



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

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Further information on plenary and committee business in the Northern Ireland Assembly and other legislatures

1 Introduction

This briefing paper was requested by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee following its meeting on 17 April 2012. The paper provides information on the following issues:

- analysis of plenary and committee business in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish Parliament
- Confirmation on whether plenary attendance in the Northern Ireland Assembly is recorded and the practice in other UK and Ireland parliaments;
- How the plenary/committee meetings scheduling works in practice in the House of Commons and Dail Eireann

1 Timings and items considered in plenary and committees in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish Parliament

This section provides a breakdown of plenary and committee business in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish Parliament. The timeframe chosen was the post-Easter recess to summer recess in 2009, as it was considered to be a typical period of business for each legislature.

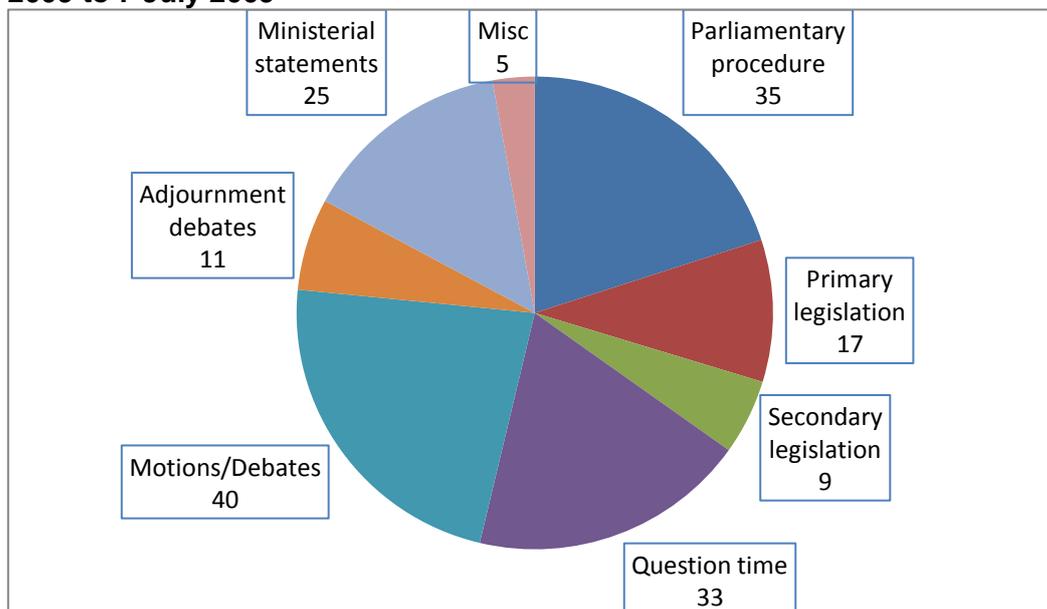
The research looked at the official records in the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly to determine the total length of time spent in plenary.

Table 1: Information on length of plenaries in the Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly

| Legislature | Number of plenaries | Total amount of hours | Average hours per sitting |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Scottish Parliament | 19 | 115 hrs 30 min | 6 hrs 4 min |
| Northern Ireland Assembly | 21 | 125 hrs 30 min | 5 hrs 58 min |

