



## Review of Public Administration Implementation

Issue 1: August 2006

### In this issue

- 1 The work of the Public Service Commission >
- 2 Ministerial statement to Parliament >
- 3 Work currently underway on Human Resource issues >
- 4 Progress Report >
- 5 Focus On: Implementing the RPA >
- 6 Contacts for more information >

## An update on the Review of Public Administration

The RPA represents the most comprehensive reform of the public sector in Northern Ireland for more than 30 years. It was launched in 2002 by the Northern Ireland Executive and since the suspension of devolution has been taken forward by direct rule ministers, taking account of the views of the local political parties and others.

Extensive public consultation showed that people wanted a more streamlined system of public administration that allows easy access to services, is easily understood, is fair and has clear lines of responsibility and accountability. There was an overwhelming desire to see excessive bureaucracy reduced and scarce resources redirected to front line services.

| next >



The Secretary of State announced the final outcome of the review in two parts: in November 2005 he announced final decisions on the future of local government, education, and health and social services structures; and in March 2006 decisions on the remaining public bodies.

Government recognises the need to keep all staff informed about the changes and any potential impacts for their jobs and future career. This bulletin has been developed to give you information about the implementation of the RPA. At a local level, specific questions should be directed in the first instance to your employer. I would ask all managers to ensure all staff have access to the information in this bulletin which should be in addition to regular face to face briefings.

**Nigel Hamilton**

Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and  
Chair of the RPA Steering Group

[< previous](#) | [next >](#)



## Review of Public Administration Implementation

### 1 - The Public Service Commission

In March 2006, Government established the Public Service Commission with the following terms of reference.

“To make recommendations to Government on the guiding principles and steps necessary to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to new organisations established as a consequence of Government decisions on the review of public administration, taking into account statutory obligations, including those arising from section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.”

In June, government accepted the **PSC's First Guiding Principle and Recommendation: An Effective Communications Strategy**, to help ensure all staff are kept informed about how RPA change is to be implemented and what arrangements are in place to safeguard the interests of staff.

publicservicecommission

[< previous](#) | [next >](#)



## Review of Public Administration Implementation

The main points of this recommendation are

- Arrangements should be put in place to ensure that all staff are informed in a timely way, about how change is to be implemented
- That each organisation provides staff with an identified contact point (or points) to which RPA specific queries might be met
- Electronic means of communication should be supplemented by the prudent use of regular newsletters, and direct contact through seminars, workshops, conferences and staff meetings.

In August, Government accepted the PSC's **Second Guiding Principle and Associated Recommendation: Managing Vacancies Effectively**. The main points of this recommendation are:

- To minimise the risk of redundancies arising as a result of decisions from the RPA, existing employing authorities should avoid creating new posts and should use all available expedients to manage vacancies, which might arise within defined groups.

The PSC has also made recommendations to government on; Chief Executive designate post in the Health and Social Services Authority, recruitment of HSS Chief Executives and the Chief Executive designate post in the Education and Skills Authority.

Further information about the PSC can be found on their website at [www.pscni.gov.uk](http://www.pscni.gov.uk)

< previous | next >



## Review of Public Administration Implementation

### 2 - Ministerial statement to Parliament

The Secretary of State has appointed David Hanson as minister with overall responsibility for the implementation of the Review of Public Administration and the wider reform programme. On 20 July Mr Hanson made a written statement to Parliament on progress with RPA. The key points of the statement are:

- Robust programme and project management arrangements are in place to deliver RPA implementation
- A Public Service Commission was established in March 2006 to safeguard the interests of staff affected and ensure a smooth transition for them to the new organisations
- Restructuring of Education and Health and Social Services is to be complete by April 2008
- The Local Government Taskforce is making a vital contribution to the new vision for local government.

The full text of the minister's statement can be found at [www.rpani.gov.uk](http://www.rpani.gov.uk) under **News Releases**

< previous | next >



### 3 - Work currently underway on Human Resource (HR) issues

A cross sector HR group has been established to consider the many and complex employment issues associated with the RPA. The group is made up of NICS departmental personnel, who act as channels for the views of all the RPA affected group of employers.

