

Media Handbook

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Introduction

One of the hallmarks of democracy is people's right to access clear, regular and independent information. In recognition of this, the Northern Ireland Assembly supports the work of the media, provides workspace and facilitates access within Parliament Buildings.

The Assembly's Communications Office has a dedicated team to provide support and information to the media. They can be contacted in Room B4 or on 028 9052 1137.

Code of Conduct

Parliament Buildings is a working environment. Accredited journalists should treat MLAs and Secretariat staff with due courtesy and consideration and conduct themselves appropriately.

Accredited journalists should observe agreed Assembly regulations about areas that are out-of-bounds and other agreed conventions. Impromptu 'door-stepping' interviews on camera, on tape or in person are not acceptable.

Accredited journalists should not act as paid or unpaid lobbyists for any individual or organisation that might seek to influence the political process or benefit from inside knowledge of it and may not use their accredited status to do so.

NB: Alleged breaches of this code will be notified to the accredited journalist's editor or head of news and to the NI Assembly Commission. The Commission may enforce a penalty including the withdrawal of media accreditation.

The Assembly Correspondents Group

The Assembly Correspondents Group is made up of members of the media who are primarily based in Parliament Buildings and who mainly report on the business of the Assembly. Members of the Group have greater access within Parliament Buildings.

Media Passes & General Information

Media passes must be worn and displayed at all times in Parliament Buildings. Security and Ushering staff will challenge anyone not wearing a pass.

All those holding a permanent Media pass (both Regular and Correspondent) must swipe in when they enter Parliament Buildings and swipe out when they leave.

There are three categories of media pass:

- 1 **Blue Day passes** - for those media personnel who attend the Assembly occasionally or for specific events. Passes are granted to those with an NUJ card or proof of employment with a recognised media outlet. They are available at the reception desk at the front door.

(More information for Blue Day Pass holders available here).

- 2 **Regular Media passes** – for those media personnel who attend regularly.

Passes are issued by the Security Office (B35A). You must complete the application for a permanent pass and have it countersigned by the Communications Office prior to any pass being issued. These passes are valid for one year from the date of issue. The expiry date will be printed on the pass and when this date has been reached the pass will be invalid. You then have to apply for a new pass.

Regular media passes have a white 'R' in a purple circle.

(More information for Regular Media pass holders is available here).

- 3 **Correspondent Media passes** - for members of the *Assembly Correspondents Group*. **These permanent passes provide holders with escort rights as well as other enhanced access detailed in this document**

Passes are issued by the Security Office (B35A). You must complete the application for a permanent pass and have it countersigned by the Communications Office prior to any pass being issued. These passes are valid for one year from the date of issue. The expiry date will be printed on the pass and when this date has been reached the pass will be invalid. You then have to apply for a new pass.

Correspondent Media passes have a white 'C' in a purple circle.

(More information for Correspondent pass holders is available here).

NB: Security requirements take precedence and access arrangements may be redefined at any time to meet specific security needs. Accredited Journalists must comply with any request or instruction communicated to them by Security staff. Health and safety guidance must be observed at all times.

Shared workplace

Parliament Buildings is a workplace. Media equipment must not impede anyone's access into or around the building. Common work areas like kitchens and photocopying rooms are for MLAs, party staff and Assembly Secretariat staff only. Members of the media are allowed access to certain corridors (dependent on the type of pass held) but they must not film, photograph or record there without prior arrangement with the Communications Office, unless otherwise stated within this Handbook.

Accessing Offices

MLA, party staff and Assembly Secretariat staff offices are private. Media personnel should be accompanied by an MLA, party staff member or member of the Assembly staff before entering any office.

Information for Blue Day Pass Holders and Regular Media Pass Holders

Where can I go?

- Media facilities in the basement.
- Catering facilities in the basement (Café Recess and Blue Flax Restaurant).
- The Great Hall.
- Committee rooms on the ground and first floors (during public meetings).
- Assembly Chamber Press Gallery (while Plenary is in session).
- Long Gallery events to which media are invited.

Where can I not go?

- The floor of the Assembly Chamber.
- Ground Floor Corridors when Committees are not in session.
- Voting Lobbies.
- Members' Bar, Members' Coffee Lounge and Members' Dining Room (unless escorted by an MLA, party staff or Assembly Secretariat staff).
- All Committee rooms during closed session.
- Any other location (except Committee rooms) on the ground, first, second, third and fourth floors (unless escorted by an MLA, party staff or Assembly Secretariat staff).