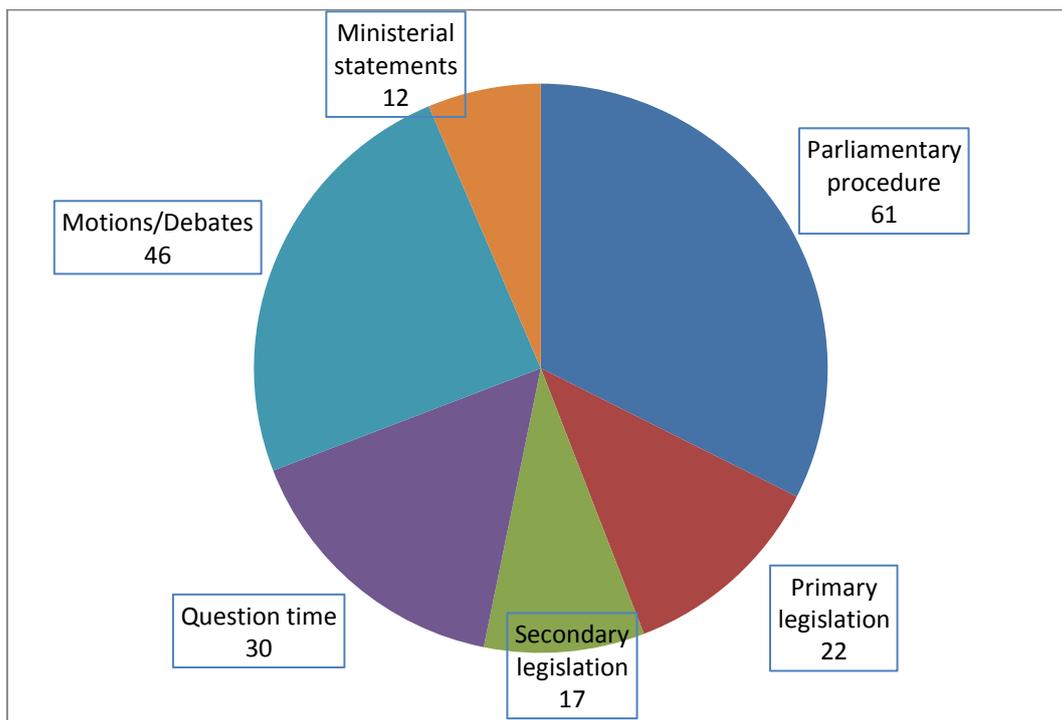
As the above table shows, there is little difference in the figures for both legislatures, given that the Assembly sat for an additional two days.

Figure 1: Items considered in Plenary in the Northern Ireland Assembly, 22 April 2009 to 7 July 2009¹



¹ The five miscellaneous items were two Private Notice Questions, two Matters of the Day and one Urgent Oral Question

Figure 2: Items considered in Plenary in the Scottish Parliament, 22 April 2009 to 25 June 2009



As figures 1 and 2 show, there are some differences in the recurrence of items considered in plenary in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish Parliament. There was almost double the amount of Ministerial Statements in the Assembly, more motions/debates (although the Scottish Parliament does not distinguish between ordinary debates and adjournment debates). The Scottish Parliament considered more legislation than the Assembly and significantly more items that could be classed as routine procedural matters.

Due to the formatting of the respective Official Reports, it was not possible to conduct an analysis of the time spent on consideration of individual items. This has also precluded an analysis of a possible increase in plenary attendance when committees do not sit concurrently.

Table 2 lists the motions/debates considered in the relevant period in both legislatures.

Table 2: Motions and debates considered in Plenary in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish Parliament, April 2009 to July 2009

| Northern Ireland | | Scotland | |
|------------------|---|----------|---|
| Date | Motions | Date | Motions |
| 20 April | Childcare strategy Loss of nursing posts | 22 April | Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland Vale of Leven Inquiry High-speed Rail Services Project Linus UK |

