

FROM: MICHAEL DALY

**cc: Dr McCormick
Mr Ewing**

DATE: 16th OCTOBER 2003

TO: PDG

ASSEMBLY STAFFING: POSSIBLE RESTORATION OF DEVOLUTION

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to:
 - Advise PDG of the proposed phasing of the return of redeployed staff to the Assembly in the event of an election and a possible full restoration of devolution, and
 - Seek your agreement to proposals to assist the Assembly in the medium to longer term phasing out the remaining secondments from NI Departments.

Background

2. Out of a total of around 350 staff in post at suspension, some 190 remain in the Assembly to maintain the status of "warm storage" as directed by the Secretary of State in Spring of 2003. CPG has worked closely with the Assembly and Departments to make best use of staff resources during the period of suspension. To date a total of 104 Assembly secondees from NICS have been offered back on loan to the NI Departments to take forward specific projects. A further 12 directly recruited staff have been identified for redeployment on loan, most are now in place. In addition, Departments have been making use of specialist research workers, though not on the basis of a redeployment. With the expectation of an election in the near future, we need to take steps to ensure an efficient return of staff. However, with many of the original secondments either technically over or are due shortly to end, we need to ensure the Assembly is not faced with a sudden staff shortage, where this is avoidable.

Action on Foot of Election and Restoration

3. Over the past few weeks we have been in discussion with the Assembly Secretariat to consider what action needs to be taken immediately, in the event that an election is called, and in slightly

slower time, though not by much, in the event that a full restoration of devolution is likely. The Assembly Secretariat have identified those staff which would need to be returned as soon as possible but most would be needed within 1 week of when the election is called. I attach details and I would now ask you to make the necessary arrangements to ensure a smooth return to the Assembly once an election is called. If there are any compelling operational difficulties, you should contact the Secretariat. I should point out that the 2 staff working on Hansard would only be required in the event that there is to be a first plenary. I will let you have details of the requirements for remaining staff as soon as I have them, but this will be subject to the extent of political progress.

Medium to Long Term Strategy

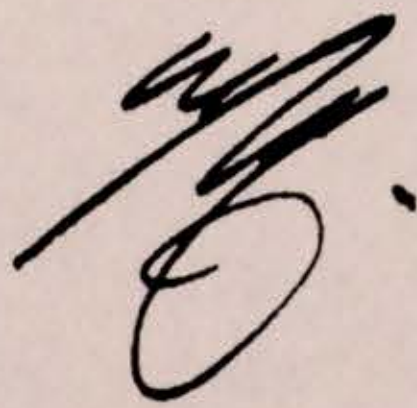
4. Turning to the question of the Assembly's staffing position in the medium to longer term, we are conscious of the fact that a significant proportion of the workforce comprises staff on secondment from NI Departments. While this in itself is not a problem, the timing for their return to their parent Department is such that we could be faced with a significant number of staff opting not to remain, leaving the Assembly with gaps in a number of key areas.
5. The Assembly are developing plans to make the transition to a workforce largely made up of direct recruits, including a strategy of some over-manning to ease the transition. However, we believe it will be necessary to put in place an arrangement aimed at facilitating a phased return of secondees in a way which helps ensure adequate capacity for a return to normal business and over the period of transition.
6. Civil Servants who have been successful on Assembly recruitment competitions have the option of a 3 – year secondment after which they may choose to remain permanently with the Assembly or to return to their parent Department at the higher grade, if applicable. This would apply to around 90 staff.
7. In addition, some 73 secondees remain on loan to the Assembly. Although these staff have not taken up posts as a result of Assembly competitions, they occupy, in many cases, key posts. More than half have already exceeded their original 3 year period of secondment. Taken together, these 2 groups of staff make up around 50% of the Assembly's workforce.
8. With regard to the direct recruit secondees, clearly, if staff opt not to remain with the Assembly after their scheduled return date, it would be difficult for the Secretariat to provide the necessary level of service, in the event of a full restoration. In the circumstances we are proposing that secondees are offered a 2 year extension to their period of

secondment, the offer being made within 3 months of the due return date. In parallel with this, the Assembly will be taking steps to make a smooth transition to a largely directly recruited workforce. The on-going extension of secondments will take account of progress and will aim to bring back staff as soon as is practicable.

9. Turning to the secondees not holding posts secured through direct recruitment, it is proposed that we offer 1 year extensions, as necessary, in order to allow the Assembly to run further recruitment competitions. However, in line with the previous arrangements, any civil servants who may be successful in such competitions, would have to be offered up to 3 years of secondment, after which they could return to their parent Department at the higher grade, if appropriate.

Conclusion

10. In conclusion, we need to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to enable the Assembly Secretariat to manage the staffing consequences of an election and eventual restoration of devolution.
11. PDG is asked, therefore, to:
 - note the requirement for the immediate return of staff listed in Annex A, in the event that an election is called (para 3);
 - agree to the proposed arrangements for extending the secondment periods for directly recruited staff (para 8); and
 - agree to the proposed arrangements for extending the secondment period for normal seconded staff (para 9).
12. If you have any queries regarding this minute, please call me on 26168 or Gary Ewing on 26534. Otherwise an early reply would be appreciated.



MICHAEL DALY