Where can I record *without permission* from the Communications Office?

- Any position in the Great Hall subject to Health & Safety guidance. However, you **cannot** film with any of the corridors leading off in the background shot.
- Media facilities in the basement.
- Outside the building to get external shots of the building from the front.

For information on any other locations, please contact the Communications Office

You can't record or film in the following areas:

- Corridors leading off from the Great Hall.
- Press Gallery of the Assembly Chamber.
- Rotunda leading to the Assembly Chamber.
- Outside a Committee room when a meeting is in session.
- Inside the car park to the East and West of Parliament Buildings.

Information for Correspondent Media Pass Holders

Where can I go?

- Media facilities in the basement.
- Catering facilities in the basement (Café Recess and Blue Flax Restaurant).
- Basement floor corridors.
- The Great Hall.
- Ground floor corridors (note exemptions in next section on sitting days i.e. Monday and Tuesday).
- The Library.
- Committee rooms on the ground and first floors during public meetings.
- Assembly Chamber Press Gallery (while Plenary is in session).
- Long Gallery events where media are invited.
- Any other location on the first floor. Exceptions are detailed under "Accessing Offices" on page 2.

Where can I not go?

- The floor of the Assembly Chamber.
- Voting Lobbies.
- All West corridors (to the left of Great Hall) on sitting days. This includes the Assembly Chamber rotunda on sitting days.
- All Committee rooms during closed session.
- Members' Bar, Members' Coffee Lounge and Members' Dining Room (unless accompanied by an MLA, party staff or Assembly staff).
- Second, third or fourth floor (unless accompanied by an MLA, Party or Assembly Secretariat

staff).

Where can I record *without permission* from the Communications Office?

Great Hall

- Anywhere in the Great Hall subject to Health & Safety guidance. However, you **cannot** film with any of the corridors leading off in the background shot.
- The stairs of the Great Hall.
- The balcony areas on the first floor which overlook the Great Hall.

Senate Chamber

- Ground floor of the Senate Chamber when not in use.
- The Senate Chamber Rotunda when empty.

Miscellaneous

- Media facilities in the basement.
- Outside the building to get external shots of the building from the front.
- Long Gallery events where the media are invited to attend.

Where can I record *with pre-arranged support* from the Communications Office?

- The Assembly Chamber Rotunda on non-sitting days, but not with the Assembly Chamber in the background shot.
- The Long Gallery when not in use.
- The corridor immediately outside of, and parallel to, the Long Gallery.
- Committee rooms.
- Committee meetings, with the consent of the Committee and by prior arrangement with the Communications Office.
- Press Conference Suite.
- Senate Chamber Rotunda when the Senate is in use.
- Other internal locations may be available for live broadcasts (contact Communications Office for details).

Where can I not record/film?

- Assembly Chamber.
- Press Gallery of the Assembly Chamber.
- Outside a Committee room when a meeting is in session.
- Corridors leading off the Great Hall.
- East and West corridors.
- Inside the car park to the East and West of Parliament Buildings.

NB

MLAs' Offices

- You may record/film within MLAs' offices only with permission of the MLA and when accompanied by the MLA or Party staff.

Escort rights

Members of the Assembly Correspondents Group can escort up to five people to all areas listed under Section 'Where can I go'. Journalists wanting to escort people beyond these areas should contact the Communications Office. Visitors must be escorted by their sponsor at all times except in the Great Hall.

NB: Leaving visitors unattended breaches security guidance and can result in the removal of escort rights.

Library and Lending

Members of the Assembly Correspondents Group can make use of the Library on the Ground Floor.

Interviews

MLAs

Interviews with Committee Chairpersons/Deputy Chairpersons, in respect of their Committee responsibilities, should be arranged through the Communications Office.

Interviews with individual MLAs should be arranged and agreed with their Parties. Please note that media will need to be accompanied by the MLA or Party staff when accessing rooms/offices on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th floors.

Other

Committee witnesses, members of other legislatures and others may be interviewed in the Great Hall. Interviewees must give their consent in advance.

NB: Elected representatives must not be interviewed in Parliament Buildings for the purpose of canvassing during an election period.

Media Facilities & Services

Facilities

The facilities listed below are described collectively as the Media Facilities.

They are located in the basement of Parliament Buildings. They include:

Press Room	B38
TV studio 1	BBC (to cover all BBC outlets)
TV studio 2	UTV (to cover ITN and CH4)
TV studio 3	RTE, Sky and TG4
Radio studio 1	BBC
Radio studio 2	INN (and other independent broadcasters by arrangement)
The Press Conference Suite	B2.

