



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

Committee for The Executive Office

# OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Briefing by Dr Jayne Brady, Head of the  
Northern Ireland Civil Service

3 November 2021

# NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Ms Sinead McLaughlin (Chairperson)  
Mr John Stewart (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mrs Diane Dodds  
Mr Alex Easton  
Mr Pat Sheehan  
Ms Emma Sheerin

**Witnesses:**

Dr Jayne Brady	Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service
Mr Gareth Johnston	The Executive Office
Ms Karen Pearson	The Executive Office
Mr Tom Reid	The Executive Office

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** We have with us this afternoon Dr Jayne Brady, head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), and, from the Executive Office, Karen Pearson, deputy secretary of COVID strategy and COVID contingencies; Gareth Johnston, deputy secretary of strategic policy, equality and good relations; and Tom Reid, deputy secretary of international relations and EU exit. The session is being recorded by Hansard and the transcript will be published on the Committee web page.

Jayne, I very warmly welcome you to your new role. On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the very best in your endeavours. I had the pleasure of meeting you last Wednesday on my home turf. I really look forward to working with you, supporting you and seeing delivery and good outcomes for all the people in Northern Ireland.

I hand over to you now, Jayne, for your overview and briefing.

**Dr Jayne Brady (Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service):** Thank you, Chair. I am delighted to have been invited by the Committee to be here. It is really great to have the opportunity at such an early stage in my role — I am just concluding week eight — to engage with you on what I see as the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead. I am joined by TEO colleagues Gareth Johnston, Karen Pearson and Tom Reid, should you wish to delve into more-detailed aspects of TEO programmes. I am grateful to have had their support over the past eight weeks, as well as that of all my colleagues in the Civil Service.

Given the importance of the work across the Northern Ireland Civil Service and wider public sector, I look forward to hearing the views of the Committee on what works, as well as on what could work better. I will set out my priorities as head of the Civil Service (HOCS) and perhaps lay some helpful

groundwork for our conversation. I have looked forward to appearing before the Committee. I am familiar with being accountable and reporting to shareholders, investors and stakeholders from my previous careers. I understand and appreciate the benefits of the sort of constructive scrutiny and challenge that, I am sure, I will receive from the Committee.

My role as chief policy adviser to the Executive and head of the Civil Service provides an opportunity to lead a rethink in what we do and how we do it. I am determined to bring energies and ideas to that role. It is my intention to work hard in support of the Executive to deliver this mandate and prepare for the next. Part of that will be about paying attention to the transformation and modernisation of our Civil Service.

As you may be aware, my experience has largely been in the private sector. Recently, I have worked in the public sector: in engineering, technology innovation and financial investment. My most recent role was as Belfast City Council's digital innovation commissioner. In that role, over the past 20 months, I saw the impact of the pandemic at first hand and the critical need to deliver a recovery plan that works for everyone. Unprecedented though it is, the pandemic is just one of the significant challenges that we face. We need to rebuild in the wake of COVID and tackle the systemic difficulties that already existed in the system. In my experience, moments of discontinuity, such as we are experiencing, also provide a platform for delivering change and for embracing opportunities to transform and to improve our services and economy.

I was keen to take up this role having observed the way in which the Civil Service adapted to the huge complexities and challenges of the past 20 months: specifically, supporting the restoration of the new Executive; the negotiations, legislation and operational arrangements for the EU exit; and a comprehensive response to the pandemic. In taking forward that huge, vital programme of work, the Civil Service demonstrated agility, resilience and public service motivation. As innovation commissioner, I saw at first hand that the Civil Service is up for partnership and innovation. Those are, perhaps, the two most important ingredients for success in any organisation, but particularly in the Civil Service, where we work so closely with the wider public services, the general public and its elected representatives. We demonstrated that we can respond with agility and innovate where necessary.

I know that it can be easy to be overcautious in trying new things, particularly when it comes to exploiting technologies or new ways of working. However, moments of disruption, such as we have experienced, can shine a light on opportunities for new thinking, specifically on how we do business and how we can deliver the Civil Service of the future. I, and we, want to make the Civil Service a more attractive, diverse and inclusive place to work, while continuing to deliver and enhance services to our customers in addressing the challenges ahead. I want to build on those qualities and learn from the new ways of working that we have developed. At the same time, I am very conscious that we must address the areas where our performance has not always been what we or the public would wish, and that we must ensure that our people, services and systems keep pace with the demands that are made of us.

Having met a range of colleagues from right across the system, it is clear to me that there is a real and genuine appetite in the Civil Service for reform and improvement. As the chair of the Civil Service board, I know that we want to deliver a modern, innovative Civil Service with diverse people and skills, one that is better equipped to meet the challenges of the future and to serve the Executive and our communities more effectively. Indeed, along with my colleagues, we have already started to deliver on that. We have reconstituted the Northern Ireland Civil Service board with new terms of reference and a refreshed mission to lead and deliver change. We have plans to recruit external members to the Northern Ireland Civil Service board to offer independent scrutiny and expert advice. We have launched a competition to appoint new permanent secretaries through a refreshed recruitment process, and we are developing schemes to increase diversity in the Civil Service workforce, including undergraduate and apprenticeship programmes.

We also need to look beyond the service. At the core of my approach to the transformation will be partnership, which I believe will be key to our success. I want to ensure that we have access to the best ideas and thinking that is out there. The way to do that is to build networks and partnerships and to be open-minded and inclusive. Although I would have loved to have done more, I have been able to go out and engage with a whole range of people to share ideas and stimulate new thinking. I enjoyed chatting with the staff who operate the Strangford ferry. I saw at first hand the impact made by the Lagan weir teams along the river. I saw the challenges presented and the transformative work being delivered in Maghaberry prison. I have also explored the archives of our Public Records Office and launched the Civil Service domestic and sexual abuse policy.

