



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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Gender balance in Assembly Secretariat decision-making groups

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This Briefing Note contains a gender analysis of decision-making groups established by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Secretariat (NIACS) during the three-year period, 2017 – 2020.

1 Introduction

At its meeting of 3 March 2016, the Assembly Commission approved a Gender Action Plan (2016-18), which set out actions and measures to promote gender equality within the Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat (NIACS). One of the actions in the Plan was to develop guidance for Heads of Business (HoBs) and Directors on staff volunteering and representation on decision-making groups/panels within the NIACS.

Information gathered in an early exercise (2014) on 26 groups found that:

- 16 of the groups were dominated by male representation
- 2 of the groups were dominated by female representation
- 3 of the groups had no female representation
- 1 of the groups had no male representation
- 8 of the groups had an equal number of males and female representation (allowing for an odd number of members)

On the basis of the above findings, the subsequent guidance contained a monitoring form which recorded the gender and Assembly grade (AG) of the staff members who were participating in the various groups. Group leaders were asked to submit the completed monitoring forms to the Equality and Good Relations Unit for processing.

The most recent Gender Action Plan (2019 – 2023) contains an action to compile and analyse three-years of data from the monitoring forms (2017/18 – 2019/20). This Briefing Note completes that action.

1.1 A Note about Gender Balance

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2020), “In a scenario of gender equality, women and men are expected to participate proportionally to their share of the population.”¹ In the specific context of the Assembly Secretariat, however, it seems reasonable to limit the analysis to the ‘population’ who actually work there – i.e. the Secretariat workforce – as the Secretariat cannot be held responsible for gender issues in the wider population outside Parliament Buildings.

¹ European Institute for Gender Equality (2020) **Gender Balance** (Glossary and Thesaurus). Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1148>

2 Monitoring Data, 2017 – 2020

The data below refers only to those groups which were newly established from 2017 onwards. Existing groups, such as SMG, are not included in the figures.

2.1 Composition of the Groups

There were seven decision-making groups created between 2017 and 2020 (see Appendix 1). Of those:

- Five had a predominance of males;
- Two had an equal representation of males and females;
- Six of the seven groups contained at least one female representative; and
- One group had no female representatives.

Table 1 (overleaf) contains a summary of the gender composition (by grade and directorate) of the seven groups. A total of 47 staff participated in the groups, 29 males and 18 females, resulting in a gender composition of 61.7 per cent male and 38.3 per cent female. Appendix 1 contains a complete summary of the composition of the seven decision-making groups by grade.

Table 1: Summary of gender composition, decision-making groups by Grade and Directorate, 2017 – 2020.

Grade	CSU (+Chief Executive)		Corporate Services		Parliamentary Services		Legal, Governance, Research Services		Overall Totals			% Female
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total	
AG1	2 ¹										2	2
AG2			3		2			2	5	2	7	28.6
AG3				1	1				1	1	2	50.0
AG4			6	1	2	1	3	1	11	3	14	21.4
AG5				2	1		6	5	7	7	14	50.0
AG6			3	1	1			2	4	3	7	42.9
AG7												
AG8			1						1		1	
Total		2	13	5	7	1	9	10	29	18	47	38.3

Notes: ¹ The Chief Executive sat on two groups during this period.

