

The New Northern Ireland • Assembly

TRANSITION
PROGRAMME

Margaret McAlinden

CONTENTS

Transition Programme

Foreword by Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

A milestone of historic importance on this journey towards a secure and peaceful Northern Ireland has been reached. Your election as a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly has now placed in your hands responsibility for completing the next stages of the journey. I congratulate you and all your colleagues on your new office and wish you every success in your task.

There is a transitional period which provides an opportunity for Assembly Members and Civil Servants to prepare together for the new responsibilities ahead. A Transition Programme has been developed to assist you. This document sets out the preliminary details. The Programme is ready to begin with initial seminars at the end of July. I very much wish to ensure that the Programme is owned by the Assembly and reflects the requirements of its Members. Suggestions from Members on the content of the Programme will be valued.

The responsibilities which you and your colleagues will take on in February will be very demanding. The development of new policies will call of vision, determination and competence of a high order.

The Programme can, I believe, help you and I warmly commend it to you.

Margone "Mo"
Mullan

CONTENTS

	Page
Overview	1-2
<i>Background</i>	
<i>The Programme</i>	
<i>The Programme Office</i>	
Core	3-9
<i>Seminar Details</i>	
<i>Nomination Procedure</i>	
<i>Nomination Form</i>	
Functional	11-12
<i>Proposed Seminars</i>	
International	13
<i>European Union</i>	
<i>United States</i>	

OVERVIEW

Background

The transition programme is being 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 outline of the programme set out below is provisional. It reflects the consultations carried out, before the Election on 25 June, with representatives of most of the political parties. It will be developed further now in consultation with the Party Offices in the Assembly, so as to respond as speedily as possible to what 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 usually lasting no more than one day in a conference centre or other appropriate locations. The seminars/workshops will be 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 will be most effective if the numbers participating are kept at around 50, which would include civil servants. It is

therefore envisaged that many if not all of the seminars will be repeated for each subject; the second (or third) seminar being sufficiently far ahead to fit in with Members' availability.

Subject to the views of members it is proposed to conclude each seminar with a dinner addressed by a distinguished speaker; this would allow Members to explore issues of particular interest in an informal setting.

The Programme

Four components have been envisaged:

- 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 should take priority and be the basis from which specialised subjects can be pursued. The CORE subjects proposed are:
 - (1) An Overview of the Northern Ireland Government (including roles and responsibilities of Northern Ireland departments).
 - (2) Public Finance.
 - (3) The Northern Ireland Assembly – Relationships with other UK Assemblies.
 - (4) North/South Co-operation.
 - (5) The Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Union.

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 Committees:

- Agriculture
- Economic Development
- Education
- Environment
- Equality
- Social Services
- Public Health
- Social Security & Child Support.

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

- (a) the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission in Brussels.
- (b) a United States development programme.

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

The core seminars have been worked up in some detail. The rest of the programme will be finalised in the light of discussions with the political parties through their Party Offices. The following pages set out the programme as it now stands.

It should be noted that the Transition Programme in outline does not cover the Assembly Standing Orders and working practices. These are important aspects of the transition and it is envisaged that as the Programme evolves the Assembly and Transition Offices will work together to provide information in these areas.

The Programme Office

The Programme Office is located at:

Room 241a
Rosepark House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST BT4 3NR
Tel: (01232) 526406
Fax: (01232) 526135

CORE

Seminar Details

A series of priority seminars dealing with core subjects with which all assembly members will wish to be familiar. Initially some seminar dates and venues have been put in place. However, all seminars can be repeated as necessary to meet demand.

An Overview of Northern Ireland Government

Outcomes of the seminar

- To provide Assembly members with an overview of the machinery of government of Northern Ireland.
- To provide an overview of the different public bodies that constitute the delivery mechanisms for public services in Northern Ireland.
- To provide an overview of the issues of public finance.
- To develop an understanding of the role of the Civil Service.

Contents

Introduction and legislative framework

To provide an understanding of existing legislation within which the machinery of government works. To understand the role of departments in this process. To outline the different responsibilities of Ministers and Assembly Committees in this machinery.

Structures and processes of government

To outline the different roles, responsibilities and structures of Northern Ireland Departments, the next step agencies, executive non departmental public bodies, boards and local councils and to understand how these interact and are controlled.

Public Finance

To provide an overview of government finances. In particular, to understand the role of the Comprehensive Spending Review; how finance is planned, the block, capital and departmental running costs. To understand how these finances are accounted for and audited. To understand the new government initiatives in this area involving better government and efficiency.

The people and the relationships that make the machinery work

To provide an understanding of the different status of people who work in Government and the relationship between them. In particular this will develop an understanding of the relationship between Assembly members and civil servants, including the importance of political neutrality of civil servants. It will explore the issues of ethics and probity developed by the Nolan Commission. The importance of the Fair Employment Commission. The government equal opportunities responsibilities will also be discussed.