As you mentioned, Chair, I had a welcome opportunity to visit the Ebrington site in Derry/Londonderry and see the regeneration work that is being done there. It is evident how much has been achieved since I was last there in 2017, with proposed tenants in place for all buildings on-site and very impressive infrastructure works now complete. I also got to spend time in the AMP building and discuss future plans with a tenant. Not only is the building fitted out to an incredibly high standard, but AMP is investing in impressive proposals. Work is under way to develop its business incubator — something that is very close to my heart — to support a variety of small and medium-sized enterprises. That is a welcome demonstration of private-sector commitment, partnership and ambition, which is critical to successful regeneration and wider community benefit.

I spent time with Urban Villages initiatives and Communities in Transition staff at the cultural festival at C S Lewis Square in east Belfast. I met a range of great organisations that are working together to improve community relations and celebrate diversity in the east and south Belfast Urban Villages areas. Through those conversations, we have explored — and through the many more to come, we will explore — how transforming services can be a means to the end of better serving the Executive and the Assembly and improving the lives of our citizens — the people whom you represent — through investment in high-value public services.

Civil Service reform, though vital, is only one part of my ambition as HOCS. I also want to focus on the contribution that the Civil Service makes to the well-being of the community and the growth of our economy. Since my appointment, I have been struck by the sheer scale and complexity of how the Civil Service supports people, communities and businesses. I have seen the pride, commitment and professionalism of public servants. Throughout the pandemic, we have all seen what the Northern Ireland Civil Service can achieve when it works together as a whole. With the Northern Ireland Civil Service board, I want to leverage the best of the Civil Service to support the Executive and deliver meaningful change for our communities. That means delivering a cross-cutting and strategic programme of work that sets out ambitious, service-wide objectives and prioritises a small number of areas in which Departments work together to deliver long-term and far-reaching improvements. To build that programme, I have engaged with the First Minister and deputy First Minister, colleagues at all levels across the system, the Executive, and a range of other stakeholders.

From those many valuable conversations, four clear themes have emerged. The first is delivery, including achieving the goals of the COVID recovery plan and advancing the Programme for Government. It is also about identifying a small number of cross-cutting, long-term, strategic priorities and maximising the opportunities that multi-year Budgets provide to think more strategically. The second is the transformation of the service, which I have already described. The third theme is innovation. Through my experience in engineering and finance, I know about the power of innovation and intelligent risk-taking. We need to be more innovative in our approaches. We need to use data and analytics more effectively in policymaking to get the best advice and information, and we need to be ready to seize the opportunities that are emerging in the modern world. The fourth is communication. I want to improve the way in which we communicate with our partners and stakeholders. I want co-production to be at the core of how we do business. I also want to do more internally to share good ideas and good practice, and ensure that all of our people, no matter where they work, feel connected to the Programme for Government and the business of the Executive.

As, I hope, is clear, the vision is far-reaching in its scope and impact. I am very pleased to say that the First Minister and deputy First Minister are highly supportive of the goals that I have identified, although they also fully recognise the challenges and difficulties that are inherent in a programme of work of that scale and ambition, and the need to ensure that the right resources are in place. Our plans must amount to more than a set of abstract, long-term ambitions that are never realised. Critical elements of delivering that programme will be agility, a focus on delivery in the short and medium term, building momentum, and laying the foundations for the realisation of our long-term ambitions.

With the NICS board, I will oversee that work and ensure that it is being driven forward at the highest levels of our system. I will continue to engage and build partnerships to strengthen our plans and deliver inclusive solutions. No matter how hard we work, our efforts will really deliver only when we deliver outcomes in partnership with people across the communities that you serve. That is why the role of the Committee is so important. I, therefore, look forward to working with you and your colleagues as we develop that partnership.

I know that the Executive Office permanent secretary, Denis McMahon, will be coming to see you on 10 November. Denis and I work very closely together, but we have distinct roles. While I support the Northern Ireland Executive and manage the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Denis leads TEO operational functions and is the accounting officer for the Department. The TEO permanent secretary

reports to the head of the service and works under the direction and control of TEO Ministers, who agree the policy for departmental functions. I know that, when he comes to see you next week, Denis will be very happy to talk you through those arrangements from his perspective. While my remit and interests range across the service, I am, of course, keen to, where appropriate, take an interest in and lead on cross-cutting issues that are central to the lives of our people. For example, I lead on the Executive COVID task force, which has representation from a range of Departments. I report to each Executive meeting, supported by cross-departmental work that is led by my team and TEO.

While COVID has, of course, been a necessity for the Department and the whole system for the past 20 months, we also continue to look for societal harms that need our strategic responses. For example, attempts to tackle violence against women and girls here are not new. However, statistics show that work to date has not decreased the number of incidents; in fact, the reverse is true. It is intended that the TEO-led strategy will engage Departments, external stakeholders and all sectors to co-design ambitious solutions that tackle the cause — not the symptoms — of the problem. I will chair that group. We have recently secured a dedicated senior civil servant, Claire Archibald, to lead that work. Over the next few weeks, Claire will transition from her current post to that important new strategic leadership role. She is already meeting internal stakeholders and identified experts in the field.

We need to look outwards on a big scale and communicate our place in the world. I want to bring my experience of living and working in China, North America and Europe, combined with my background in securing financial investment cases, to amplify the opportunities for our international relations team in TEO to bring strategic investment cases forward.

The next decade will be unlike everything that has gone before. In the face of major societal, economic and environmental challenges, we have the opportunity to ensure that this decade is remembered, first and foremost, for delivery. Despite all the difficulties that we know are ahead, I am optimistic about what we can deliver, because I know what we have already achieved. I look forward to working with you and the Committee to make that delivery a reality.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you very much, Jayne, for that overview and for sharing your vision with us. It is a vision that we, as elected representatives, share. We believe that there has to be an emphasis on delivery and transformation in all our services. We must look wider than the core of the Civil Service to deliver that innovation, transformation, partnership and collaboration in our communities, wider society and business community.

Jayne, when you look at the width and depth of the brief, it can be pretty overwhelming. In the past eight weeks, have you identified areas that you regard as your priority? In the midst of all the things that you have to do, you have to distil the priorities and what you can actually achieve. What are some of the quick wins that you would like to progress in order to demonstrate widely the change of culture and the movement that you see as the vision of the Civil Service that you are heading up?

