

DRAFT PRESS STATEMENT BY [SECRETARY OF STATE][MINISTER RESPONSIBLE  
FOR NICS]

1. I welcome the publication of the FEA Report, the culmination of an investigation extending over nearly four years. The Government is firmly committed to pursuing absolutely fair and impartial employment policies. The Report provides clear evidence that in the modern Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) practice matches policy and that people are recruited and promoted solely on the grounds of their suitability for the job.
2. As the Agency itself says, "this Report should encourage all good potential applicants to regard the Service as a worthwhile career".
3. In view of its length and the inevitable complexity of the analysis, the Report requires careful study. There are, however, a number of salient points which should be highlighted. These are contained in paragraphs 4-18 beneath. The way ahead is considered in paras 19-24.

Composition

4. Roman Catholics are under-represented in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (30.7% compared with around 38% in the community as a whole). However, the picture has changed radically in recent years. Roman Catholic representation amongst people recruited since the late 1960's compares with their representation in the community. Indeed, in each of the years 1976-1980, Roman Catholics formed between 45% and 54% of the male recruits to the General Service grades and between 53% and 54% of the female recruits. The majority of Roman Catholics in the Northern Ireland Civil Service are in the under-40 age group.

Recruitment

5. Recruitment procedures are fair. For the higher level entry competitions, selection boards contain members from outside the Civil Service, often drawn from both

communities and both sexes. Vacancies are widely advertised. Opportunities for careers exhibitions are taken up uniformly by both education systems.

6. An analysis of typical recruitment showed that numbers of Protestants and Roman Catholics applying for province-wide recruitment competitions are comparable. In the localised competitions the applications reflect the religious mix of the area. Generally, similar proportions of candidates were appointed to vacancies.
7. Roman Catholics with appropriate qualifications have not entered the Civil Service in sufficient numbers at the higher entry levels (the critical take-off point for senior career progression) or the technical grades. As the Report indicates:

"..... if those appointed at Executive Officer II level have an advantage in promotion opportunities, the relative absence of Roman Catholics appointed at this level (in 1970, none out of 18; in 1975, 16 out of 58; and in 1980, 2 out of 16) will necessarily be reflected in an analysis of numbers occupying senior posts."

8. The Report refers to people being "appointed" to particular levels in the Civil Service. It should be clearly understood that it is the potential recruit himself (not the Civil Service Commission) who decides the competition for which to enter and hence the level at which, if successful, he will be appointed.

#### Promotion

9. Promotion procedures are fair. A study of all promotion boards held in 1981 and 1982 for the grades of Executive Officer I, Staff Officer, Deputy Principal and Principal and involving 5086 officers (or over 40% of the total in the General Service grades) demonstrated the parity of outcome of the boarding process. Details for each stage of the process gave no indication of one group advancing at a differential rate

compared to the other. 13.4% (or 469) of eligible Protestants were promoted, compared with 14.6% (or 232) of eligible Roman Catholics.

10. A study of the General Service grades aged between 25 and 35 showed that similarly qualified Protestants and Roman Catholics of similar age and the same sex, entering at the same levels, progress at similar rates.

#### Senior Grades

11. Roman Catholic representation in the grades of Staff Officer and above has markedly increased over the past decade from 14% to 22.5%.
12. There is every sign that, given present trends, this increase will continue. By 1983, representation of Roman Catholics in the more senior levels had already virtually reached the point which had been anticipated for 1990 in preliminary projections made by the Agency.

#### Factors determining success in the Civil Service

13. The Report demonstrates that the two most important factors governing pay levels of both Protestants and Catholics are educational qualifications and the level at which the officer enters the Civil Service. As the Report indicates, this is to be expected in a large organisation with seniority patterns and variable levels of entry. The officer's sex has also been found to be a major factor.
14. Promotion in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, as in other Civil Services and in most organisations, is based on merit, measured by achievement, which is the product of talent and experience. It is not a matter of the Civil Service denying opportunity to otherwise meritorious candidates because they lack arbitrarily chosen qualifications or seniority. It would be surprising if the most intellectually able who have entered the Civil Service at the levels which set the more demanding educational

standards were not able to make successful careers in the Civil Service. Educational qualifications per se are not grounds for promotion but, as this and other Agency studies show, they are associated with success in a competitive environment such as the Civil Service.

15. The Report makes clear that, if the groups which make up society are to be represented at all levels broadly in proportion to their relative strengths within the population, the characteristics which determine success must be uniformly distributed over the various groups. Roman Catholics in the Northern Ireland Civil Service tend to be younger, there is a greater proportion of females, they tend to have lower educational qualifications and they enter the Civil Service on average at a lower level.

#### Religion

16. For the modern Civil Service (ie the almost 15,000 officers recruited since 1967, who made up three quarters of those studied by the FEA) religion determines neither their job prospects nor their salary levels. The major factors governing their pay levels are those considered above.
17. For those recruited prior to 1968, these factors are also the major determinants of pay levels but present information suggests that religion has also a statistically significant effect. The significance of religion in comparison with the other factors can be measured by using the appropriate statistical techniques to extend the analysis given in the Report. Taking the Civil Service as a whole and ignoring officers' ages, the type of grade entered is  $1\frac{1}{2}$  times as important as religion, sex is 21 times as important, educational qualifications are 34 times as important and the level at which the Service is entered is 47 times as important. If Officers' ages are taken into account, religion becomes relatively even less significant.
18. It is not possible to say whether religion would remain a statistically significant factor if information on other

factors such as wastage rates and mobility were available for Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The way ahead

19. The Government wholeheartedly endorses the Agency's view that in a plural society those who administer the country's affairs should so far as possible reflect the diversity of its culture and outlook and that Roman Catholics and Protestants should be properly represented at all levels in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It is evident from the information in the Report that both Protestants and Roman Catholics look to the Civil Service as a career and actively seek employment in it. It is also evident from the Report that this, coupled with fair and impartial employment policies, is leading to a rapid closing of the gap between the proportions of Protestants and Roman Catholics at the more senior levels {where Roman Catholics have been seriously underrepresented.}
20. The Government accepts the need for information systems which make clear the religious balance within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The FEA's investigation demonstrates how such information can remove misunderstanding about an organisation which is clearly in the midst of a process of rapid change and can illuminate the nature of the change. The Government will be entering into discussion with trade union representatives on this matter.
21. The Government also endorses the Agency's recommendation that more Roman Catholics with good academic qualifications should be encouraged to seek employment within the Northern Ireland Civil Service, particularly at the higher entry levels. It hopes that the Roman Catholic community (including in particular the educational interests within it) will regard this recommendation as being addressed to it as much as to the Government.
22. The Report records (and this Statment affirms) the Government's

commitment to sexual equality as a key element in the development of personnel policy within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

23. The Government also accepts the Agency's recommendation that, when considering the siting or re-siting of Governing offices, it should be borne in mind that the location of offices has a major impact on the religious composition of Departments. This factor has already been taken fully into account in a general review of office accommodation on which the Government is engaged.
24. The Government will be prepared to discuss with the Agency any improvements in its personnel arrangements which may be necessary and which, in the words of the Report, preserve and uphold the principles of fairness and efficiency in selection and promotion decisions and of promotion on merit.