Dates/Venues

29 July 1998 – Europa Hotel, Belfast

27 August 1998 – Stakis Hotel, Templepatrick

Public Finance

Outcomes of the Seminar

- To understand in broad terms how economic policy and public finances operate at the national and regional levels.
- To understand the different roles of Ministers, the Assembly and departments in relation to:
 - (a) the economy as a whole;
 - (b) the total resources available to the Government of the region;
 - (c) how that total can be allocated to best effect between programmes;
 - (d) how best value for money can be obtained and waste and impropriety avoided, and;
 - (e) the relationships between public expenditure and wider policies.

Contents

Macro-economic Context and Economic Management

To understand in broad terms the macro-economic context and the role of economic management including fiscal and monetary policies and government spending reviews including the new system of UK public expenditure control.

Northern Ireland Expenditure and Financing

To understand how Northern Ireland public expenditure is determined through the Barnett formula and other mechanisms and how it is financed from taxes, rates and other sources. The roles of Executive Ministers and

Assembly members in operating the 'Block' and dealing with 'Appropriations' in the Assembly.

Accountability

To understand how regularity, propriety and value for money can and must be secured in all public expenditure, how public accounts contribute to this; the roles of internal and external audit; the Permanent Secretary's role as Accounting Officer and the scrutiny role of the Assembly.

Strategic Issues

To understand the future of the Barnett Formula, Needs Assessment and the relationship between Transferred and Reserved expenditure.

Dates/Venue

30 July 1998 – Stakis Hotel, Templepatrick
25 August 1998 – Europa Hotel, Belfast

The Northern Ireland Assembly – Relationships with other UK Assemblies

Outcomes of the seminar

- To have an overview of devolution in the UK.
- To understand how Northern Ireland fits into the wider devolution programme.
- To appreciate how other devolved assemblies are likely to evolve.
- To have an opportunity to consider how links might be developed between the Northern Ireland Assembly and other devolved assemblies.
- To understand the checks and balances needed in single chamber parliaments.

Contents

Devolution in the UK

To have an overview of the current issues surrounding devolution in the UK in order to develop an understanding of the history so far.

The Welsh National Assembly

To gain an understanding of the structure and procedures envisaged for the Welsh National Assembly.

The Scottish Parliament

To examine the planning process already begun for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

Checks and Balances

To gain an understanding of how other single chamber parliaments work and to examine what checks and balances need to be in place in such institutions.

Date/Venue

20 August 1998 – Europa Hotel, Belfast

North/South Co-operation

Date/Venue

4 September 1998 – Europa Hotel, Belfast

Outcomes of the seminar

- To have an overview of existing levels of North/South co-operation, both at Government to Government level, and in the private sector.
- To understand the respective roles, responsibilities and structures of the Northern Ireland and Irish Public Administration systems.

The possibility of a further seminar on North/South co-operation, in Dublin, in due course is under consideration.

Contents

Comparison of Northern Ireland and Irish Public Administration Systems

A background briefing on the respective roles, responsibilities and structures of the Northern Ireland and Irish Public Administration systems, including the Irish Parliamentary system. This will set the context within which participants can examine existing levels of North/South co-operation.

Existing North/South Co-operation

A joint presentation will be made by officials of the Northern Ireland and Irish Civil Services' setting out an overview of existing North/South co-operation between their two administrations. In addition, officials will make joint presentations, in workshop format setting out illustrative examples of existing co-operation in a number of areas.

Private Sector Co-operation

The perspective of the private sector in regard to North/South co-operation will be reflected in a number of presentations in workshop format by speakers from a range of areas in that sector.

Nominations for Core Seminars

A nomination form is attached which should be completed and returned to the address given at the top, either directly or if alternative arrangements have been agreed, through your Party Office.

The Northern Ireland Assembly and the European Union

Outcomes of the seminar

- A background briefing on the relationships between Northern Ireland and the European Union.
- An understanding of the practical way in which the Assembly may relate to the European Commission.
- An understanding of the opportunities provided to the Assembly by the changes in the structural funds.
- Outline the advantages to Northern Ireland of the principle European Union Policy areas.

Contents

The impact of European Policy and Funding in Northern Ireland to date

An understanding of the recent history of organisational and funding relationships between Northern Ireland and the European Union. How the system has worked to date.

Future of the structural funds with the new fund objectives of agriculture, enlargement and relations with other regions

Changes that are proposed to the structural funds in the next few years. How these can be used to maximum benefit by the Assembly.

Economic and Monetary Union – New policies and structures

An understanding of the development of the single market including the issues of competitiveness and employment. The development of the single currency and its implications.

