

THE NEW NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSITION PROGRAMME****BACKGROUND**

The Transition Programme has been designed, with the participation of local and international advisers, to assist Members and Committees of the Assembly in their preparations for the effective functioning of the Assembly when it takes on its full powers after the transitional period.

The Programme's objective is to provide as comprehensively as is practicable a background briefing about the responsibilities and issues facing the Assembly. It is not intended to address or consider issues of policy arising with regard to the future.

The overview of the Programme set out below is flexible. It reflects the consultations carried out, before the Election on 25 June, with representatives of the political parties. It is being developed on an ongoing basis in consultation with the Party Offices in the Assembly, so as to respond as speedily as possible to what Assembly Members need.

The ground to be covered is potentially very extensive, but the time which Members can give to it is necessarily limited. With this in mind the Programme has been planned as a series of short seminars/workshops, lasting no more than one day in a conference centre or other appropriate locations. The seminars/workshops are informal and participative, using background material for consideration and discussion with a number of appropriate Northern Ireland Civil Servants under the guidance of independent experts and facilitators, drawn from Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Ireland and abroad.

The seminars/workshops are most effective when the number participating are kept at around 50, which includes civil servants. It is therefore envisaged that many if not all of the seminars will be repeated for each subject; the repeat seminars being sufficiently far ahead to fit in with Members' availability.

THE PROGRAMME

Four components have been designed:

- I. A short series of seminars/workshops dealing with **core** subjects with which every Member of the Assembly will wish to be familiar. These seminars take priority and are the basis from which specialised subjects have been pursued. This component has been completed, the CORE subjects and the dates of seminars were:

- **Tuesday 29 July 1998 and Thursday 27 August 1998** An Overview of the Northern Ireland Government (including roles and responsibilities of Northern Ireland departments).
- **Thursday 30 July 1998 and Tuesday 25 August 1998** Public Finance.
- **Monday 7 September 1998** The Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Union.
- **Wednesday 9 September 1998** North/South Co-operation.

- **Thursday 24 September 1998** The Northern Ireland Assembly - Relationships with other UK Assemblies.

II. A series of **functional** seminars/workshops focusing initially on key areas of government activity which are likely to be of general interest to Members, not least Members of particular Assembly Committees:

- **Monday 21 September 1998** Health and Social Services.
- **Thursday 1 October 1998** Agriculture.
- **Tuesday 6 October 1998** Public Health.
- **Wednesday 28 October 1998** Equality.
- **Thursday 29 October 1998** Environment.
- **Tuesday, 17 November 1998** Education
- **Thursday, 26 November 1998** Social Security and Child Support.
- **Friday, 11 December 1998** Culture and Recreation.
- **Friday, 15 January 1999** Economic Development

This component is ongoing and will be further developed in response to Members' needs.

III. An international component funded by the United States Government and the European Union focusing on:

(a) **United States Programmes - The Task of Government**

- (1) To analyse and discuss the best practices and models available in functional areas of government focusing heavily on skills and competency.
- (2) To bring together elected representatives and administrators from Northern Ireland in a non-political environment to discuss public policy, policy analysis and policy formulation.
- (3) To visit legislatures and meet representatives and administrators and discuss their successes and failures in attempting to deliver good government.
- (4) To look at federalism in the United States and discuss relevant issues for Northern Ireland's legislators.
- (5) To analyse, discuss and observe good examples of public private partnership, legislative relations and legislative resources.

The first part of this component has taken place with a party of 15 Assembly Members completing the programme at Boston College from 18-25 November 1998. The second element will take place from 12-19 December for a party of NI Party Staffers and Committee Clerks.

(b) **The European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission in Brussels - 3 day Conference in Brussels 3-6 November 1998**

The objective of the Conference and visit was to allow members of the Assembly to interact and build direct links with those who work at the administrative heart of Europe in Brussels.

The President of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, and other Commissioners met the Assembly Members giving them the opportunity to explore ways in which they can have an impact within the European Institutions. This was achieved through workshops on policy issues selected by the Assembly members themselves, and led by officials directly involved.

The work of the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee and their relevance to Northern Ireland were also explained.

- IV. A supplementary programme of events will be required to address needs identified in discussion with Party representatives. This could involve working in partnership with appropriate institutions and providers, eg the Industry and Parliament Trust. Provision for these will be made within the available resources.