**Dr Brady:** You are right. There is such breadth, scale and scope to the Civil Service and the opportunities that lie in it. The first number of weeks in the role have been a listening brief. Part of that engagement is listening to the Committee, civil servants and the Executive, led by Ministers. I want to identify where I can add most value. My experience has been in looking at areas in moments of disruption and at where we can double down and deliver innovative strategies to realise any opportunities that lie in that disruption. In the past 20 months, I have seen how the Civil Service has been able to respond in moments of disruption. I am really keen to make sure that we double down on that agility, those new ways of thinking and that calculated risk-taking approach.

In the first number of weeks, in which we have discussed and agreed some terms of reference, there were four key areas for delivery. One is the transformation agenda. We have a number of reports, such as the Audit Office and renewable heat incentive (RHI) inquiry findings, that identify clear areas. Part of it is about attracting a broader skill set to the Civil Service. The first thing that I have done on that is to go out, with a refreshed approach, and establish the recruitment process for a number of senior roles in the Civil Service. That is in train and will deliver.

The second piece that we are looking towards is what role innovation and digitisation can play in delivering opportunities in the Civil Service. We are working on a programme to identify what those areas of opportunity are, both within the Civil Service and more broadly, to deliver for our citizens in Northern Ireland. You are right that our intent here is not only to deliver long-term strategies but to have short-term focuses. Some of those may be to identify key individuals or key skill sets that we need to bring into the service to provide expert input that will inform decisions.

Another aspect is how we engage in co-design and communication with our shareholders and encourage a partnership-led approach. That is the third theme that we are looking at to progress the short and medium-term interactions. We must make sure that we work in partnership with those *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality]* in Northern Ireland and more broadly.

I would welcome the opportunity to come back as we develop those work plans, which are being led by the Northern Ireland Civil Service board. We have a view to having those proposals completed by the end of this month and would welcome the opportunity to come back to the Committee to further discuss them with members.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** You put delivery as your top priority. It is fair to say that a lot of plans and strategies have been put in place but that they lack delivery. It has been all about developing strategies, but delivery has not been felt on the ground. A lot of those plans are just replications of previous ones. To be honest, I am a bit nervous about the coronavirus recovery plan as well.

How do you and your colleagues oversee and carefully manage delivery? How can it be outcomes-based? How can we see milestones? How can we make sure that the key objectives are delivered on an ongoing basis? Some of the language in our key plans for the future, the recovery plan in particular, is very soft. There is no data behind it. I know that for you, as an engineer — you made reference to this in your briefing — it is about data and about having analytics behind your intention. How will you manage that with the coronavirus recovery plan, for example? It is not visible for the Committee to scrutinise.

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Chair. I will perhaps bring Karen in to discuss some of the further details, but I will give you an outline of my view of how the plans, including the COVID recovery plan, should be measured and progressed. You are right: for me, numbers and figures are substantive. The economy is an area in which I have worked for most of my career, and much of that concerns skills, gross value added (GVA) and those hard figures and measures.

There is a perspective about how we put in place long-term strategies that go beyond the next number of years. The COVID recovery plan looks ahead for two years, but can we look at strategic outcomes for the next 10 years? What might those GVA metrics be? How many jobs do we need to transfer as part of that? We have a very high rate of economic inactivity: 27%, which is much higher than in any other area of the UK and, indeed, benchmarked externally. How do we look at the real figures and turn them into meaningful metrics against which we can define targets over the next 10 years? How do we make sure that the outcomes and outcomes-based methodologies align with that? That is very much the basis of the outcomes approach that is being delivered through the COVID recovery plan and the Programme for Government. The next stage is to look at broader metrics and see how we can deliver on them.

I will ask Karen to come in and provide more detail on that approach, if you are content, Chair.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** That is fine, thank you.

**Ms Karen Pearson (The Executive Office):** Thanks, Chair. I completely concur on the importance of everything that you have said. That is where we are with the recovery process. It takes us into Jayne's transformation programme and eventually into the Programme for Government.

Of the four key priorities for the team, funding is the number one. We have significant funding for this year, and we await the results of the spending review for future years. Secondly, on priorities, the plan has 83 deliverables, but TEO and Jayne want us to be in the space of looking for the most impactful ones that require collaboration and a role for TEO. We are narrowing them down to a few specifics, on which we will be happy to brief the Committee. That will take us into outcomes-based accountability, which, as Jayne said, is fundamental to the Programme for Government approach. We want to build that in here. We want to be able to demonstrate that people are better off because money has been allocated and action has been taken. Ultimately, we need to be able to describe that in outcomes.

It picks up on some of the key lessons from COVID. No one Department can do all those things on its own, so there must be collaboration, co-design and partnership-working. My team has been engaging with external stakeholders for two or three weeks — we will speak to local government this week, I think, and we have been speaking to the mental health champion — because we really want to understand what is happening for citizens out there.

The final thing that we are committed to is reviewing the plan. It was published in August, and it represented a point in time. We seriously doubt that we have seen all the implications of COVID play out yet. It is a two-year plan; we will keep it under review. If we start to see new and emerging harms that we had not anticipated, or if a particular harm deepens that makes things worse for citizens, the plan can be reviewed.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** I return to Jayne. You probably have the renewable heat incentive action plan and recommendations as a framework for reform that you can now work to. How will you progress those recommendations? That will be the key to reform and decision-making processes in the Civil Service. It is fundamental for you to move forward with your new vision.

**Dr Brady:** You are right. In addition to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and Northern Ireland Audit Office recommendations on capability and capacity, the RHI recommendations provide a platform for delivering that transformation. We have responded to those recommendations, and I am working with colleagues in the Department of Finance to put a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place to define how those will be brought forward jointly with DOF, the NICS board and through my own role. We are reviewing those MOUs at the moment with ministerial input, and we are open to coming back to the Committee to get input once we get through those discussions.