Three dedicated offices for BBC, UTV and Press Association

Services

The Communications Office holds a briefing for the media every Monday at 11am in the Press Conference Suite (B2). The Office also provides a range of information to the media including: the weekly business diary, order papers and indicative timings, Weekly Answer Booklets, research papers, Bills and Acts of the Assembly and the Official Report.

There is internet access in the Press Room which provides access to the Assembly website which has up-to-date information on Assembly business. For wireless internet access, contact the Communications Office for an individual username and password.

Broadcasting Services

The Assembly Broadcasting team provides the sound and vision feeds from the Assembly Chamber. The rules to which Assembly Broadcasting must adhere in respect of the television coverage of the proceedings are available from the Communications Office on request.

Live vision and sound feeds, in various formats, of the proceedings in the Chamber are fed to various points in the Media Facilities/Press Room. Those seeking to use these should contact the Communications Office. Assembly proceedings are distributed throughout Parliament Buildings on the internal TV system.

Broadcast recordings of the proceedings can be made available by request. Video and audio files suitable for Non Linear Editing systems (NLE) can also be provided during a sitting.

Domestic DVDs are available at the end of Assembly business. It is important to note that this is not broadcast quality.

Footage can be ordered from the Communications Office on 028 9052 1884.

Power points, telephones, WiFi and ISDN are provided in the Press Room and in all of the studios. Contact the Communications Office to arrange a 24-hour guest account.

Assembly Broadcasting provides audio and video coverage of all Assembly public meetings. All rooms output audio coverage, however only the Assembly Chamber, Senate Chamber, Committee room 29 and Committee room 30 output video.

There are 3 HD/SDI/PAL circuits to broadcasters' studios and 2 circuits HD/SDI/PAL journalist wall boxes. If all four televised rooms have simultaneous meetings, the Assembly will decide which room will not get video coverage. However, in these instances audio will always be available from studio wall boxes. The televised circuits usually follow the below format:

Room	Circuit
Plenary	1
Senate	2
Room 30	3
Room 29	1 or 2, depending on day of week and other scheduled business. Normally CCT 1.

Test cards of each circuit will be indented to help broadcasters allocate recordings at their end.

TV Channels useful to broadcasters

Feed	Internal TV Channel	Format
CCT1 – Usually Plenary coverage	20	Video
CCT2 – Usually Senate coverage	30	Video
Room 30	31	Video
Room 21	32	Audio only
Room 29	33	Video
Room 144	34	Audio only

Lawn box feeds

The lawn box at the front of Parliament buildings has 2 assignable SDI only feeds that can be routed from Assembly broadcasting. If PAL is required please contact Assembly Broadcasting. The SDI has embedded audio. For radio purposes analogue audio can be made available.

Great Hall distribution

A pool microphone is in place on sitting days for broadcasters in the Great Hall. An XLR feed from this microphone can be obtained from the distribution amplifier beneath the bench closest to the microphone.

Contact numbers

Contact	Staff	Phone number
Assembly Broadcasting front office	Phill Agnew	028 905 21490
Assembly Broadcasting Engineering	Allan Boston	028 905 21493
Assembly duplication requests	Tracey Wilson	028 905 21884

Other Facilities

Parking

Members of the media can park in the Visitors' Car Park and overflow car park, or in the designated areas on Prince of Wales Avenue or Massey Avenue. By arrangement with the Communications Office, members of the media can drop equipment off at Parliament Buildings by prior arrangement, and subsequently park in the Visitors Car Park.

Media requests for parking/dropping off/picking up equipment must be made at least an hour in advance to ensure that Security can process and/or accommodate the request.

Induction Loops

Most of the public areas in Parliament Buildings, including the Assembly Chamber the Great Hall and the Committee Rooms, are fitted with induction loops. Users can avail of this facility by switching their hearing aid to 'T'.

Assisted Access

Wheelchair access is available at the East and West Doors

Restrooms

Restrooms, including those with disabled facilities, are on the Ground Floor (near the front door), in the basement (next to the Blue Flax restaurant) and in Café Recess.

Catering

Refreshments are available in the Blue Flax restaurant and Café Recess, which are both in the basement. Café Recess is open to members of the media, MLAs, party staff, and Assembly Secretariat staff from 10.00am-4.00pm. Refreshments are also available in the Assembly Gift Shop.

