

DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURES AND CENTRAL MACHINERY

NI Departments

1. The handbook for members of the new Northern Ireland Assembly included a section which summarised the current NIO Ministerial responsibilities, and the structure and aims of the six existing Northern Ireland Departments. The relevant pages from the handbook are attached.

Central Machinery

2. In addition to these Departmental structures, there are central and cross-Departmental arrangements.
3. Central Secretariat exists within the Department of Finance and Personnel to carry out a range of central and co-ordinating functions (DFP). Central Secretariat evolved from the Cabinet Office of the Stormont Parliament. It operates under the control of the Head of the NI Civil Service, rather than the Permanent Secretary of DFP (although at present both posts are held by John Semple). Its main current functions are.
 - providing advice to the Secretary of State and Ministers on issues which cross Departmental boundaries;
 - providing input to the political development process;
 - operating the Central Community Relations Unit;
 - overseeing the process of making appointments to public bodies, and setting central policy within the guidance of the NI Commissioner for Public Appointments;

- preparing programmes for visits to Northern Ireland - from the Royal Family, the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers, Ambassadors from overseas, Select Committees etc;
- promoting civil protection procedures within the public sector;
 - devising central guidance for NI Departments on areas of common interest, eg, freedom of information, public access to Government records, relationship with the Ombudsman;
 - exercising oversight of the NI legislative process, ie, the Order-in-Council programme;
 - providing the point of contact between NI Departments and NIO and between NI Departments and the Anglo-Irish Secretariat at Maryfield.
4. This is the statement of current responsibilities, without prejudice to the future shape or scope of the Unit which will be a matter for the new administration to determine.

Cross-Departmental Arrangements

5. The NI Civil Service also has a complex structure of cross-Departmental groups dealing with a wide range of issues. These exist as recognition of the fact that such collaboration and co-operation is necessary because the business of Government and advancing economic and social policies cannot always readily be pursued readily along departmental or functional lines.
6. Full information on the range of these bodies can be provided at whatever stage Ministers wish to receive it.

QUANGOS

1. The term "quangos" covers a variety of bodies (usually referred to as Non-Departmental Public Bodies) exercising executive, advisory or tribunal functions. In Northern Ireland, it covers bodies as diverse as the Police Authority, Education and Library Boards, Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts, LEDU, the Housing Executive, the FEC, the EOC, the Transport Holding Company. Some of the larger executive quangos in Northern Ireland undertake functions performed by local authorities in GB.
2. The agenda in relation to developments affecting quangos in recent years has been set, by and large, by the Reports of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. These reports have led to a focus on greater openness, transparency and probity in the operation of public bodies.
3. The Government published a Consultation Paper "Opening up Quangos" on 11 November 1997, setting out proposals to make quangos more open, accountable and effective. The document was issued throughout the UK, and in Northern Ireland was circulated under cover of a memorandum by the Secretary of State, placing the issues in the paper in the Northern Ireland context.
4. The Secretary of State has not yet made public the NI response to the Consultative Paper but has indicated her intention to make a substantive statement in due course, recognising the role which the new NI administration will play in taking forward consideration of the issues covered in the paper.
5. An important area in relation to quangos is that of public appointments, ie, the appointments made to the Boards of quangos.
6. At present, close to 3,000 public appointments are made in Northern Ireland. Appointments to executive quangos are required to be made within the guidance, and in accordance with the principles, of the NI Commissioner for Public Appointments,

Sir Len Peach, who also serves as GB Commissioner. Government Departments in Northern Ireland voluntarily apply those principles to all the appointments for which they are responsible.

7. Public appointments are made on merit and are subject to the non-discrimination provisions of the NI Constitution Act 1973 and, in relation to gender, to Equal Opportunities legislation.
8. The NI Commissioner produces an annual report on his findings of progress made by Departments in operating their appointments procedures in accordance with best practice. The Secretary of State is also required to produce an annual report. The first such report, covering 1996/97, was published in January 1998. The main area identified by the Secretary of State as requiring action was the position in relation to under-representation of certain groups in the membership of public bodies - women, young people, disabled people and those from ethnic minorities.

10. MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

10.1 The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, The Rt Hon Dr Marjorie Mowlam MP has overall responsibility for the work of the Northern Ireland Office and 6 Northern Ireland Departments. She is assisted by 4 Ministers whose responsibilities are as follows:

Minister of State
Mr Paul Murphy MP

- Political Development
- Department of Finance and Personnel
- Information Services
- Oversight over all matters relating to the EU
- Liaison on Scottish and Welsh devolution

Minister of State
Mr Adam Ingram JP MP

- Law and Order
- Department of Economic Development excluding Training and Employment Agency
- Oversight over all matters relating to co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in economic and social areas, as well as security

*Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State*
Mr Tony Worthington MP

- Department of Education
- Department of Health and Social Services
- Training and Employment Agency
- Community relations

*Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State*
The Lord Dubs

- Department of Agriculture
- Department of the Environment
- Minister with responsibility for all Northern Ireland matters in the House of Lords

The current structure, aims and objectives of the NI Departments are detailed in the following pages.