The issues currently being considered by the group include;

- Pay and Non pay terms and conditions of employment
- Public Service Pensions
- Continuity of Employment
- Transfer Schemes
- General principles of filling posts in new organisations
- Early Retirement / Pre-redundancy Schemes
- Vacancy control (now encapsulated in the PSC's second recommendation)
- Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Negotiating / consultative mechanisms with trade unions at sector / employer level
- Consultative and liaison mechanisms between PSC, employers and trade unions
- Negotiating / consultative mechanisms with existing councils / shadow councils
- Comprehensive and cross sector application of Section 75 obligations.

[< previous](#) | [next >](#)



## 4 - Progress Report

**A number of key new appointments have recently been made to help meet RPA implementation dates.**

Dick Mackenzie has been appointed as Local Government Boundaries Commissioner. He will make recommendations on the exact boundaries of the 7 new councils, based on groupings of the existing councils. While it is planned that each of the new councils will have approximately 60 councillors, in exceptional circumstances, the Commissioner will have the flexibility to increase this to 65.

In Health, David Sissling has been appointed Chief Executive Designate for the Health and Social Services Authority. He took up the new role in August.

[< previous](#) | [next >](#)



Five new Health and Social Services trusts were established in shadow form on 1 August 2006. They will take over the functions of the current 18 Trusts by 1 April 2007. Chairs and Chief Executives of the new trusts have been appointed.

They are as follows:

<b>Southern Area:</b>	Chair; Anne Balmer	Chief Executive; Colm Donaghy
<b>South and East Area:</b>	Chair; Denise Fitzsimons	Chief Executive; John Compton
<b>Western Area:</b>	Chair; Gerard Guckian	Chief Executive; Elaine Way
<b>Belfast Area:</b>	Chair; Patrick McCartan	Chief Executive; William McKee CBE
<b>Northern Area:</b>	Chair; James Stewart	Chief Executive; Norma Evans

They will take up their new posts on 1 September 2006, and will start work immediately on getting their new organisations ready to 'go live' from 1 April 2007.

In Education, it is planned that advertisements for the Chief Executive designate of the new Education and Skills Authority will be placed in September.

[< previous](#) | [next >](#)



In addition to the appointments noted above, progress with implementation of the RPA has been made in a number of other areas:

- March 2006** The Secretary of State set up the Public Service Commission.  
See page 2 of this Bulletin.
- March 2006** A Local Government Reform Taskforce was set up to implement the RPA.  
More information can be found at <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/lgd/localgovreform/>
- May 2006** Legislation to set the number of councils at 7 and the remit of the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner completed its Parliamentary stages.
- August 2006** Five new Health and Social Services Trusts now operating in shadow form

Over coming months consultation will be undertaken on Libraries and Health restructuring.

< previous | next >



## 5 - Focus On: Implementing the RPA

In each Bulletin we aim to Focus On a particular aspect of the RPA. This month we look at some of the structures that have been put in place to ensure the RPA is implemented in accordance with the agreed timescale.

**RPA Steering Group:** This group, which is chaired by Nigel Hamilton, Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, is made up of representatives from each of the Departments and the Public Service Commission. Its role is to ensure co-ordinated implementation of ministerial decisions on the RPA in accordance with consistent principles and statutory obligations. It is also responsible for publication of regular progress reports.

**RPA Central Unit:** The Central Unit was set up in OFMDFM to help the Steering Group meet its objectives. It co-ordinates material for meetings and monitors delivery of priorities and progress by Departments within the timeframes agreed by ministers.

[< previous](#) | [next >](#)



**HR Cross Sector Group:** It is recognised that getting the HR issues right is critical to the successful implementation of the RPA. Section 3 of this Bulletin gives more information on membership and workload of this group.

