always be given, before the policy is implemented, to the inclusion	The importance of being able to suspend or stop an ongoing scheme will be drawn out as part of the revision of the Guide to Policy Making.	<i>Making a Difference</i> highlights modelling extreme circumstances (p.17); unexpected negative consequences (p.19); and communicating risks clearly			

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	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.		and realistically to senior management (p.21). <i>Making a Difference</i> was published 1 February. The RHI recommendations were referenced in the launch presentation to 900+ policy officials.			
3	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.	DoF plans to address the knowledge and skills of those in policy roles by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing training with an emphasis on modelling and testing; • conducting a fundamental review of the Practical Guide to Policy Making; and • following through to the Policy Skills Guide (which sets out the skills required for professional development in policy roles) and policy-skills training to improve consistency in best practice. 	Policy teams are encouraged to engage closely with, or where possible include professional colleagues from NISRA and the economist profession throughout the process and from the earliest point. Those professional colleagues will seek to work closely together with each other and with policy teams. Training in analysis of policy options is available to generalist civil servants in policy teams through a range of accredited courses at degree or Masters-level. A range of internal training opportunities also exist, including courses that directly address the policy development process as well as key supporting courses. (For example, in options appraisal and evaluation). <i>Making a Difference</i> was published 1 February. RHI recommendations referenced			

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			<p>in the launch presentation to 900+ policy officials.</p> <p>The review and, if necessary, development of the Policy Skills Guide is to be considered within the context of wider development of the policy function.</p>			
4	<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. 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. 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</p>	<p>Ministers and this will also be featured in the leadership development programme.</p> <p>DoF told us that the guide is expected to provide specific standards for the provision of advice to Ministers. In addition, to highlighting the need for advice to always comply with the NICS values, it will set out clear principles in terms of clarity and comprehensiveness. It will reinforce what can go wrong using the RHI findings and will illustrate how these risks can be addressed. This will include specific guidance about the systems that need to be in place to provide regular and accurate information to Ministers. DoF told us it's their intention to have a first draft of the policy guide completed in March 2022.</p>	<p><i>Making a Difference</i> was published 1 February. RHI recommendations were referenced in the launch presentation to 900+ policy officials.</p>			

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	third party is involved in implementing and/or administering a scheme or policy.					
12	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. 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>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.</p> <p>DoF told us that they are seeking to introduce a system of commercial case peer reviews across NICS to utilise existing expertise within the system; with the aim to provide a more robust line of defence model for SIB and Accounting Officers, and that there is an intention to develop a medium to long term capability delivery plan, with measurable milestones by May 2022</p>		The recommendation is not currently likely to be fully implemented. However, DoF have told us that they want to use experience across the NICS to conduct commercial case peer reviews. This has the potential to address the spirit of the recommendation made by the Inquiry but is at too early a stage for us to consider.	<p>The use of Commercial Case Peer Reviews has been established.</p> <p>A list of Commercial Case Peer Reviewers has been established with expertise from the following areas; Construction, Infrastructure, Project Delivery, Commercial and Procurement.</p> <p>Over the last 6 months Commercial Case Peer Reviews have been carried out on two Major Projects.</p> <p>Expertise for these Peer Reviews was drawn from CPD, Cabinet Office, DfI, DfC and SIB.</p> <p>Reviewers were selected from participants who had completed the Cabinet Office Assessment and Development Centre and had appropriate project delivery experience.</p> <p>DAO (02/20) makes clear that if external professional or other specialist external resources are required, the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) should be engaged at an early stage of the project or programme to</p>	

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					identify the availability of appropriate resources.	
13	<p>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</p>	<p>The formal appointment process for programme and project SROs will be amended to ensure that SROs are aware of the benefits of external input to project boards as appropriate during the project lifecycle.</p> <p>The departmental Portfolio, Programme or Project offices can also record nomination of external members when the project board members are being appointed.</p>	<p>DAO (DoF) 02/20 (Revised Policy and Guidance on Best Practice in Project Delivery and Engagement with Gateway/Assurance Review Process) was published on 16 September 2021.</p> <p>The revised DAO advises SROs of '[T]he need to ensure that wider programme and project resourcing requirements are addressed...' and states that 'SROs must secure the necessary staff with the appropriate skills and experience... Where external professional or other specialist external resources may be required, Strategic Investment Board (SIB) should be engaged at an early stage of the project or programme to identify the availability of appropriate resources. A revised SRO Appointment template is attached to the revised DAO 02/20.</p> <p>The SRO appointment letter reminds SROs to take account of the guidance on programme and project resourcing, including the acquisition of external expertise, as set out in DAO 02/20.</p>			