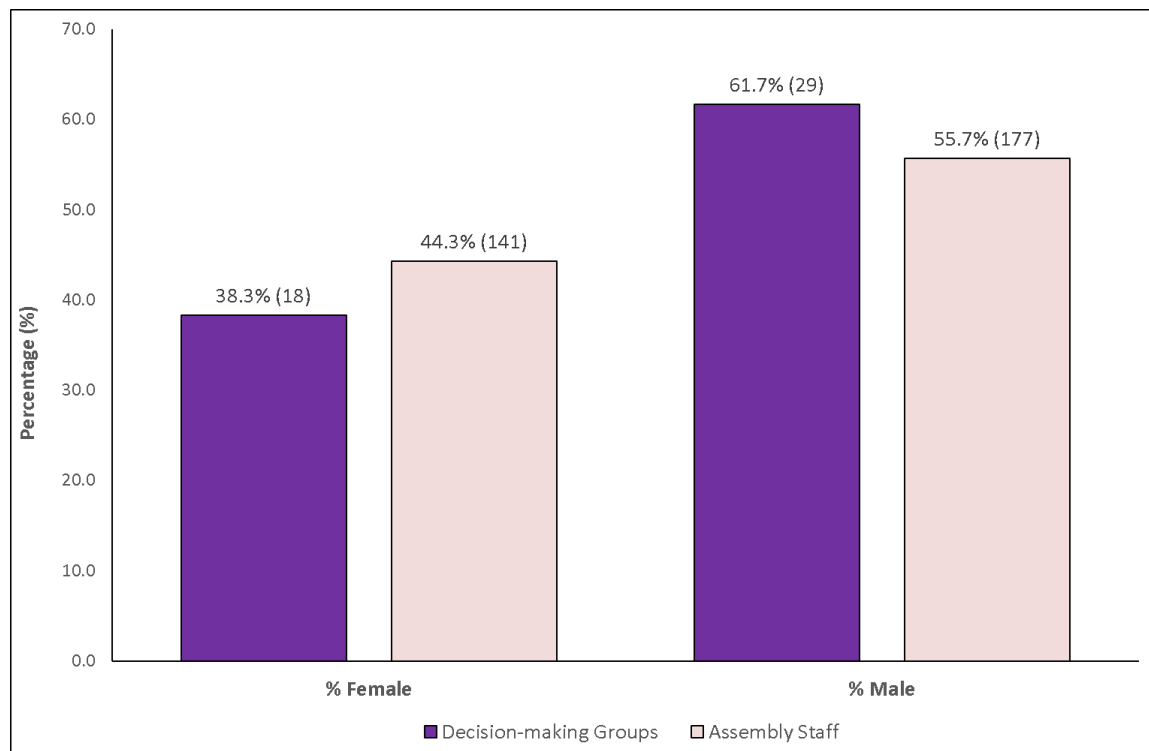
Table 2 (overleaf) presents the gender composition of the Secretariat on 1 September 2020. Of the 318 staff in post on that date, 141 were female (44.3%) and 171 (55.7%) were male.

Table 2: Gender Composition of Assembly Secretariat, 1 September 2020

Grade	Male	Female	Total	% Female
AG1		1	1	
AG2	2	1	3	33.3
AG3	8	3	11	27.3
AG4	13	17	30	56.7
AG5	20	24	44	54.5
AG6	23	28	51	54.9
AG7	46	33	79	41.8
AG8	65	34	99	34.3
Total (N)	177	141	318	
Total (%)	(55.7%)	(44.3%)		

Source: HR, personal communication

Fig. 1, which combines Tables 1 and 2, shows the composition of decision-making groups compared with the composition of the Assembly Secretariat on 1 September 2020. The figure reveals that, while females account for 44.3 per cent of Secretariat staff, they represent only 38.3 per cent of the members of decision-making groups. Conversely, while 55.7% of Secretariat staff are male, they represent 61.7 per cent of decision-making groups, a gap of six percentage points.

Fig 1: Composition of Decision-making groups versus Secretariat Staff, 1 September 2020

Sources: HR and Equality and Good Relations Unit, September 2020

A simple calculation shows that, in order to raise the proportion of females in decision-making groups from its present level (38.3%) to one which fully reflects the proportion of females in the Secretariat workforce (44.3%), the number of female members of such groups would be required to rise from 18 to 21, an increase of three ².

3 Discussion

The results of the analysis presented above come with an important caveat. Due to the small numbers involved, even a minor change in gender composition (one or two) ³ would change the relative percentages significantly. As shown above, there is a gap of six percentage points between the female share of decision-making groups in the Secretariat, and their share of the overall workforce, to the detriment of women. Numerically, however, this translates into just three additional members.

Nonetheless, the present exercise has a certain value, in that it provides a useful benchmark or baseline against which future changes in composition can be monitored.

² To calculate what is required to achieve gender balance, simply multiply the current number of group members (47) by the proportion of females in the Secretariat workforce (44.3%), i.e. $47 \times 0.443 = 21$.

³ The Digital Steering Group, for example, has a complement of 8 members, five male and three female. Adding just one female member (and correspondingly reducing the male total by one) would increase female representation from its current figure of 37.5 per cent to 50.0 per cent.

Appendix 1: Summary of Decision-making Groups by Assembly Grade (AG), 2016/17 – 2019/20 (N = 47)

Grade	Blog Editorial Group		Digital Strategy Steering Group		COVID-19 Response Group		GDPR Project Board		Informal Evacuation Working Group		PBSS Project Board		Unacceptable Behaviour Working Group		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
AG1						1								1	2
AG2					2	1	2	1			1				7
AG3					1	1									2
AG4	1		1		3	2			2		2		2	1	14
AG5	3	3	3	2	1					1				1	14
AG6		1	1	1					1	1	1		1		7
AG7															0
AG8					1										1
Total	4	4	5	3	8	5	2	1	3	2	4	0	3	3	47