



Department of

Finance

An Roinn

Airgeadais

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Special Advisers: Annual Report

2025/26

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SPECIAL ADVISERS

Special Advisers are an integral part of the team supporting Ministers in their governmental duties. They offer political insights and assistance that the impartial permanent Civil Service cannot provide, thereby safeguarding the Civil Service from politicisation and aiding the Executive in achieving its objectives.

Fully incorporated into the government framework, Special Advisers collaborate closely with other civil servants to fulfil Ministerial priorities. Their unique role involves delivering political input and advice on key policy matters and fostering relationships to enhance cross-party cooperation within the Executive.

Special Advisers are not employees of their political party; instead, they serve as temporary civil servants under Article 3 of the Civil Service Commissioners (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, as amended. They adhere to the same terms and conditions as civil servants, outlined in the Staff Handbook, and share the collective duty of all civil servants in supporting the Executive's operations.

According to Section 6 of the Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013, the Department of Finance must publish an Annual Report detailing the number and costs associated with Special Advisers. This report addresses the financial year 2025/2026.

In compliance with the Functioning of Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021, the relevant interests of Special Advisers are published separately and updated regularly.

SPECIAL ADVISER PAY POLICY

The Scheme for the Remuneration of Special Advisers¹ sets out that responsibility for determining pay lies with the Department of Finance, as the Department with overall responsibility for determining pay policy and conditions of employment for all NICS employees. There are three pay bands for Special Advisers as set out below.

	1 August 2025
Pay Band 1	Up to £65,918
Pay Band 2	£65,919 - £83,897
Pay Band 3	£83,898 - £97,070

Pay bands are reviewed annually and revalorised in line with relevant revalorisation of pay implemented for the NICS. There is no progression on a scale or spine with defined increments for Special Advisers. Annual pay increases are based on the average NICS salary increase, subject to satisfactory performance, and capped by the maximum of the pay band. Eligibility for a pay increase is in line with NICS rules on pay award eligibility.

The 2025 NICS pay increase was applied to other civil servants in September 2025. Increases to the Special Adviser base pay were applied in November 2025.

From 2026, pay reviews will be effective from 1 April.

¹ [Remuneration of Special Advisers](#)

SPECIAL ADVISER SALARY SETTING

The Finance Minister does not participate in setting the salaries for Special Advisers. Salaries are assigned to a pay band based on the level and scope of responsibility required for the position, and individual salaries are determined by officials within the Department of Finance.

Although the standard practice is to pay new appointees at the base of the pay band, a higher starting salary within the respective band may be granted to recognise the skills and expertise that an individual brings to the role.

A Special Adviser will not earn more than a Minister in the Executive or more than the highest level under the published pay scale for an Assistant Secretary (Grade 5) in the Civil Service.

Special Advisers are eligible for severance payments if their employment ends because their appointing Minister no longer holds the Ministerial Office in which they were employed. This includes instances where the appointing Minister moves to another Ministerial position. Special Advisers are not entitled to severance payments if they accept a paid public office during the period covered by the severance.

NUMBER OF SPECIAL ADVISERS

On 31 March 2026 there were fourteen Special Advisers working across the Civil Service. On 31 March 2025 there were thirteen in post.

OVERALL COSTS OF SPECIAL ADVISERS

The Special Adviser pay bill for the financial year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 was £1,508,552.

2025/2026 FINANCIAL YEAR

Special Advisers in post 2025 /2026

Department	Name	Pay Band (PB)	Salary (If PB 2 or 3)
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	Dr Jonathan Bell	2	£66,336
Communities	Peter Johnston	2	£69,336
Economy	Eoin Rooney	2	£69,336
Education	Richard Bullick	3	£84,428
Health	Mark Ovens	2	£69,336
Infrastructure	Bronagh O’Kane	1	-
Justice	Claire Johnson	2	£69,336
Justice	Craig Harrison ²	2	£65,919
Finance	Dr Dara O’Hagan	3	£84,428
Executive Office	Dr Ashleigh Perry	2	£69,336
Executive Office	Alastair Ross	3	£87,469
Executive Office	Ronan McGinley	3	£87,469
Executive Office	Matthew Morrison	2	£65,919
Executive Office	John Loughran	2	£74,669
Executive Office	Clíodhna Nic Bhranair	2	£66,336

² Temporary appointment to cover period of maternity leave.

End of Temporary Appointment 2025/2026

Department	Name	End Date
Justice	Craig Harrison	30/01/2026

Salary Costs 2025/2026	£1,014,684 ³
Employer National Insurance Contributions	£143,032
Employer Pension Contributions	£350,836
Severance Costs	£NIL
Overall Total	£1,508,552

SPECIAL ADVISER GENDER AVERAGE SALARY FOR 2025/2026

- 10 male Special Advisers – average salary – £74,022
- 5 female Special Advisers – average salary – £70,154⁴

³ This figure includes salary and paid absences.

⁴ Calculated from salary table on page 5.