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			In addition, SROs are advised that a senior representative of the suppliers or delivery agents can be invited to the Project Board to provide their perspective and expertise.			
8	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 with relevant employment legislation	<p>Reform the role and sponsorship of the Civil Service Commissioners for NI. We note that this will require engagement with the Northern Ireland Office as Commissioners are appointed by the Secretary of State.</p> <p>Increase investment, resources and focus to support the continued work in relation to the key building blocks of workforce planning.</p> <p>Give specific focus to the review and development of the workforce model in terms of job roles, review of professions and resourcing mix.</p> <p>In developing the workforce model, ensure that the key functional skills important across the job role structure (e.g. policy and commercial skills) are incorporated into the model design with L&D delivery plans prioritised and aligned.</p> <p>Continue the review of the NICS approach to professions,</p>	<p>The DoF set up the People & Organisational Development Group on 1 November 2022, separating from NICS HR the key business as usual functional delivery areas inextricably linked to delivery of this change in approach to recruiting, developing and managing careers in the Civil Service.</p> <p>Work has commenced to map out the key deliverables and confirm associated investment needed to deliver this challenging change agenda.</p> <p>A Recruitment and Selection Policy group has been established between the NICS and the Civil Service Commissioners to work collaboratively on reviewing NICS recruitment policy.</p>			

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		based on the agreed Terms of Reference and aligning to the workforce model delivery plan.				
9	<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.</p> <p>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>The Department told us that in addition to the specific training and guidance on the handling of commercially sensitive information for those working in procurement (as set out above), the identification and handling of commercially sensitive information in general is an aspect of the existing guidance in respect of handling official information. This is to be found in the Guide to Physical, Document and IT Security, April 2014. The handling of official information is addressed in the 'Responsible for Information' e-learning package. The renewed focus upon records management, including the security of information, has corroborated the importance of this aspect of the work of officials generally.</p> <p>Line managers are required to ensure that staff are sufficiently skilled to fulfil their role.</p>		<p>Whilst we note the Department's response, we believe the guidance on handling commercially sensitive information should be directly communicated to all staff who may receive such information and that it is not sufficient to meet the recommendation to just rely on line management to identify appropriate staff to receive it. A more proactive approach coming from the leadership of the NICS is required</p>	<p>The identification of staff who may receive commercially sensitive information is a matter that can only sensibly be done by line managers.</p>	
9	In addition, a wider range of opportunities and encouragement for policy civil servants to gain front-line			We note that the NICS Board has placed a temporary embargo on outward secondments due to critical	The NICS Board agreed to lift the embargo on outward	

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	business/ commercial and operational experience would be of benefit.			resourcing pressures across the NICS and as such cannot currently consider this recommendation fully addressed.	secondments with effect from 26 July 2022.	
10	<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 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>Develop the Guidance on the Use of Professional Services including Consultants, including issues of the ‘intelligent customer’ role and the knowledge transfer needed.</p> <p>Develop the guidance on assessing the need for specialist support within project management / assurance methodologies, in the TEO Guide to Policy Making.</p>	<p>The refreshing of the Guidance will be prioritised on completion of MPMNI project. It will be initiated in October and should be complete by the end of January.</p> <p>The refresh project will take into account Cabinet Office decision to discontinue spend control on consultancy and professional services from 1st February 2023.</p> <p><i>Making a Difference: the NICS Guide to Making Policy that Works</i> was published Feb 2023</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</p>	<p>Develop the role of the SRO in ensuring they have the right skills available to them to deliver the policy, including externally sourced expertise</p>	<p>An SRO Appointment process is in place across departments.</p> <p>The SRO Appointment letter advises the SRO of their roles and responsibilities, support and guidance available and</p>		<p>CDG reports bi-annually to the NICS Board on the status of Major Programmes and Projects (MPP). Of the current 105 MPPs, 98 SRO appointment letters have been issued with the remainder being drafted by P3Os. CDG continues to work with</p>	