Catering services are available in the Blue Flax restaurant until 7pm on Monday to Friday. If Assembly business continues after 7pm (Plenary sessions or Committee meetings), service will be available for an additional 30 minutes after completion of business.

NB: Members of the media are asked to respect the fact that catering facilities within Parliament Buildings are social areas. Therefore, comments made by an MLA, party staff and Assembly Secretariat staff are 'off the record' unless specifically indicated otherwise, and in advance. Members of the media who wish to discuss business matters with MLAs are encouraged to clarify whether they would prefer to meet elsewhere by arrangement.

Smoking

Parliament Buildings is a no smoking area. There is a designated smoking area in the courtyard accessible from the basement.

Access Times for Parliament Buildings

Door Opening and Closing Times

Main Front Door - Monday to Friday from 7.45am to 10.30pm and at other times by special arrangement (opening times may vary during recess).

East Door (nearest the car park) – Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 10.30pm (opening times may vary during recess).

West Door – Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 10.30pm (opening times may vary during recess).

Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 came into force on 1 January 2005. Its purpose is to ensure a better understanding of how public authorities carry out their duties, why they make the decisions that they do and how they spend public money. Under the Act, any person or organisation may request information from a public body in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

How do I make a request to the Assembly Freedom of Information Unit?

The Act requires all requests to be in writing, to state clearly what information is required and to include the name and correspondence address of the applicant. You may e-mail your request, write to the Communications and Information Standards Office or use the online Request Form.

Requests from the Media

We aim to respond quickly to all requests from the Media and, where possible, we will strive to deal with routine FoI queries from the Media as general media enquiries. We therefore hope to process such enquiries promptly. Complex requests will continue to be treated under the FoI legislation.

Contact Information:

Communications and Information Standards
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings,
Ballymiscaw,
Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT4 3XX

TN: +44 (0)28 9052 1147

FAX: +44 (0)28 9041 8340

E-mail: foi@niassembly.gov.uk

General Media Enquiries

The Communications Office manages the Assembly's interaction with print, broadcast and online media. Communication Officers provide journalists with information about the Assembly and facilitate media access to Parliament Buildings, Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Committees.

The Communications Office is available to answer media enquiries on the Assembly and Committees, as well as arranges and coordinates interviews and secure locations for film, video, and photo shoots.

If you have a media enquiry, please contact one of the Communications Officers (contact details below).

Out of Hours Media Service

The Communications Office operates an Out of Hours Media service. Communications Officers are responsible for particular Committees (listed below) and media requesting information on particular Committees should, in the first instance, telephone the Communications Officer responsible.

Debra Savage, Communications Officer Sinead Murphy, Deputy Communications Officer	Caroline Moore, Deputy Communications Officer
Committees Enterprise, Trade & Investment Office of First and Deputy First Minister Employment and Learning Finance & Personnel Social Development Health, Social Services and Public Safety Regional Development Public Accounts Standards and Privileges Procedures Audit Justice	Committees Agriculture and Rural Development Assembly and Executive Review Committee Culture, Arts and Leisure Education Environment

Contact Telephone Numbers

Northern Ireland Assembly

Communications Office 028 9052 1137

Susie Brown, MCIPR Office: 028 9052 1161
 Head of Communications Mobile: 07776 198226
 Susie.brown@niassembly.gov.uk

Debra Savage Office: 028 9052 1405
 Communications Officer Mobile : 07920 864221
 Debra.savage@niassembly.gov.uk

Caroline Moore
Deputy Communications Officer
Caroline.moore@niassembly.gov.uk

Office: 028 9052 1806
Mobile: 07900 053926

Sinead Murphy
Deputy Communications Officer
Sinead.murphy@niassembly.gov.uk

Office: 028 9052 5938
Mobile: 07899 864368

If your enquiry is in relation to an Executive Department or Ministerial activity, please contact the Executive Information Service (EIS) via the relevant Departmental press office.

Political Party press contact details

Alliance	028 9052 1314
Democratic Unionist Party	028 9052 1873
Green Party	028 9052 1790
Independent (David McClarty)	028 9052 1210
Sinn Fein	028 9052 1471
Social Democratic and Labour Party	028 9052 1319
Traditional Unionist Party (TUV)	028 90 521175
Ulster Unionist Party	028 9052 1441

Essential Health & Safety Information

In the event of an evacuation please exit the building via the nearest exit unless directed otherwise. Assemble at the bottom of the front steps until it is safe to return to the building.

If you require first aid assistance, or want to report an accident, please contact the Health & Safety Office (B10) on 028 9052 5932 or the front reception on 028 9052 1990.