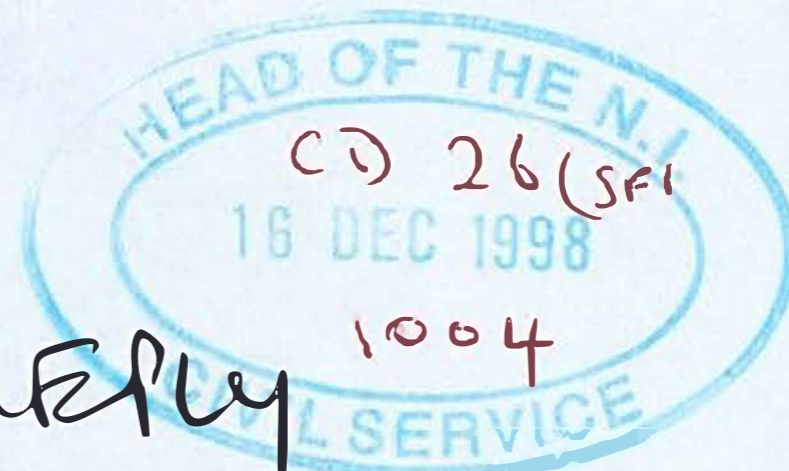




Mr Sample

JM  
22/17

DAVID



Dear Tony,

ANY REPLY

DL

13/7

Prime Minister

**SPECIAL ADVISERS TO MINISTERS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

Following the appointment of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister Designate of the New Northern Ireland Assembly, I agreed that they could adopt up to 3 special advisers each during the shadow period before devolution. I also indicated that I would be prepared to authorise other Ministers (up to 10) appointed during the shadow period to appoint one special adviser each. I also agreed that the Initial Presiding Officer of the New Assembly should have one special adviser during the shadow period.

2. I have now considered what arrangements I should put in place for special advisers in Northern Ireland after devolution and am writing to let you know how I propose to proceed. On numbers, I think the current formulation for the shadow period should remain in place after devolution. This would mean that the Northern Ireland Executive Committee of up to 12 Ministers would be supported by up to 16 special advisers. I believe this number can be justified by the challenge the new Northern Ireland Ministers will face in seeking to establish a consensus on a wide range of issues while their political parties have widely different views and aspirations. In these circumstances, special advisers could play a key role in helping to broker deals at the political level and thus maintain the political parties' support for their Ministers in the Executive.

3. On a mechanism to control numbers of special advisers appointed by Ministers, I considered the option that the First and Deputy First



Minister should have responsibility for controlling the number of advisers appointed by other Ministers on the Executive. However, this could create difficulties for them in that other Ministers and, particularly those belonging to parties other than the UUP and SDLP, may not accept or adhere to numbers of special advisers specified by the First and Deputy First Minister. This could be particularly so if other Ministers sought to challenge their access to three special advisers each, while they had just one each.

4. An alternative approach would be to specify limits on the number of special advisers available to each Minister in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Order in Council. These limits could differentiate between the numbers of special advisers available to the First and Deputy First Ministers, and to other Ministers. This approach would provide a clearly defined framework for specifying controls on numbers of special advisers supporting the new Northern Ireland Executive Committee, while avoiding the potential for the First and Deputy First Ministers being drawn into disputes with Ministers from other parties about the number of advisers available to each Minister.

5. I have concluded that specifying numerical limits on special advisers in the Northern Ireland Civil Service Order in council is the best way to proceed. An opportunity now exists to do this as I have to make new Civil Service Orders before devolution. Subject to any views you may have on this approach, I plan to write to First Minister and Deputy First Minister shortly to let them know that this is how I propose to proceed on this issue.



6. A copy of this minute goes to Donald Dewar, Alun Michael and to Sir Richard Wilson.

*Mh*

MARJORIE MOWLAM

15 December 1998

PS/SES BAL  
PS | Mr Murphy DFP  
PS | Mrs Ball  
PS | Mr Sample  
Mr Loeuil  
Mr Jeffrey  
Mr Hunter  
Mr del Corder  
Mr Ferguson  
Mr C. Dally

SOS/MINISTER/BB