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	any consultancy contract has ended.		<p>mandates specific SRO training.</p> <p>The DoF Commercial Delivery Group (CDG) provides a 2-day SRO Masterclass provided by externally sourced experts through a collaborative framework arrangement with GB counterparts which SROs are mandated to attend. SROs are also required to complete Cabinet Office SRO training..</p>		<p>departmental P3Os to complete the formal SRO appointment process.</p> <p>A SRO network is being established with an event being arranged for September 2023.</p> <p>2022/2023 - 105 SROs attended the CDG SRO Masterclass training.</p> <p>April 2023 to date , 41 SROs attended the CDG SRO Masterclass training.</p>	
24	<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>Progress implementation of new processes and procedures that enable line managers' capability and confidence in their people-management roles.</p> <p>Complete the review of recruitment policy</p>		<p>The recommendation is likely to be fully implemented based on the planned action, pending completion of the review of recruitment policy and assessing its impact on securing continuity of business.</p>	<p>The review of recruitment policy, including the policy and processes to support employee mobility will be progressed as part of the People and Organisation strand of the renewal agenda.</p>	

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17	<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> <p>(a) the establishment of a project management profession with a named senior leader and a comprehensive programme of professional development; and</p>	<p>Ongoing implementation / embedding of the Project Delivery profession. A programme of development will be co-ordinated through Departmental P3Os.</p> <p>The review and development of the workforce model in terms of job roles, review of professions and resourcing mix will include completion of the work necessary to establish the Project Delivery profession, its job roles and career framework, including the appointment of a Head of Profession</p>	<p>The following development opportunities have been promoted through the P3O network;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IPA, Major Projects Leadership Programmes; • Cabinet Office Contract Management and SRO training; • DoF SRO Masterclasses; • Advice and guidance published on the DoF Intranet • Access to Corporate membership of the Association for Project Management (APM) • Promotion of the Government Online Skills Tool (GOST) - an online skills platform which allows project delivery professionals to manage their career and capability development. <p>A Head of Profession for Project Management was appointed in 2021.</p>		<p>339 NICS Project Delivery (PD) Professionals have now registered on the Government Online Skills Tool (GOST)</p> <p>2022/2023 - 105 SROs attended the CDG SRO Masterclass training. April 2023 to date, 41 SROs attended the CDG SRO Masterclass training.</p> <p>By end of July 2023, 170 SROs have attended the CDG SRO Masterclass training.</p> <p>1078 NI staff have enrolled with the UK Government Commercial College (GCC) and 852 have now completed Contract Management Foundation training.</p> <p>Work to review and refresh the NICS workforce model (including job families and career pathways) and related governance structures, roles and responsibilities (including the role of the Head of Profession) is a key priority for the People and Organisation strand of Renewal. It is however dependent on funding which is not currently available.</p>
	<p>(b) the development of improved professional opportunities for finance</p>	<p>Deliver the strategy under development for the NICS finance profession, aligning</p>	<p>The Finance Directors' Forum have established a key stakeholder sub-group to</p>		

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	professionals and for economists within the Northern Ireland Civil Service	delivery plans with the review and development of the NICS workforce model.	<p>address short-term and long-term actions. This group have been working in partnership with NICS HR on their new approach to the professions and taking forward the Finance Profession as a 'pathfinder' project.</p> <p>Other actions that have been progressed include staff rotation opportunities to develop individuals and induction training for newly promoted members of the Finance Profession</p>			
18	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.	Pending the development of revised structural frameworks following the intergovernmental review, arrangements will be made for peer learning event(s) to support existing and proposed working-level activity between administrations.	<p>Work on interjurisdictional collaboration has been included in the work for the Policy Community, following completion of <i>Making a Difference; the NICS Guide to Making Policy that Works</i>.</p> <p>It will also be taken forward as part of the wider work to develop collaborative practices within NICS, with ALBs, and with private-sector and community/voluntary-sector partners.</p>	We consider that evidence of the positive impact on information exchange and co-operation from the framework and structures established under the intergovernmental review are required before we can conclude that this recommendation is addressed.	Information exchange and cooperation between policy teams in NI Departments and their counterparts in other administrations is extensive and there are many examples of good practice. The development of guidance to policy teams initiating and developing those relationships will draw primarily upon the experience and insight of colleagues	
22	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	DoF Supply has consistently promoted the early engagement of DoF in the development of business cases prior to Supply approval being sought, particularly for		We believe that more work is needed to develop a proactive role for DoF to monitor financial progress of an initiative on an ongoing basis	The Department of Finance wrote to departments in May 2022 regarding the conditions of DoF approval. This letter stated that, while DoF would continue to routinely apply	

