

From: [McCormick, Andrew \(DFE\)](#)
To: [Timothy Johnston](#)
Subject: Re: Can you fact check this for me?
Date: 14 December 2016 16:06:41

All good many thanks

Sent from my BlackBerry 10 smartphone.

From: Timothy Johnston
Sent: Wednesday, 14 December 2016 16:04
To: McCormick, Andrew (DFE)
Subject: Can you fact check this for me?

DUP deputy leader Nigel Dodds MP today called on Opposition parties and sections of the media to retract allegations against First Minister Arlene Foster over the RHI debacle.

Mr Dodds published correspondence which nails the myth that Mrs Foster as DETI Minister failed to follow up on 'whistleblower' concerns about RHI . And he said the First Minister is now owed an apology.

In fact the 2013 email from the lady in question (attached) raised no concerns about RHI at all. It simply asked for a meeting on energy efficiency matters. A meeting with officials was facilitated and it was in these subsequent discussions that issues about RHI were conveyed. Mrs Foster did not attend these meetings or hear of the concerns. The initial email was the only contact with the Minister.

Mr Dodds said: "There has been a quite scurrilous attempt to blame Arlene Foster for the RHI saga. The endlessly repeated claim has been that she failed to follow up on the whistle blower concerns.

"Now we know that no such concerns were raised with her. This is no criticism of the lady in question. She has behaved with great integrity throughout and even told the media that her initial email to the Minister did not go into detail.

"The Department has admitted it should have responded differently when the RHI were subsequently aired.

"The Department's permanent secretary has made clear throughout that Arlene Foster acted entirely appropriately.

"Sadly Opposition parties and some section of the media didn't want to know that. They have been engaged in a disgraceful and baseless blame game for which they should now apologise."

The DUP deputy leader added: "No one is denying for a second that RHI is a totally unacceptable state of affairs. But the attempts to blame Arlene Foster have descended to hysterical levels."

The DUP also spelt key RHI facts in the hope that public debate will be better informed

RHI - Key Facts

1) The key failing at the heart of this whole saga is detailed in the NI Audit Office report of July 2016.

It explains that consultants introduced a RHI subsidy payment rate for boilers that was higher than the cost of wood pellets. The Audit Office records that DETI incorrectly reported in the 2012 business case for RHI that there was no need to consider cost tiering controls "because the rate proposed was lower than the cost of fuel and therefore there would be no incentive to abuse the system by generating heat just to claim the subsidy".

This fundamental mistake informed DETI's administration of the scheme over the bulk of its lifespan. It helps explain the failure to respond adequately to initial concerns and to respond adequately to the escalating costs from 2015 onwards. DETI didn't understand the surge in demand.

In short, DETI didn't understand the problem, so was unable to fix it when it mattered.

2) When Arlene Foster was DETI Minister there was a £15m underspend on RHI. She received no advice from officials on introducing cost controls.

Clearly, DETI was still labouring under its fundamental misunderstanding of the scheme's details at this time, and remained of the view that controls were not needed.

3) Tiering controls in RHI were introduced by DETI in November 2015.

Arlene Foster had no role in the decision on when this tiering would take effect. It is accepted that the spike in applications ahead of the tiering being introduced is a major area of concern and a major contributory factor to RHI costs. It is essential that this issue is fully investigated.

4) The RHI scheme was closed to new applications in February 2016. The original timescale for this closure was extended by two weeks, following

demands from across the political spectrum for a longer period . Arlene Foster as First Minister and the deputy first Minister supported the additional two weeks. Indeed, Opposition MLAs wanted a greater period – that was the only controversy around the decision. No concerns have been raised on the cost implications of the additional two weeks, not least because tiering controls were by this stage in place for applications

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