You are right. It provides a useful framework and platform for change. The recommendations are clear about capacity, performance management and the capability and skill-set pieces in particular. I am very comfortable in bringing that back. That is a central tenet of the NICS board's terms of reference, but, as you rightly point out, it is about making sure that the ultimate outcome, which is about delivery, is done in the best environment in the Civil Service, when it comes to capability and capacity.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you very much for your answers. I invite John Stewart to ask his questions.

**Mr Stewart:** Thank you, Chair. Jayne, can you hear me?

**Dr Brady:** I can, thank you.

**Mr Stewart:** It is lovely to meet you, albeit virtually. I congratulate you on your new role and welcome you to it. It is probably an unenviable task at times, given where we are, but I am sure that you are up for the challenge. I take my hat off to everything that you and everyone in the Civil Service have done throughout the pandemic and in general. Honestly, any time that I have needed assistance on any issue, somebody has been there for me. I know how hard the staff work behind the scenes.

As someone with a background in the private sector and working with people in small businesses, I am genuinely pleased to hear you talk about "innovation", "risk-taking" and "new thinking". Those are all great things that, I think, perhaps have been lacking in some levels of the Civil Service in the past. A lot of people who want to take those chances have not been given the freedom to do so. I wish you well in doing that, and I am pleased to hear that you are getting support from the political side of things to make those changes.

You talked about one key area, and you used the word "collaboration". For years, my bugbear has been my perception that, at whatever level of government, Departments work in silos too often. Climate change is a prime example in which we can look at the overlap between the Department of Education, the Department for Infrastructure, the Department for the Economy and DAERA and how that feeds into local government and our private business sector. You touched on all those. Even though we improved during COVID, I am keen to dive into how you think that we can break down barriers between Departments, all levels of government and the private and public sectors in order to deliver what is best for Northern Ireland in that respect.

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. You are right. In my opening address, I talked about those broader wicked challenges that Northern Ireland has. That is one of the reasons why I wanted to take the role. I wanted not only to work with people whom I valued but to try to address some of those big challenges. Those wicked challenges largely cannot be addressed in a silo. The climate crisis is, of course, one of the big challenges facing Northern Ireland and our citizens over the next 10 years. I believe that it is also a strong opportunity, because we have such a strong sector in that. We have dominance in agriculture. I worked in some of the innovation parks, and, at the Thompson dock, we built a dry dock for a boat that we had not even imagined could be built as large as that. It was a global first. We have entrepreneurs and engineers who can solve those big problems.

You are right: that strategy is being led from DAERA because that is an area from the climate piece, but, overall, that needs to be developed and lined up with Economy, with our energy policy, with the skills piece and with Education. More broadly, it is about what we can do in the public sector, so it needs a joined-up approach to deliver that. The idea of productivity and where we are with skills again needs a joined-up approach. Obviously, Economy is at the front and is foremost with that, but we need Education as part of that, and we also need the Department for Communities because we need to address the big, wicked challenges of economic activity, and we cannot do that from a silo perspective. The third of those is health inequalities. The statistics on health inequalities from where I was born to where I live now show that there is an average of seven years of a difference in life expectancy depending on what economic background you come from.

Those are big things that you cannot solve in one Department per se. It needs a long-term view, and it needs interdepartmental thinking. We talked about delivery, and I talked about those areas. The themes in the COVID recovery plan are tackling those areas, but, as part of the transformation agenda, I tasked the team to look at whether there is a small number of cross-cutting interdepartmental focuses that we as a Civil Service can take so that we can look at new ways of delivering those. The challenge is that, if it becomes too large and great, the focus will not be there. That is one of the programmes that we are looking at. What are the small number of cross-departmental ways on which we can work to deliver on those outcomes? That activity is commencing through November. It works entirely aligned with the Programme for Government outcomes framework, and it is entirely aligned with the four strands that are defined as part of the COVID recovery plan.

What gives me hope and opportunity is that my experience in the Civil Service has been that people are up for this. I came into a new role, and the team around me has stood up. The permanent secretaries are leading some of those initiatives. When we had the crisis of the pandemic, which we are still going through, those Departments stood up and worked together. I chair the COVID task recovery group, and that is across all disciplines. We know that, when we have really big, difficult, wicked problems to solve, we need to work together, so it is not about defining a new way of working. For me, delivery is first and foremost about the function and form that needs to follow that delivery structure and how we need to do that. That is first and foremost in how we can look towards addressing those big challenges and with that will come the transformation of the service that we need to deliver that.

**Mr Stewart:** That is great. That is exactly what I wanted to hear, and I really do wish you well in it because it is not an easy task by any stretch. I believe that you are up for it, and that is good to hear.

On the local government piece, I mentioned climate change, but we have economic recovery. Whether that is developing entrepreneurship, starting up small businesses or economic regeneration areas, local government has a role to play. It is also key to our economic recovery strategy, which you are heading up. How do you get a feel for that, and how do you link up what our 11 councils are doing and what our enterprise agencies are doing, as well as what central government can do?

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. Having been an employee of local government, how we join those up has been a key focus for me. On the pieces here, lots of things are being done. How do we pull them together to be compelling narratives? We have the labour market programmes that are being delivered by the Department for Communities and the Department for the Economy, and I guess that that is the piece here. I do not say that it is easy, because, if it were easy, we would have done it.

How do we look towards what outcome we need to achieve and then work back to say what the form is that we need to deliver that? The first thing for me is to find what the strategic objective is. If I look towards aspirational figures, I see that £12 billion to £14 billion GVA in 10 years will bring us to a transformative piece in Northern Ireland with that productivity piece. To do that, you need to invest in sectors that give you high-value experts, and those are clearly defined in the 10X innovation strategy. That needs to fund and support those entrepreneurs and value-makers as well as cover the mix from FDI in creating those ecosystems. You cannot solve that unless you look at our productivity and economic inactivity figures. To bring the 27% figure down to 21%, 20,000 or 30,000 people need to be moved from economic inactivity into the labour market. We need to get into the hard detail of where we can move the dial and embrace the innovation opportunities and how we can think differently. It is about setting that bold ambition, which I know that we can do.