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|----------|--|----------|--|
| 21 April | Educational Underachievement Social Housing | 23 April | Newspaper Industry Transport Infrastructure Glasgow 2014 Legacy Plan Daily Record and Sunday Mail |
| 27 April | Steps to Work Contracts Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects | 29 April | Housing Telehealth |
| 28 April | Health Provision for Older People Local Govt Boundaries Children Missing from Care | 30 April | Education Economy United Kingdom Budget (Implications for Scotland) Private Residential Care Homes (Accountability) |
| 5 May | Employment and Support Allowance Costs of Division | 6 May | Midwives |
| 11 May | RUC Museum Children Missing from Care | 7 May | School Discipline Community Courts Royal Mail |
| 12 May | Dairy Farming Economy | 13 May | HBOS-Lloyds TSB Merger |
| 18 May | Healthcare for Older People Restructuring Assembly and Executive | 14 May | Community Courts United States of America and Canada (Engagement) RNID Hearing Matters Campaign |
| 19 May | Byron Review (Education) Juvenile Justice System Special Educational Needs Review | 20 May | Bees |
| 26 May | Educational Underachievement Race Relations | 21 May | Student Hardship Supporting Employment Aquaculture Strathclyde Police Prolific Offender Programme |
| 1 June | Civil Service: Equal Pay Claim | 27 May | Open Prisons Influenza A(H1N1) Sheep (Electronic identification) |
| 2 June | Royal Mail Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority | 28 May | Missing Children Alert System Supporting Scottish Business Cashback for Communities Infertility Treatment |
| 8 June | Diabetes Service Framework Decline in Bee Population | 3 June | Unpaid Carers |
| 9 June | Housing Budget Social Housing in Foyle | 10 June | Supporting Town Centres |
| 15 June | Supply Resolution for 2009-10 Main Estimates | 11 June | United Kingdom General Election National Waste Strategy Anne Frank Diary |
| 16 June | Increased Income for Ex-Service Pensioners | 17 June | Dispensing Doctors (Rural Areas) |

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| 22 June | Way Forward for Apprenticeships Egan Contractors (Housing) Criminal Justice Inspection's Report on Section 75 | 18 June | Scotland's Festivals Former Gurkha Soldiers' Rights |
| 23 June | NI Assembly Code of Conduct Impact of Economic Downturn on NI businesses PSNI Full-time Reserve | 24 June | Supporting Social Work |
| 29 June | Private Security Industry Senior Civil Service Pay and Bonuses Racist and Sectarian Attacks | 25 June | Commission on Scottish Devolution (Report) Hybrid Bills Mary's Meals |
| 30 June | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 7 July | N/A | N/A | N/A |

Committees

This section provides a breakdown of committee business in the Northern Ireland Assembly and Scottish Parliament.

Tables 3 and 4 detail the number of meetings, items, duration of meetings, average duration and average number of items in the statutory and standing committees of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Removal of administrative items

To provide a fairer comparison with Scottish Parliament committees, certain 'administrative' items have been removed from consideration of the Northern Ireland statutory committees. These items are not recorded in the minutes of the Scottish Parliament committees and are the apologies, minutes of previous meetings, matters arising, date and time of next meeting and AOB (correspondence has been retained as this item can take up enough time to make its inclusion valid).

Table 3: Northern Ireland statutory committees with administrative items removed from consideration

| Committee | Meetings | Duration | Items | Average Duration | Average No. of items |
|---|----------|----------|-------|------------------|----------------------|
| Agriculture and Rural Development | 11 | 24:30 | 64 | 02:13 | 5.8 |
| Culture, Arts and Leisure | 11 | 21:44 | 49 | 01:58 | 4.5 |
| Education | 11 | 32:05 | 46 | 02:55 | 4.2 |
| Employment and Learning | 10 | 18:07 | 26 | 01:48 | 2.6 |
| Enterprise, Trade and Investment | 9 | 22:08 | 64 | 02:27 | 7.1 |
| Environment | 9 | 29:35 | 77 | 03:17 | 8.6 |
| Finance and Personnel | 12 | 26:17 | 56 | 02:11 | 4.7 |
| Health, Social Services and Public Safety | 9 | 20:22 | 55 | 02:15 | 6.1 |
| OFMdFM | 10 | 18:49 | 34 | 01:52 | 3.4 |

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|----------------------|------------|---------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Regional Development | 9 | 22:33 | 56 | 02:30 | 6.2 |
| Social Development | 9 | 17:23 | 59 | 01:55 | 6.6 |
| | 110 | 253:33 | 586 | 2:18 | 5.3 |

Table 4: Information on standing committee business in the Northern Ireland Assembly, April 2009 to July 2009

| Committee | Meetings | Time | Items | Average Length | Average No. of items |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|----------------|----------------------|
| Assembly & Executive Review | 9 | 08:27 | 70 | 00:56 | 7.8 |
| Committee on Procedures | 3 | 01:04 | 22 | 00:21 | 7.3 |
| Public Accounts Committee | 8 | 17:57 | 67 | 02:14 | 8.4 |
| Committee on Standards and Privileges | 9 | 09:02 | 74 | 01:00 | 8.2 |
| | 29 | 37:30 | 233 | 1:09 | 7.9 |

Tables 4 and 5 detail the number of meetings, items, duration of meetings, average duration and average number of items in the subject and mandatory committees of the Scottish Parliament.

