



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

---

Paper 000/00

06 January 2015

NIAR 493-14

**Barbara Love and Laura McCaughey**

# Review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Audit of Inequalities

## 1 Background

This paper presents a review of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Audit of Inequalities (2011). The purpose of the 2011 Audit was to inform the development of a revised Equality Scheme (2012-2016). This scheme was approved by the Equality Commission on 28 March 2012. While equality and good relations data and information relevant to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Equality Scheme are monitored and reviewed on an on-going basis, this paper formally reviews the 2011 Audit of Inequalities.

The review was carried out by the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) and focuses on:

- Inequalities identified in the 2011 Audit and the steps taken by the Assembly Commission and Secretariat since then to address these inequalities; and,
- Equality data and information relevant to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission that has been produced since the 2011 Audit.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a strategic picture of inequalities relevant to the role and functions of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. It presents the findings of a systematic review and evaluation of existing reliable and verifiable data, both qualitative and quantitative, for each of the section 75 equality and good relations categories. It also identifies a number of potential inequalities and data gaps for consideration by the Assembly Commission.

While this paper presents the findings of a formal review, it is important to note that progress against the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Equality Scheme (2012-16) and associated action plan is reviewed regularly on a policy by policy basis. Progress is reported to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. As evidenced in the findings of this review, the Assembly Commission has taken a proactive role in tackling emerging inequalities. It is worth recognising that the complex inequalities identified in this review are already being considered and addressed by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.

## 2 Role and Functions of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission finds its statutory basis in Section 40 and Schedule 5 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. As the body corporate, it is responsible for providing the property, services and staff required for the Assembly's purposes. It consists of an MLA from each of the five main parties, plus the Speaker of the House who acts as Chairperson. It has four principal roles. These are:

- The allocation of resources;
- The provision of property to support the Members, support staff and secretariat staff for a fully functioning Assembly;
- The provision of services; and,
- The provision of a fully staffed Secretariat to support the administration of the Assembly.

In exercising the above roles the Assembly Commission carries out the following functions:

- The acquisition and maintenance of premises and equipment to provide suitable accommodation, facilities and support services in which a fully functioning Assembly can operate; and,
- The recruitment and ongoing development of suitably qualified and experienced staff to support the Assembly.

### 3 About the Audit of Inequalities

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires all public authorities designated for the purposes of the Act, including the Assembly Commission, to comply with two statutory duties.

The first duty is the *Equality of Opportunity* duty, which requires public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between the nine equality categories of persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without; and persons with dependents and persons without.

The second duty, the *Good Relations* duty, requires that public authorities in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group.

Following an Effectiveness Review<sup>1</sup>, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland published a revised guide to the two statutory duties.<sup>2</sup> This guide outlines what public authorities are required to do to comply with the statutory duties and also makes a number of recommendations in order to:

*“Shift the focus within public authorities from concentrating primarily on the process of implementing Section 75, towards achieving outcomes within the Section 75 framework.”*

Public authorities must submit an equality scheme to the Equality Commission detailing their arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and a plan for their performance. In the revised guide, the Equality Commission recommends that public authorities develop action measures to effectively demonstrate that they have paid due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations through the implementation of their equality scheme. In preparing action measures/action plans, the Equality Commission further recommends that public authorities:

*“Undertake an audit of inequalities to identify the range of key inequalities which the discharge of the public authority’s functions is intended to or is likely to address.”*

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission carried out its Audit of Inequalities between November 2010 and January 2011 and produced a revised Equality Scheme

---

<sup>1</sup> Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (November 2008). Keeping it Effective: Reviewing the Effectiveness of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – Final Report.

<sup>2</sup> Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (April 2010). Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998: A guide for Public Authorities.

for 2012-2016. This Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission on 28 March 2012. While equality and good relations data and information relevant to the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission are monitored and reviewed on an on-going basis, this paper formally reviews the 2011 Audit of Inequalities.

## 4 Progress since the 2011 Audit of Inequalities

This section considers the inequalities identified in the 2011 Audit and summarises some of the main actions undertaken since then to address them as well as on-going actions. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all activities undertaken by the Assembly Commission to address inequalities. It does, however, demonstrate that the Assembly Commission has invested considerable resources and made good progress in tackling the inequalities identified in the previous Audit.