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	<p>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.</p>	<p>those cases that are likely to be novel, complex or contentious. This early engagement occurs regularly and includes attending departmental Casework Committee meetings relating to such projects.</p> <p>The Better Business Case NI guidance encourages the development of business cases in three stages for large or complex projects – Strategic Outline Case (SOC), Outline Business Case (OBC) and finally Full Business Case (FBC). These reflect the development of the proposal from its initial inception right through to final procurement. For those projects costing over £50 million or which are considered novel or contentious, the SOC must be submitted to DoF Supply for approval. Such projects cannot proceed to OBC stage without DoF approval which provides DoF Supply with an opportunity to comment and give advice around the most expensive, complex and otherwise novel cases, prior to departments committing significant resources in business case development.</p> <p>Consideration by DoF of the introduction of an Approval</p>		<p>as recommended by the Inquiry</p>	<p>standard conditions of approval to projects it approved, these conditions, in terms of implementation timeframes and tolerance levels, could vary depending on the nature of the project. Further, the letter stated that DoF may also apply “non-standard” conditions of approval in certain circumstances, to provide further assurance around the proposal. These measures taken together will help to ensure that DoF can tailor the level of monitoring of a project post-approval to the degree of complexity, risk, scale of spend, etc involved.</p>	

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		Panel for the highest cost and most complex proposals.				
29	<p>The finance function within a department should exert the necessary authority and capability to fulfil the requirements of <i>'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland'</i>, 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>	<p>Progress and finalise the review of MPMNI.</p> <p>Deliver the strategy currently under development for the NICS finance profession</p>	<p>MPMNI continues to be a top priority for PSD and further progress has been made. It is currently envisaged that a revised version will be published by the end of September.</p>			
30	<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 <i>'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland'</i>. The Inquiry recommends that the financial training requirements for</p>	<p>At a later stage consider 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 this in conjunction with the Centre for Applied Learning. There are no current plans for further classroom-based training courses due to the Covid pandemic.</p>	<p>Initial informal feedback from the Finance profession is that the online course provides a good initial overview of Public Expenditure with on-the-job training providing much of the further learning.</p> <p>Formal engagement with FDs will take place in the coming months on the need and scope for a classroom-based training course.</p> <p>Any further training beyond online course will be dependent on PSD capacity.</p>			

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	budget holders be reviewed and updated.		Consideration of costs will also be a factor.			
32a	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. 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. Leaders should set the tone and expectation for strong governance and risk management.	As previously mentioned, DoF issued guidance to Accounting Officers in May 2020 to apply the updated HMT Orange Book setting out the latest approach to Risk Management. The revised Orange Book guidance moves to a more practical guide by providing a non-technical, clear and concise guide to the concept of risk management.		Whilst the changes in risk management are welcome, we do not believe these address the Inquiry's recommendation in isolation as the recommendation has a practical focus, asking all departments to review the use and understanding of governance systems. We note that DoF has identified and brought to our attention issues it has identified in departments, such as irregular expenditure, in the years since RHI. This is to be welcomed but reflects that departments have failed to adequately improve their own governance structures to prevent such issues prior to the launch of an initiative or detect such issues at sufficiently early stage.	The governance statement, a key feature of the organisation's annual report and accounts, manifests how Accounting Officers duties have been carried out in the course of the year. It should encompass discussion of both corporate governance and risk management matters. MPMNI states that there is no set template for the governance statement. It goes on to set out that with the board's support, it is for the AO to decide how to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> organise the governance statement; take account of input from within the organisation and from the board and its committees; where relevant, integrate information about the organisation's ALBs. 	
28	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	Further address the culture and behaviours surrounding record keeping in the NICS. Further work by the NICS Information Management Council is planned to follow up on the progress of implementing the changes		Implemented. However, it will take time to fully address the culture and behaviours surrounding record keeping which were identified by the RHI Inquiry.		

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	underpinning the policy or initiative on which they are engaged.	from the Records Management and HPRM reviews.		<p>Since failings over RHI emerged we have continued to identify a number of similar issues of a lack of transparency and a culture of burying problems, particularly in DfE, during the course of our financial audit and public reporting work and it is concerning that this cultural issue appears not to have been fully tackled.</p> <p>We will continue to monitor for cultural improvements in openness and transparency across the NICS in future reports.</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>In June 2021 all departments were asked to confirm if they fully, partially or did not accept the recommendations from the NICS RM and HPRM optimisation reviews.</p> <p>All departments accepted all recommendations. In December 2021 departments were asked for an update on implementation.</p> <p>NICS Information Management Council has developed a work programme to implement the necessary recommendations. Each individual work task will have its own timeframe.</p>		<p>We would recommend that GIAFIS monitor compliance with standards and processes for record keeping across all departments on an ongoing basis, particularly where matters should be documented for complex or major decisions.</p>	<p>Ongoing monitoring of compliance within departments in general would be the role of management; this is, in effect, what the Records Management Governance Framework is intended to achieve.</p> <p>The option of GIAFIS conducting a thematic review of compliance with the Records Management Governance Framework should be considered in the context of a wider exercise to address records management as a cultural and ethical matter.</p>	