Table 5: Information on subject committee business in the Scottish Parliament, April 2009 to July 2009

| Committee | Meetings | Duration | Items | Average duration | Average no. of items |
|--|-----------|---------------|------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Economy Energy Tourism | 9 | 24:44 | 25 | 2:44 | 2.8 |
| Education Life Long Learning and culture | 10 | 23:40 | 32 | 2:22 | 3.2 |
| Health and Sport | 9 | 25:31 | 33 | 2:50 | 3.7 |
| Justice | 10 | 32:18 | 61 | 3:13 | 6.1 |
| Rural Affairs and Environment | 8 | 16:18 | 36 | 2:02 | 4.5 |
| Transport Infrastructure Climate Change | 7 | 20:21 | 13 | 2:54 | 1.9 |
| European and External Relations | 4 | 6:32 | 26 | 1:38 | 6.5 |
| Finance | 9 | 23:01 | 33 | 2:33 | 3.7 |
| Local Government and Communities | 9 | 21:55 | 37 | 2:26 | 4.1 |
| | 75 | 194:20 | 296 | 2:35 | 3.9 |

Table 6: Information on mandatory committee business in the Scottish, April 2009 to July 2009

| | Meetings | Duration | Items | Average duration | Average no. of items |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|-------|------------------|----------------------|
| Audit | 6 | 12:41 | 38 | 2:06 | 6.3 |
| Equal Opportunities | 6 | 17:18 | 22 | 2:53 | 3.7 |
| Public Petitions | 5 | 12:28 | 20 | 2:29 | 4.0 |
| Review of SPCB supported bodies | 3 | 5:38 | 4 | 1:52 | 1.3 |

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|-----------------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| Standards Procedures Public Appts | 4 | 4:26 | 17 | 1:06 | 4.3 |
| Subordinate Legislation | 9 | 3:35 | 52 | 0:23 | 5.8 |
| | 33 | 56:06 | 153 | 1:42 | 4.6 |

Assembly statutory committees sat in total for around 60 hours more than the subject committees of the Scottish Parliament. Assembly committees, on average, consider a greater number of items, even when administrative items are removed.

2 Recording attendance of members

None of the legislatures in the UK and Ireland record Members' attendance in the Chamber. Attendance is recorded for voting purposes but this does not necessarily give a fair reflection of Members' attendance over the course of a sitting, as they may only attend to vote.

The research has found that Freedom of Information requests have been submitted to the House of Commons and Scottish Parliament asking for the disclosure of attendance records. On both occasions, the replies have confirmed that neither the Commons nor Scottish Parliament hold such records².

In Dail Eireann, payment of the Travel and Accommodation Allowance (TAA) is verified by attendance at Leinster House but does not have to include sitting days.

Members must attend a minimum of 120 days annually to receive full payment of the TAA. The 120 days can be registered on any day that Leinster House is open to attend and is not specific to the sittings of the House. Attendance recording at Leinster House is by means of an electronic System for Recording Attendance (SRA) or signing a Daily Attendance Record located in the One Stop Shop. Members can register their attendance once daily at any time during the day or evening when Leinster House is open. Members, in general, attend on sitting days for plenary sessions of the Houses and on non-sitting days for a range of reasons related to their parliamentary duties e.g. to attend Committee meetings, to meet Ministers or to meet other parliamentary colleagues. Members may also attend without recording attendance on the system³.

² http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/george_galloway_former_mp for House of Commons and <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/help/FOIDisclosureFiles/13998/2008-013998%20disclosed%20reply.pdf> for Scottish Parliament

³ <http://www.oireachtas.ie/ViewDoc.asp?fn=/documents/members/20102527-2.htm&CatID=168>

3 Business in the House of Commons and Dail Eireann – an overview of a typical sitting week

The following tables give an overview of a typical week's business in the House of Commons and Dail Eireann. The busy schedule of the Commons places in context the ongoing inquiry by the Procedures Committee into sitting times and the parliamentary calendar.