We are at a moment when we choose to step up and embrace that opportunity and innovation, or we continue to go to the same place. That is why I took the role and why I have worked with colleagues. I took it because I feel that there is a real appetite among all my colleagues to deliver that level of

ambition. A few things can provide a big transformative impact over the next 10 years. Let us make this a decade of delivery on those.

**Mr Stewart:** Thank you very much. It is very reassuring to hear that. By way of shameless self-promotion, I say that I chair the all-party group (APG) on micro and small businesses. It has been focusing on this through Enterprise NI, which provides our secretariat. Your schedule is probably massively busy, but it would be great to get you along to address the APG. It would be interested to hear what you have to say about that.

I have a last, small point. The sound cut out when you responded to the Chair's comments on implementation of the recommendations of the RHI inquiry. Do you have a rough time frame for that? I think that you said that it was with the Department of Finance, but I did not hear an indicative time frame for the full implementation of the recommendations. Could you give me an idea of that?

**Dr Brady:** Yes. We have drafted an MOU that we are reviewing with Ministers, so it will be within this calendar year. We will come back to the Committee to advise on that, but it is being done. It is obviously a key mandate for me. Working on that with DOF colleagues has been a positive experience. I cannot confirm that, because there is ministerial direction on it, but it is well progressed.

**Mr Stewart:** No problem. Thank you for your time and thanks to your entire team for everything that you are doing.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you very much, Deputy Chair, for your unashamed plug for the APG on micro and small businesses. John and I swap roles there: he is the chair and I am the deputy chair. I concur with him, and I offer that invitation to you.

**Mr Sheehan:** I welcome you to your new job, Jayne. I hope that everything goes well in your role. I will touch first on COVID recovery. I had not intended to bring it up, but we received a paper about the Public Health Agency taking part in four-country weekly meetings to share experiences, lessons learned and the latest research and so on. One area of focus is the low uptake of the vaccine among young people, but the paper says that there has been no formal contact with the Republic of Ireland, where there has been a very high uptake among young people. Can you explain why there has not been any formal contact?

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Mr Sheehan. I reinforce the importance of vaccination as our biggest defence against COVID and the pandemic. The areas that we have identified in the COVID recovery plan and our communications piece emphasise that. I will bring in Karen, who has been leading some of the engagement, to comment on how we have engaged more broadly across the regions. Perhaps we will need to come back to you on the specifics of the question. Karen, do you want to comment?

**Ms Pearson:** Thanks for the question, Mr Sheehan; it is a really important question. We will do anything that we can to get greater vaccine uptake than we have at the moment, particularly amongst the younger population.

I would need to know a little bit more about what you have in front of you. From our experience, Minister Swann has had several engagements with the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA). I am not close enough to the detail of exactly what they have discussed, but I would be a bit surprised if there is a particular gap in engagement around vaccination with colleagues in the South, given the efforts that have gone in at a political and CMO level to keep conversations going. If we can find out a little more from you, Mr Sheehan, we will certainly look at that.

**Mr Sheehan:** I can certainly ensure that the paper is forwarded to you. When we have a problem with uptake among young people, and the South does not have the same problem, it seems strange that we are not sharing experiences or gaining experience from the South.

In any event, I do not want to focus on COVID recovery. I know that your predecessor was bogged down in COVID recovery to a large extent, Jayne. I am sure that you want to take a wider view on delivery and on coordinating Departments and so on. I have been very encouraged by some of what you have said today, particularly in relation to co-production, focus on delivery, outcomes in partnership with stakeholders and so on.

One of the issues that this Executive face is the fact that there is no Programme for Government. The main document that they need to work off is the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement. How do you see the key commitments of NDNA being delivered? How do we measure progress on the delivery of those commitments? Thanks.

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Mr Sheehan. When it comes to the programmes that we are delivering, we have signed off the COVID recovery plan, which is a segue into the Programme for Government. We carried out extensive consultation on the Programme for Government outcomes framework earlier this year. The clear themes are there to be delivered, and we are committed to delivering on the NDNA pieces. Overall, those fit into the programme of activities that are going ahead.

Karen can comment on where we are with the alignment of those deliverables. I am very happy to discuss those further with the permanent secretary for TEO, Denis McMahon, when he joins next week, and any further information that can be provided.

**Ms Pearson:** Thanks, Jayne. The Committee will know that there was a consultation on the Programme for Government and that the results for that are in. It is now a question of Ministers looking at the results and seeing where they want to go next.

We are working our way through the issues in relation to NDNA. We do that for Ministers in line with the priorities that they set for us in those areas, but I think that we could probably cover that in more detail next week with Denis, if that is acceptable to the Committee.

**Mr Sheehan:** OK. Thanks for that. I apologise that I will have to leave shortly.

Finally, the Executive have a number of offices throughout the world: in the States, Europe, China and so on. Communication will be very important for encouraging inward investment here, given the changed circumstances in relation to Brexit, the protocol and so on. How will you communicate that message, Jayne? What will your strategic approach to improving the economy here be? Thanks.

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Mr Sheehan. That is actually very close to where I want to be very directly involved. I lived in Beijing for a year in 2001, working in FDI in the international sector. I have also lived in Düsseldorf and North America, so I understand the opportunities for Northern Ireland to play a role and how compelling our offer is. I am leading our revised strategy on how our internationalisation programme can be amplified. In terms of those overall programmes, we are looking at the cross-cutting strategies that we talked about, going forward, and at how we make sure that we join up the dots with regards to where our economic strategy is and how we can deliver that more usefully to the partners that we presently have on the ground.

I am happy to come back and deliver some more insights on that, but certainly, as I said in my opening remarks, that is an area of focus. There are real opportunities for us to double down on our internationalisation approach in support of delivering those big cross-cutting outcomes.

**Mr Sheehan:** OK. Thanks for that. I look forward to hearing from you at later date on that. Thank you. Chair, I am finished.