**RPA Communications Group:** This group has been set up to co-ordinate the communications activities across all sectors. Keeping staff informed about RPA implementation is a key priority. Within each sector, local communications will provide detailed information, so individuals will know how RPA impacts on them and their job.

**Public Service Commission:** See Section 1 of this Bulletin.

**Central Joint Forum:** The CJF is chaired jointly by Nigel Hamilton and John Corey of NIPSA. It comprises representatives of government and the N I Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC ICTU). The CJF is a formal joint mechanism set up to address all relevant RPA implementation issues affecting the interests of employees.

In addition to the work of the CJF, consultation will also take place with major unions not affiliated to NIC ICTU.

[< previous](#) | [next >](#)



## 6 - Contacts for more information

### **Review of Public Administration Central Unit**

Telephone 028 9027 7675

or website: [www.rpani.gov.uk](http://www.rpani.gov.uk)

which also has a full list of Departmental contacts.

### **Public Service Commission**

Telephone 028 9025 6017

or website: [www.pscni.gov.uk](http://www.pscni.gov.uk)

< previous |

## FIRST GUIDING PRINCIPLE AND ASSOCIATED RECOMMENDATIONS

### AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

#### Introduction

The Public Service Commission's first guiding principle and associated recommendations, under its remit "to make recommendations to government on the guiding principles and steps necessary to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to new organisations established as a consequence of government decisions on the Review of Public Administration, taking into account statutory obligations, including those arising from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.", deal with the absolute requirement for an effective communications strategy.

#### Context

The Public Service Commission welcomes the establishment of the Steering Group which will oversee the implementation phase of the Review of Public Administration. The Commission understands that the Steering Group will focus its attention on those significant, cross-cutting, themes which are central to delivering an extensive change programme. The indications are that more than 100,000 people, in central and local government and a host of other public sector organisations, will be affected by the changes announced by the Secretary of State in November 2005 and March 2006.

#### Guiding Principle

Government, and the Steering Group, should be guided by the principle that the support and involvement of staff, and their staff representatives, is required to give positive effect to change. The Commission considers that such cooperation will be readily forthcoming provided that people are treated with dignity and respect. Regular communication, particularly in relation to the personal and specific effects of change, will provide a large degree of comfort and reassurance to each individual person who is proud to serve in the public sector.

#### Recommendations

*The Public Service Commission recommends that the Steering Group ensures that arrangements are put in place, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that all staff are informed, in a timely way, about how change is to be implemented and what arrangements are planned to safeguard the interests of staff and secure their cooperation during, and after, the period of change. Such arrangements should be subject to industrial relations procedures to ensure staff representatives are properly involved in the processes.*

*The Commission further recommends that each organisation provides its staff with an identified contact point (or contact points) to which RPA specific queries might be directed, or from which staff might seek RPA specific information.*

*In relation to formal communications, the Public Service Commission recommends that electronic means of communication, including e-mails and websites, should be supplemented by the prudent use of regular newsletters, and direct contact through seminars, workshops, conferences and staff meetings.*

## **Commentary**

The Public Service Commission acknowledges that different sectors are working to different timeframes and that some organisations are already involved in the change process and may have embarked on their own communications strategies. Nevertheless, the Commission wishes to distinguish between communication and consultation in the context of safeguarding the interests of staff.

The Commission attaches a great deal of importance to the need for employers to have due regard to statutory obligations<sup>[1]</sup>, or the application of good practice flowing from those statutory obligations, so that employees, and their staff representatives, are informed, and consulted, in a timely way. That being the case, the Commission calls on the Steering Group to ensure that any proposed actions should be subject to existing industrial relations arrangements, before formal communications are conveyed to staff. Where no appropriate industrial relations machinery exists, organisations should proceed, urgently, to establish suitable mechanisms.