Table 8: Order of Business in the House of Commons for week commencing 16 April 2012

| | Commons Chamber | Committees | Westminster Hall |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Monday (House sits at 2.30pm) | 2.30 - Questions to Education Secretary 3.15 – Topical questions to Education Secretary 3.30 – Urgent Questions (if any) Ministerial Statements (if any) – there were 10 to be made on this day Main business (until any hour) Finance (No. 4) Bill (second reading) Finance (No. 4) Bill (programme) 10.00 – Deferred divisions Finance (No. 4) Bill (carry over) E-tabling of written questions Adjournment Electrification of the Midland Main Line (debate may continue until 10.30 or for 30 mins, whichever is later) | 4.30 - European Committee B 4.30 – Fourth Delegated Legislation Committee 4.30 - Fifth Delegated legislation Committee Select Committees 4.30 – Communities and Local Govt 5.00 – Culture, Media and Sport | N/A |
| Tuesday (House sits at 2.30pm) | Private Business Transport for London (Supplemental Toll Provisions) Bill | 4.30 – European Committee B 10.30 – Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee | 9.30 – 11.00 – High street bank branch closures in rural areas 11.00 – 12.30 – Future of the |

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| | <p>Chairman of Ways and Means London Local Authorities and Transport for London (No. 2) Bill</p> <p>Questions to Foreign Secretary 3.15 – Topical Questions to Foreign Secretary</p> <p>3.30 – Urgent Questions (if any) Ministerial Statements (if any) – there were 7 to be made on this day</p> <p>Preliminary Business 10 minute rule motion</p> <p>Main Business Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill (Programme) (no debate) Consideration of Lords Amendments</p> <p>Orders, Regulations and European Union Documents Pensions (no debate) Postal Services (no debate) Postal Services (no debate) Financial Services Credit Rating Agencies</p> <p>End of sitting Presentation of Public Petitions (no debate)</p> <p>Adjournment Cigarette packaging and contraband cigarettes (Debate may continue until 10.30 or for 30 mins, whichever is later)</p> | <p>4.30 - Eighth Delegated Legislation Committee</p> <p>Select Committees 9.45 – Treasury 10.00 – Energy and Climate Change 10.00 – Foreign Affairs 10.00 – Health 10.00 – International Development 10.00 – Transport 10.15 – Culture, Media and Sport 10.15 – Justice 10.15 – Business, Innovation and Skills 10.30 – Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 10.30 – Public Administration 10.40 – Home Affairs 12.30 – Backbench Business Committee 1.45 – Defence 2.00 – International Development</p> | <p>Gangmasters Licensing Authority 12.30 – 1.00 – Govt policy on higher rate taxpayers and child benefit 1.00 – 1.30 – Sustainability of the London Olympics 1.30 – 2.00 – Flood Defence funding</p> |
| Wednesday (House) | Questions to Secretary of State for Scotland | 2.30 – Ninth Delegated Legislation | 9.30 – 11.00 – Human Rights in Sri |