**Ms Sheerin:** Jayne, thanks for the presentation and your answers thus far. Congratulations on your new role. I wish you the best of luck.

I want to pick up on some things that you covered slightly in your remarks when you referred to the disparity across the North in the indicators and the impact that certain things had on COVID. I know that we do not want to talk at length about COVID, but we know that women were disproportionately impacted by it. You also talked about the issues that we have with the workforce and economic activity, and we know that women are more likely to be economically inactive because they take on the burden of unpaid care in the home. What specifically are you thinking of to address that? We had the publication of the 'COVID-19 Feminist Recovery Plan', and we know that women and people from areas of deprivation were more adversely impacted by COVID-19.

You talked about the international aspect. We heard comments from our Agriculture Minister in the past couple of days that bemoaned the prospect of the New Zealand trade deal and the impact that it would have on Irish farmers. That was ironic, to put it lightly, given that he supported Brexit and trade deals like that were one of the things that those of us who campaigned against Brexit were afraid of.

What are your plans to maximise the benefits of the protocol and the protections that it offers us on the international stage?

More broadly, how do you plan to work with the five-party Executive? We do not have a Programme for Government and, given that, NDNA and its commitments outline our Programme for Government until the end of the mandate. There are a number of commitments in NDNA that parties signed up to that they are now renegeing on and, obviously, Acht na Gaeilge is one of the big ones that comes to mind. How do you plan to work with the Executive when you may have partners in government trying to work against others when they agreed to deliver on rights?

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Ms Sheerin. On your first point, it will probably come as no surprise that diversity and the representation of women is a key thing for me. There are two bits to that. There is the social justice piece and the delivery of equality and diversity, but there is also the economic piece that will be delivered.

Last year, a report was done by PwC that showed that the economic impact of moving from having 71% of women in the workforce to 78% would deliver £1.2 billion GVA. That would be a really strong economic impact. In some areas, we are very much labour-constrained, particularly in technology and innovation. There are really big opportunities to address those inequalities and to deliver economic outcomes as part of that. That is central to the discussions and the delivery of the cross-cutting diversity perspectives that we talked about and how we can double down on that. COVID has shown us that we do not have to be in the office every day to deliver those perspectives. I talked about embracing the opportunities that we have seen. It is about how we double down and provide different platforms and ways of working.

That is covered very clearly in the COVID recovery plan. We have an inequality strand, and we will look at the potential barriers and potential areas in which we need to step up with things like childcare and how we double down and make sure that we provide mechanisms so that we can have those very big impacts in every aspect of delivery and add GVA to the economy. I mentioned that I will chair the interdepartmental group on violence against women and girls. I will make sure that we do that from a root-cause perspective as opposed to dealing with the symptoms. Of course, there are inequality strategies in the Department of Health, the Department of Justice and the Department for Communities, but we must make sure that we look at that from a women-centred lens in addition to a diversity lens. I came into the Civil Service from a private-sector background as its first substantive female head, and that showed me that the Civil Service is up for embracing diversity and innovation. That will be a common thread for my role throughout my time in the Civil Service.

You mentioned aspects of agriculture and the protocol. I am really clear on the definition of my role as a civil servant: I am not there to set policy; I am there to advise policymakers, help with policy delivery, mitigate the implications for changing scenarios and deliver on the opportunities ahead. There is a real opportunity for us to lead the agriculture sector and solve those big problems. My family has a rural background, and I know the DNA that is built into understanding those very substantive areas that are brought up day and daily. We can be the problem solvers for some of those big global challenges such as the delivery of net zero carbon.

You mentioned the Programme for Government and NDNA, and we have talked about coming back with a more detailed definition of those deliverables. TEO has committed to and delivered on NDNA commitments, including support for victims and survivors of historical abuse, progress on Executive business and the establishment of the EU exit committee. We are committed to delivering on those NDNA commitments and the COVID recovery programmes. Denis is in front of the Committee next week, and we are very happy to work with him on a more detailed response.

**Ms Sheerin:** Thanks, Jayne. That is helpful. I do not have any other questions. Everything has been covered brilliantly.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Emma, thank you for bringing up the issue of women's equality. You are a woman after my own heart because that is extremely important for COVID recovery.

**Mrs Dodds:** It is good to see you again, Jayne, and to renew conversations, even if in a slightly different way. I honestly wish you well with your job. You have an enormous challenge, but the rewards for Northern Ireland, if this is handled correctly, could be really good and brave.

Throughout my time in politics and as a Minister, particularly during COVID, we have had some amazing civil servants who stepped up to the mark and worked all the hours there were ever to work alongside Ministers to put mitigations in place during that hugely disruptive period. COVID was a disrupter, but we can learn from that and enhance our experiences. COVID-19 has acted as an accelerator. I am keen to see and understand how that accelerated knowledge and learning from COVID can be employed in the Civil Service.

The digitisation of our society has moved on in the past two years in a way that might have taken five or 10 years. How will that help the Civil Service? How can we bring things together so that we are not wandering here, there and everywhere looking for answers? Can we have a significant data hub to work from? Do you plan to have people who are skilled in garnering data? Can those people disperse data across the Departments so that everyone is not wondering what the dickens is going on in other Departments? If we have access to data hubs, we can understand what everyone is doing. It seems to me that an enormous amount of time is wasted in having meetings about meetings, and we could probably disseminate information much more quickly. I am interested in how you see that happening.

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Mrs Dodds. You have experience working with the Department for the Economy. My time with your officials at that time gave me the view that this was an organisation that I wanted to join. I then worked with the Department of Finance and the Department for Communities in my time in local government, so it was a compelling factor for me to see how rapidly people delivered new things and how open they were to co-design. I was coming in externally and working with them from that position. That is really key.

A key part of that is how we embrace risk. During that period, we were forced to embrace risk because the consequences were just too difficult. What I now need to do is to make sure that we provide the frameworks to still enable that risk, particularly in light of analysis of reports such as RHI and those of the Audit Office, and that we do not go back into that risk aversion perspective. To do that, we need to have strong capability with substantive experts to support people in making those risk-based decisions, which we saw, of course, with the CMO and CSA in Health, but have those more broadly.