The New Institutional Relationships of the European Union

The nature of new relationships within the European Union. How the Assembly can develop its own institutional links with the Commission. Possible different forms of organisation within the Assembly with regard to the European Union.

Date/Venue

7 September 1998 – Europa Hotel, Belfast

Nominations for Core Seminars

A nomination form is attached which should be completed and returned to the address shown on the form, either directly or if alternative arrangements have been agreed, through your Party Office.

The Transition Programme

Core Seminars/Workshops – Nomination Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____ Fax: _____ E-Mail: _____

Please indicate your preferences by ticking the boxes

An Overview of Northern
Ireland Government – including
roles and responsibilities of
Northern Ireland departments

29 July 1998

Europa Hotel

27 August 1998

Stakis Hotel

Public Finance

30 July 1998

Stakis Hotel

25 August 1998

Europa Hotel

The Northern Ireland Assembly –
Relationships with Other UK Assemblies

20 August 1998

Europa Hotel

North/South Co-operation

4 September 1998

Europa Hotel

The Northern Ireland Assembly
and the European Union

7 September 1998

Europa Hotel

Please complete, tear off and return (either directly or if alternative arrangements have been agreed, through your Party office) to :

Project Planning International
Montalto Estate
Ballynahinch
Co Down BT24 8PT

All Seminars can be repeated should the demand arise

FUNCTIONAL

It is intended that an ongoing series of functional seminars will be developed through consultation with party representatives to ensure that both the style and content reflects the interests and priorities of Assembly Members. In the short term a number of seminars are proposed, based on initial discussion with party representatives. Each seminar aims to provide an understanding and appreciation of key issues, roles, structures and functional responsibilities in a given area. The proposed seminars are as follows:

Agriculture Seminar

- General Agricultural Issues
- The Industry's Perspective
- The European Perspective
- The Rural And Environmental Perspective
- The Fishing Industry Perspective

Education Seminar

- Raising Standards and Improving Quality
- Curriculum, Assessment and Progression
- Funding and the Distribution of Resources
- Higher Education and Student Support
- Culture and Recreation

Economic Development Seminar

- Progress on the new Economic Development Strategy
- Industrial Development Board – developing internationally competitive companies
- Local Enterprise and Development Unit – developing small firms and encouraging enterprise
- Training and Employment Agency – services and support for companies and the unemployed
- Industrial Research and Technology Unit – innovation, research and development, and technology transfer
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board – marketing Northern Ireland

Environment Seminar

- Housing, Local Government, Public Records Office Northern Ireland and Land Registers Northern Ireland
- Urban Regeneration, Northern Ireland Partnerships, Visions for Londonderry and Belfast
- Planning, Environment, Roads and Transport
- Water, Fire Services, Property Services and Road Safety
- Key Strategic Issues

Equality Seminar

- Current policies and issues
- Human Rights
- Cultural Diversity – linguistic diversity and culture as a social and economic asset
- Equality Law – the legislative framework
- Equality – an international perspective

Social Services Seminar

- Organisation, structure and operation of the Health and Personal Social Services
- Future organisation of the Health and Personal Social Services?
- The emerging Social Services agenda
- The future of Acute Services?

Public Health Seminar

- The Public Health agenda in Northern Ireland
- Health Inequalities
- Social Inclusion
- Food Safety
- Health Promotion

Social Security and Child Support Seminar

- Social Security and Child Support in Northern Ireland
- Social Security dependency and Work and Tax Incentives
- Social Security and the Voluntary Sector
- Social Security trends in the European Union
- Welfare Reform/International trends in Social Security

Assembly Members are invited to register their interest in any of the above seminars with their Party Office or, where appropriate, direct with the Programme Office.

INTERNATIONAL

European Union – 3 day Conference in Brussels

The objective of a Conference and visit would be 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 would meet the Assembly Members who will also have the opportunity to explore ways in which they can have an impact within the European Institutions. This will be achieved through meetings 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 will also be explained. A conference could take place in early November. **The Commission is planning for such a conference to take place from 3rd-6th November.**

A United States- Funded Development Programme

The purpose of this part of the programme would be to provide an opportunity for consideration of relevant and comparable institutions at Federal and State level in the USA.

Funding for it would be provided by the United States Government through Boston College, Massachusetts with the support and approval of the US Information Agency.

It is envisaged that this programme, parts of which could run until September 1999, will be drawn up in consultation with Ministers, Committees, and Members, supported by appropriate advisers from the United States.

Possible components of this part of the programme are, for example, Ministerial-led cross-party delegations to focus on functional areas of government, building on linkages and relationships already in place between Northern Ireland and the USA. A further possibility would be visits by inter-party groups of Members to look at the delivery of State and local government services.