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|--|--|--|---|
| <p>sits at 11.30am)</p> | <p>Noon – Prime Minister’s Questions 12.30 – Urgent Questions (if any) Ministerial Statements (if any) – 2 due on this day</p> <p>Preliminary Business 10 Minute Rule Motion</p> <p>Main Business Finance (No.4 Bill) Statistics Board (no debate) Education (no debate) European Commission Work Programme (no debate)</p> <p>Adjournment Selective dorsal rhizotomy in the NHS</p> <p>Debate may continue until 7.30 or for 30 mins, whichever is later</p> | <p>Committee</p> <p>Select Committee 9.00 – Science and Technology 9.15 – Education 9.15 – Work and Pensions 1.45 – Defence 2.00 – Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2.00 – Environmental Audit 2.00 – European Scrutiny 2.00 – Foreign Affairs 2.00 – Scottish Affairs 2.15 – Northern Ireland Affairs 3.00 - Speaker’s Committee 3.00 – Public Accounts 3.00 – Procedure 4.45 - Selection</p> | <p>Lanka 11.00 – 11.30 – Flood defences in Exeter 2.30 – 4.00 – Inquest into the death of Kevin Williams at Hillsborough 4.00 – 4.30 – Fishing quotas and the case of Paul Gilson 4.30 – 5.00 – Cost of fuel duties in Northern Ireland</p> |
| <p>Thursday (House sits at 10.30am)</p> | <p>Questions to Transport Secretary 11.05 – Topical Questions to Transport Secretary</p> <p>11.15 – Questions to Women and Equalities Minister</p> <p>11.30 – Urgent Questions (if any) Business Question to the Leader of the House Ministerial Statements (if any) – 4 statements due today</p> <p>Main Business Finance (No.4) Bill Presentation of Public Petition (no debate)</p> | <p>8.55 – Tenth Delegated Legislation Committee</p> <p>Select Committees 9.15 – Liaison Committee 9.45 – Political and Constitutional Reform</p> | <p>2.30 – 5.30 - Cycling</p> |

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| | <p>Adjournment Armed Forces Covenant</p> <p>Debate may continue until 6.30 or for 30 mins, whichever is later</p> | | |
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Please note that the following table provides information for the week beginning 23 April 2012.

Table 9: Order of Business in Dail Eireann for week commencing 23 April 2012

| | Dail | Committees |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Monday | N/A | N/A |
| Tuesday (Dail sits at 2.00pm) | <p>2.00 - Questions (Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform)</p> <p>3.15 – Leaders Questions</p> <p>3.36 – Questions to Taoiseach</p> <p>4.36 – Order of Business</p> <p>5.06 – Topical Issues</p> <p>Motion: Rota change (no debate)</p> <p>Social Welfare and Pensions Bill (Second Stage)</p> <p>Motion: Committee Stage of Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012</p> <p>Private Members Business: Motorist Emergency Relief Bill 2012 (Fianna Fáil)</p> <p>9.30 – Dail adjourns</p> | <p>2.00 - Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture</p> <p>2.00 - Education and Skills (Sub-Committee)</p> <p>2.15 - Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht</p> |

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|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Wednesday (Dail sits at 10.30) | <p>10.30 – Leaders Questions 10.51 – Order of Business Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012 1.30 – SOS 2.30 – Questions to Minister for Social Protection</p> <p>3.45 – Topical Issues</p> <p>4.33 – Morning Business continued</p> <p>7.30 - Private Members Business: Motorist Emergency Relief Bill 2012</p> <p>Afternoon business continued</p> <p>10.30 – Dail adjourns</p> | <p>9.30 - Jobs, Social Protection and Education</p> <p>10.00 - Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture</p> <p>10.30 - Environment, Transport, Culture and the Gaeltacht</p> <p>3.30 - Finance (Sub-Committee)</p> <p>3.30 - Justice, Defence and Equality</p> <p>2.00 - Sub-Committee on the Referendum on the Intergovernmental Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs)</p> |
| Thursday (Dail sits at 10.30) | <p>10.30 – Leaders Questions</p> <p>10.51 – Order of Business</p> <p>11.11 - Social Welfare and Pensions Bill 2012</p> <p>3.42 - Statements re Government's Proposals for the Establishment of Irish Water and Water Metering Programme</p> <p>5.42 – Topical Issues</p> <p>6.30 - Questions to Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation</p> <p>7.45 – Dail adjourns</p> | <p>9.30 - Sub-Committee on the Referendum on the Intergovernmental Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs)</p> <p>10.00 - Members' Interests of Dáil Éireann</p> <p>10.00- Public Accounts</p> <p>10.30 - Communications, Natural Resources and Agriculture</p> <p>11.30 - Health and Children</p> <p>2.00 - Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform</p> |

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| <p>Friday</p> | | <p>10.00 - Sub-Committee on the Referendum on the Intergovernmental Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (Sub-Committee of the Joint Committee on European Union Affairs)</p> <p>11.00 - Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement</p> |
|----------------------|--|---|