The Commission regards the principal aim of the communications strategy to be *“to guarantee that timely, consistent and relevant information reaches all staff, in all of the organisations affected, and in such a way as to ensure that relevant queries are dealt with efficiently and effectively.”*

SID McDOWELL  
CHAIRMAN  
Public Service Commission

<sup>[1]</sup> The Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005

## **SECOND GUIDING PRINCIPLE AND ASSOCIATED RECOMMENDATION**

### **MANAGING VACANCIES EFFECTIVELY**

#### **Background**

The Public Service Commission was established to make recommendations to Government on the guiding principles and steps necessary to safeguard the interests of staff and to ensure their smooth transfer to new organisations established as a consequence of Government decisions on the Review of Public Administration, taking into account statutory obligations, including those arising from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Public Service Commission has consulted Government, the sectoral Staff Commissions and representatives of NIC/ICTU about the most appropriate way to manage vacancies as part of a wider set of arrangements which will be required to achieve the Secretary of State's aim of making every possible effort to avoid redundancies in bodies affected by the RPA.

#### **Guiding Principle and Associated Recommendation**

The Public Service Commission recommends that, in order to minimise the risk of redundancies as a result of decisions arising from the Review of Public Administration, and recognising the need to keep open all possible means to redeploy staff, existing employing authorities should avoid creating new posts,

[| next >](#)

and should also use all available expedients to manage vacancies which might arise within defined groups.

### **Commentary**

The Public Service Commission recognises that decisions taken in relation to managing vacancies should represent a proportionate means of achieving the Secretary of State's aim to make every possible effort to avoid redundancies in a way which is compliant with statutory obligations, including Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Commission also recognises that it would be inappropriate to apply constraints to the extent that they have a detrimental effect on service delivery. Existing employing authorities should, in the first instance, and with immediate effect, and in conjunction with relevant trade unions at local and other levels, define, and publicise, those services which will be subject to vacancy management schemes as referred to below.

Existing employing authorities should be required, by Government, through sponsoring Departments, to develop and implement vacancy management schemes in consultation with appropriate trade unions, who should be consulted on the application of the Scheme in respect of any particular posts. Schemes should provide that no new posts be created except where an existing employing authority can demonstrate an inescapable requirement for the post. Examples of

[| next >](#)

new posts which might fall into this category include those required to ensure service delivery, where new responsibilities or requirements are imposed by legislation or Government action, or in cases where there is exceptional stress and pressure of work on existing staff. Furthermore, all vacancies should be scrutinised and, if it can be demonstrated that a particular post must be filled, this should be achieved by an appropriate mechanism, including -

- Temporary promotion
- Acting up
- Delaying a retirement
- Employing staff on fixed term contracts to expire before the handover to a new employing authority
- Secondments

Where staff accept temporary promotion, acting up or secondment etc there will be an underlying guarantee to the employee in respect of continuity of employment rights in their previous substantive post for the purposes of RPA implementation.

Decisions on creating new posts or filling vacancies should be fully documented.

If an existing employing authority concludes that none of the arrangements referred to above is practicable, it should then seek to fill the post through the redeployment of an officer who is affected by the Review of Public Administration, who may be employed in another body, and who wishes to take up a post with the organisation in which the vacancy occurs. When determining the constitution of the selection pool, employing authorities should take into consideration the relevant equality monitoring data.

To facilitate these arrangements, existing employing authorities should collaborate in filling vacancies across the affected bodies to ensure staff have an opportunity to apply for such vacancies as might arise. One option might be to create a clearing mechanism. Circumstances will dictate the detailed arrangements, although decisions should be taken on a case by case basis.

Throughout the RPA implementation process, employing authorities should ensure that appropriate training measures are in place to support staff directly affected by this recommendation.

Existing employing authorities should be required, by Government, through sponsoring Departments, to introduce, and apply, monitoring and review arrangements in relation to policies on managing vacancies. In keeping with the Public Service Commission's recommendations in relation to effective

communications, reports on how arrangements for managing vacancies effectively are working in practice should also be provided to staff and local trade unions and/or staff representatives on a regular basis.

SID McDOWELL  
Chairman  
Public Service Commission  
19 July 2006