

Annual Conference 2025

...creating space for conversation on public finances

12 September 2025 at PwC Belfast Merchant Square

Compered by Mark Simpson – BBC News Presenter & Correspondent

Agenda

9.30 – 10.00 Registration, Breakfast and networking

10.00 – 10.10 Welcome from Deborah Stevenson, PwC

10.10 – 10.20 Opening Address – Dr Esmond Birnie, NI Fiscal Council

10.20 – 10.40 Address from the Minister of Finance – John O'Dowd MLA

10.40 – 12.00 **Plenary 1 – Panel discussion - Overview of the Barnett Formula**

An overview of how the Barnett Formula operates in practice and how it affects the Northern Ireland Block. We consider recent developments in this space and potential ways in which this might evolve in future years.

Speakers

Joanne McBurney - Deputy Secretary, Public Spending, Department of Finance NI

Prof Gerald Holtham – Visiting Professor at Cardiff Metropolitan University and Managing Partner at Cadwyn Capital

David Phillips – Associate Director and Head of Devolved and Local Government Finance, Institute for Fiscal Studies

12.00 – 12.45 Lunch

12.45 – 14.00 **Plenary 2 – Panel discussion – Public sector transformation**

This session examines what drives successful public sector transformation. Does dedicated investment enable genuine change, or do tight budgets spark greater innovation? Drawing on recent case studies, the panel will explore what works, what doesn't, and how context shapes transformation across services and sectors.

Speakers

Robert Watt - Secretary General, Department of Health, Ireland

Mike Farrar - Interim Permanent Secretary, Department of Health NI

Prof Jodie Carson - Professor of Strategic Policy in Practice & Co-Director of the Strategic Policy Unit, Ulster University

14.00 – 14.15 Wrap up – Maureen O'Reilly, NI Fiscal Council