We also need to have data to evidence those decisions, which is the point to which you referred. So, absolutely, part of my central theme is innovation. How do we make sure that we do not lose this opportunity, and what do we need to build capability from a data and evidence perspective in terms of making that more informed? In my role, in terms of that joined-up approach and assets to the Executive, I will focus on that area.

We have set up a group in the Department to qualify what we can do in short-term pieces for those deliveries and getting momentum into that, but looking at other external resources that we need to bring into the organisation to support us in that. I am wholeheartedly behind that approach. That is an area where we can make quick, strong progress in the short term. There is also the question of how we can scale that up. I think about digitisation. There is a view on how we digitise and modernise the services in the Civil Service and not just in terms of informing policy. How can we be more informed in providing the next generation of services? I will focus on delivering in that area in the very short term.

**Mrs Dodds:** Thank you, Jayne. I agree with you. You mentioned some things that are crucial to allowing government to function, Ministers to make decisions and to move quickly. One is about having the data to back up the decision that you are about to take. The other is having the framework around risk management so that, when you take decisions, the risk of those decisions is properly weighed up and assessed. That is all very important. There is a tendency in the Civil Service, in light of the RHI report, to draw back from risk in any shape or form. We will not drive forward the economy or skills if we do not have a proper management system for all that. That is massively important.

You indicated that you want to keep in place some of the learning from COVID. Undoubtedly, some of that will be a greater mix of where we work and whether we are working from home or in an office-based environment. Many of the companies to which I have talked find that, for collaboration, the drive for innovation and that kind of togetherness with people with whom you work, they need an office-based environment to create that and drive that forward. What are your plans for the Civil Service in that arena? How many civil servants are still permanently working from home? What is the percentage?

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Mrs Dodds. I talked about collaboration and partnership and those ways of working. For me, that is really important. The Civil Service workforce takes its view from the Executive's policies, which were to work from home where you can, and that has now moved to work

from home or to have a hybrid style of working. We do not put ourselves above and beyond the directions given by the Executive. That is how that has been progressed.

As you are aware, there has been a consultation on the new ways of working, and the overriding perspective is how we maintain the best services for our citizens to deliver that. That is about maintaining that service continuity and delivery and recognising that many civil servants have never worked from home. I went out to the Strangford/Portaferry ferry, and the people working there were delivering that day and daily. Front-line health workers have never moved in those environments.

I recognise that there are different ways of working. Departments are coming up with models of what they recognise as the optimum perspective, and policies will be delivered with a view to going live early next year with that new way of working, subject to what the Executive direct with regard to the COVID recovery plan.

I would be very happy to come back with more information. To be honest, I do not have the stats to hand of what the proportion is, but the working-from-home message has been a critical lever in minimising the risk of onward infections of COVID. I appreciate that it is all in the context of COVID, but I am happy to come back and give you a more fulsome response.

The establishment of different regional hubs in the Civil Service is a really innovative way of looking at different ways of working. Those will not be departmentally led. We can provide different ways of collaboration, even interdepartmentally, which can provide more joined-up thinking as well. I fully appreciate the need to feel part of a team and, for me, to have felt part of a team and to meet and establish contacts. I would be happy to come back and give you a more fulsome response on the stats as part of that.

**Mrs Dodds:** That is great. Thank you very much. I recognise that the world of work will never be the same again. I fully recognise and accept that, and we may never want it to be the same again, but the most innovative companies have schemes where they bring people together to collaborate. It is hard to understand how you drive the ambition of young people in particular if they do not meet their colleagues. I would like to understand how you see that working.

I have a couple of questions around the Civil Service and workforce planning. The age profile in the Northern Ireland Civil Service is worrying. I would like us to be really proactive. I see that there is a new apprenticeship scheme, but it is minuscule in respect of the overall size and number of civil servants in Northern Ireland. I would like us to look at that age profile.

Public policy needs the brightest and best, and we need to look at how we appoint the brightest and best of our young graduates and at how we make a career in public policy, which is enormously worthwhile at times, more attractive to young people. There is a huge piece of work to be done around that.

I could go on forever on this one, but I will finish on this. I think that there is a huge piece of work to be done across Departments and across the Civil Service, which may fall into a more cross-departmental issue, and that is around improving the skills of our workforce.

**Dr Brady:** I absolutely agree with you on the question of the age profile. If we look at the figures and analyse them, I think that we have moved in the last year from 0.4% to 1.1%, which is the under-25s; that is 250 and it is not enough. You are right about that. That is about diversity and *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality.]* It is also about how impacted the under-25s have been over the past 20 months in terms of providing pathways and opportunities, as well as the Civil Service having very significant benefits. There has been an apprenticeship scheme, which is operated with the Department for Communities. That is where we can see how we can scale up. There was a graduate placement scheme, which ran during the middle of the year. For the focus, there was a real opportunity not only with graduate intake but with using other mechanisms, such as shared skills and reskilling. *[Inaudible owing to poor sound quality]* specific areas in terms of policy. For me, this is the best job in the world because it is where you can deliver an actual impact.

I talk to my daughters, and what they want to do is to change the world as well. If you look towards what we can do in the Civil Service and the opportunities that are there, I want us to be an employer of choice, to be the best place to work and to be an aspirational piece. That is very much in my mission of how we drive and deliver that. We are also working very closely with DOF on the operational side and how we get in that broader diversity perspective as well as some of the experts that we need in order to inform that risk-based decision-making. That is a critical aspect for me in moving that forward.