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	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 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>Establish formal project under Senior Civil Servant SRO to examine what the NICS requires in a records management system in 2020 and beyond. The programme board for this project met for the first time in March 2021.</p> <p>An initial scoping exercise under this review was due to be completed in June 2021 however has been delayed.</p> <p>The NICS are currently considering migrating to Microsoft Office 365 (MS365) and how this would align with obligations for future retention, accessibility, utilisation and disposal of NICS information records. A Proof of Concept for records management in MS365 is currently being considered with a number of pilot users. The results from this concept will inform the future direction for a records management system.</p>	The future of CM will be considered as part of a future NICS Digital and Data workstream which is included within the Renewal Agenda, subject to affordability, capacity and capability.			
32b	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	<p>Implement the remaining recommendations of the GIAFIS review.</p> <p>Launch and promote the revised NICS Code of Ethics (note the revised Code of Ethics was issued February 2022).</p>	Launch of the RaC policy framework on 25 January, including nomination of designated officers as Speak Up Champions; and reporting to Boards including the NICS Board .			

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	decisions are properly informed.	Finalise and launch the 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. Appoint Speak-Up Champions.	Initial training for Designated Officers and their operational teams has been provided from May 2023, and a programme of continuous professional development is in preparation			
35	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. The default response amongst officials should be one of curiosity rather than assuming the concern is misplaced	The NICS aims to endorse a culture of curiosity and challenge. The development and roll-out of the single overarching <i>Raising a Concern</i> policy is being used as a vehicle for encouraging a change in culture, as well as ensuring that all concerns are given attention, no matter how they have been raised. The launch and promotion of the revised policy is intended to address the use of language around concerns, and staff and management attitudes. The policy will address how Departmental management (including Boards) are apprised of the number and nature of concerns being raised, and are provided with analysis of trends.	Launch of the RaC policy framework on 25 January, including nomination of designated officers as Speak Up Champions; and reporting to Boards including the NICS Board . Initial training for Designated Officers and their operational teams has been provided from May 2023, and a programme of continuous professional development is in preparation	The revision to the Code of Ethics and the plans to develop a system with a responsible team for raising concerns in all departments are welcome, however we will need to assess the impact of this new system for collating concerns raised and how they are considered by departments. Work is still needed to address the recommendation that, where appropriate, officials investigate the implementation and operation of schemes in practice.		

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		<p>The policy will be accompanied by explanatory guidance for managers, staff, members of the public, and responsible teams.</p> <p>This development of the new policy will be accompanied by the identification of champions within the NICS who will provide the necessary leadership to support changes to practice and culture.</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>The single, overarching <i>Raising a Concern</i> policy being developed will give the responsible team within each department the task of collating records of concerns being raised, and of briefing the Departmental Board.</p> <p>The roll-out of the policy will be the basis for all departments to review internal processes</p>	<p>Launch of the RaC policy framework on 25 January, including nomination of designated officers as Speak Up Champions; and reporting to Boards including the NICS Board</p> <p>Initial training for Designated Officers and their operational teams has been provided from May 2023, and a programme of continuous professional development is in preparation</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>			<p>No evidence has been provided of actions taken to implement this recommendation. Whilst the review of the implementation and operation of schemes is a standard practice in the assurance process, we believe more can be done to</p>	<p>The monitoring and evaluation of policy interventions is included in the practice of the policy function, as set out in <i>Making a Difference</i>.</p>	

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				encourage practical investigation		
36	<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. 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 non-executives 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>	<p>Enhance the role of Departmental Boards, including the role of Non-Executive Directors and Ministers, and review the remit and agenda of Boards</p>	<p>The role of Boards in monitoring the receipt and handling of concerns is a key aspect of the Raising a Concern Policy Framework, published January 2023.</p> <p>The Non-Executive Directors’ Forum was briefed in June 2023.</p> <p>In addition, the Policy Framework sets out a crucial role for the NICS Board in commissioning and considering a report on the effectiveness of RaC arrangements across the Service.</p> <p>Leadership in the effectiveness of the NICS sits with the NICS Board, including a responsibility to ‘address issues of strategic significance facing the NICS as a whole or constituent parts of it’. This includes the corporate response to Service-wide risks and failures.</p>			