Of course, skills are critical. I talked about economic inactivity. I am very conscious that, in order to deliver a skills dimension, we cannot deliver it through the Department for the Economy alone. It is about matching those skills to make sure that we deliver for the immediate market need. Moving towards that productivity and that broader skills piece, it comes with the Department of Education and the Department for Communities. It is also about working towards having a supply end for the Department of Health, with the deficit in nursing and doctors and how we build that into end opportunities. That goes towards those problems; it is about how we look across Departments and not just do cross-departmental working for the sake of it. I know that that is difficult, but we should do it to attract people to those really big areas and have that joined-up approach. Those things cannot be solved even in a political mandate in a three- or four-year cycle. It is a 10-year cycle, so there is a job of work in the Civil Service to step up and say, "OK, we need this framework in order to deliver that difference in the next 10 years". What will we do in the next 10 years? What will we be going for in this perspective? There are areas where the Civil Service needs to look to see how it can make sense. Ministerial directions will define what those policies are, but it is also about what machinery we need to put in place to deliver them.

**Mrs Dodds:** Thank you very much, Jayne. I extend to you every good wish in the world. You have an enormous challenge ahead. As I said, I have met some amazing people who have done some really great work on COVID in the most awful of circumstances. I am not looking at Karen in particular, but she and her team were working awfully hard, day and night at times, and it has been incredibly difficult.

We really have a job of work to do to persuade our young people in particular. You mentioned the stats for under-25s; I suspect that, if I asked you for the stats for under-30s, they might not be very different. I am not being ageist in any shape or form, but we need to bring our best minds to public policy and how we drive things forward. Public servants can make a real difference to people's lives.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you very much, Diane. Skills are probably the most cross-cutting and key area on which we will have to deliver if we are to have the outcomes and the vision that we need for success here in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Easton:** Thank you for your presentation. A lot of questions have been answered. In terms of productivity, how are you looking at whether you get better value and more work done at home compared with being in the workplace? How are you evaluating that? Does it cost more or less money to do it that way? How are you weighing up all the practicalities of productivity?

**Dr Brady:** Thank you, Mr Easton. We have heard from the business sector that different ways of working have allowed it to be more productive in delivery for its customers. There is a really clear delivery metric. It has also allowed different working models and new people and resources to be brought into the skills agenda. The direction of the sustainable working model will be defined at a departmental level. It will be based on the views of how best to deliver those functions and what model of hybrid working can be delivered. It will not be a one-size-fits-all approach across the Civil Service in defining what works. It was mentioned earlier that many of the employees in the Civil Service do not have a hybrid working model while others have been delivering that very effectively. That will be from a departmental perspective. I am happy to come back and give a more fulsome response in that regard.

There are also potential economic and operational savings to be factored in, although that, obviously, is not the rationale for delivering that. For Northern Ireland, there is a really interesting perspective when you embrace new ways of working and look towards competing more globally. We can use the scale of all our resources across Northern Ireland, and we can look to more broader regional engagements. Some new entrants to Northern Ireland have set up virtual centres for working, so we have been able to embrace new and different working patterns and models. I appreciate the need, of course, to make sure that we do not drop our services and that we maintain our productivity and outcomes. That will be a key focus. It is also about not simply reverting to the same old perspective. Accountability is needed.

We are talking about the outcomes-based model for the Programme for Government and COVID recovery. It is the outcomes that factor. How can we make sure that the outcomes from our Civil Service are affecting delivery for customers? It is not about just checking in and having the perspective of being there figuratively in an office; it is about getting the model right and empowering Departments and civil servants to deliver on that piece. It is probably worth our coming back with a more fulsome response to the Committee. The consultation about new ways of working is ongoing, so

it is timely to come back within the calendar year to refresh and get input from the Committee on that approach.

**Mr Easton:** I would love to hear all that input. Thank you.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** As I said, Jayne, we met last Wednesday in the Ebrington site, and we talked about COVID recovery. We discussed the accelerators, and the four were outlined: sustainable economic development; green growth; tackling inequalities; and the health of the population. I will go to tackling inequalities. The strategic intent was outlined in three areas: addressing vulnerability; enabling recovery and skills; and providing equitable access to health services. I agree totally with each of those. However, there is another inequality that is not addressed in the COVID recovery plan: subregional inequality. Is that something that is missing and needs to be put in, or do you believe that it is addressed through other areas in the plan?

**Dr Brady:** Ultimately, policy decisions, including subregional versus regional approaches, are, from the start to the end, decisions for Ministers. From my perspective, we need to make sure, for the sake of the economy, that all our assets are being leveraged for maximum impact. When I was up in the north-west last week, it was great to see the stakeholders with whom I have worked really closely. Seagate has made such an impact by delivering that very deep technology investment. I think that Seagate has been there for 25 years, and I was delighted to have been part of supporting the smart nano corridor. Again, I recognise that the strength in those places has come from the level of investment in high-value jobs. It is also great to see those investments in the private sector, including from FinTrU. On Twitter earlier, I saw Darragh at a session with John Healy from Allstate. Both FinTrU and Allstate have been key in investing there. I guess that their investment decisions have been based on the calibre of the resources that they can find and how that can lead not only to providing those skills and resources but to reinvesting, which is a symptom of Seagate. Hopefully, they will continue to bring those high-value perspectives.

For Northern Ireland to be successful, we need all areas to deliver on their strengths. I was involved in the Belfast region city deal. I developed the digital strategy and the business case for that, which covered six council areas. I worked really closely with my colleagues on other city and growth deals to make sure that we maximised the impact, looking at our unique strengths in those areas. I am very supportive of a whole-Northern Ireland approach, but policy decisions on a subregional approach versus a regional approach are under the ownership, direction and control of Ministers.

**The Chairperson (Ms McLaughlin):** Thank you very much. That is one key area that is missing in all our reports. I was at that Succeed North West event earlier today as well. It was very uplifting. The region has a lot to offer. Policy sometimes deserves greater scrutiny, because, if anything, that is what is holding us back. It is certainly not the businesses or the region's can-do attitude. There needs to be levelling up by skilling up, and the success will be there for all to see. Derry and the north-west will be a key contributor to the economy. That is my indulgence piece today.

I thank you and your team for your briefing this afternoon. We look forward to many more updates and positive outcomes in the future. Take away our very best wishes for your new role.

**Dr Brady:** Thank you very much, Chair and members.