### 4.1 **Function 1: The acquisition and maintenance of premises and equipment to provide suitable accommodation, facilities and support services in which a fully functioning Assembly can operate.**

#### 4.1a Access to Parliament Buildings

##### *Disability*

Since the 2011 Audit of Inequalities, steps have been taken to improve access for those with disabilities to Parliament Buildings or areas within Parliament Buildings. This has included the installation of access ramps at the front entrance to Parliament Buildings; the erection of Braille signage; Changing Places Facility;<sup>3</sup> improved access to the Chamber, voting lobbies and the public gallery; the production of British and Irish signed version of the tour of Parliament Buildings and a Braille tour map. These projects have been developed with input from key stakeholders including the external Disability Advisory Group which consists of representatives from various disability related charities including Autism NI, The Cedar Foundation, Disability Action, MENCAP, National Autistic Society and REAL Network.

A number of actions are also on-going, such as the consideration of options to improve disability access to the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of Parliament Buildings as part of The Roof Project, work around Digital First<sup>4</sup> and the implementation of recommendations from access audits.

---

<sup>3</sup> This provides fully accessible public toilet facilities for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Changing places toilets include an adult-sized, height-adjustable changing bench, hoist and plenty of space

<sup>4</sup> Digital First aims to develop the Assembly's systems, workflows and procedures so that information and content can be created once and then re-used whenever and wherever it is required in the most suitable format. This project is undergoing an EQIA.

#### 4.1b Access to Services

##### *Disability*

In order to improve access to Plenary and Committees, induction loop systems have been fitted in the Great Hall, the Chamber, the Senate, the Long Gallery, a number of rooms used by Committees and in Education rooms. Portable induction loops are also available.

When required, special access arrangements can be made and programmes and resources can be tailored accordingly, such as adapting presentations, providing large print documents, or using subtitled videos for Outreach and Education activities.

Staff including Education, Outreach and Events staff have received special training, to further enable them to cater for the needs of all visitors (e.g. Autism Awareness Training, Deaf Awareness Training).

The Education Service website also adheres to W3C web usability standards, ensuring that it is accessible to people with disabilities. Website content has been designed to suit a range of ages and ability levels with a variety of media rich resources utilising sound, image, animation and video material.

##### *Religious Belief and/or Political Opinion*

In terms of language, Standing Order 78 stipulates that Members may speak in the language of their choice in the Assembly Chamber. A Member using a language other than English must provide translation.

In response to visits by Irish Language schools and requests for resources in Irish, an Irish Language Champion has been appointed in the Education Service, who can deliver the education programme in Irish. In partnership with CCEA (Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment), the Primary Section of the Education Service dedicated website is also currently being translated into Irish.

#### 4.1c Good Relations

The Northern Ireland Assembly's Education Service and Outreach Unit work with external organisations to encourage widespread participation in the education programme and the work of the Assembly. For example, the Education Service works with the Peace and Reconciliation Group on cross-community 'Let's Talk' events, which aim to bring young people from a wide variety of backgrounds together with elected politicians and community leaders. The 'Get Involved' events organised by the Outreach Unit are run by constituency, with MLAs from all Parties in attendance, and bring groups from all community backgrounds together.

In order to ensure that Parliament Buildings is welcoming to all sections of society and cultural backgrounds, a Visitor's Survey, including questions on the environs of Parliament Buildings and good relations, is currently carried out three times a year. This survey will be continued and will include questions regarding the flying of the Union Flag in the next round as part of the formal consultation of the EQIA on the Policy Review of the flying of the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings. The implementation of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's Good Relations Action Plan is also on-going and this is monitored and reported to SMG on a 6-monthly basis.

Assembly Questions, both oral and written are currently being screened for any Section 75 issues that may arise of relevance to the Assembly Commission.

#### 4.1d Participation

##### *Young people*

The 2011 Audit of Inequalities identified young people as being less involved in democracy. The Education Service delivers an inward visits programme for schools, youth groups and other groups seeking an educational focus to their visit. Whilst the vast majority of groups fall between the Primary 5 and A-Level age range (approximately 8-years old through to 18-years old), some groups fall outside that. The Education Service sees a high number of university groups during an average academic year. They have also engaged with a number of younger children, having delivered programmes to Key Stage 1 groups<sup>5</sup>. They have also met with a small number of Early Years groups<sup>6</sup>. The visits programme is open to all schools including special schools.

The Education Service also works with youth organisations which bring together young people from a variety of backgrounds. For example, it is part of the Participative Democracy Partnership with Youth Action, Public Achievement, and Save the Children, the aim of which is to encourage youth workers to involve young people in the work of their democratic institutions.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has also just been awarded Erasmus+ funding to develop a Structured Dialogue project. The aim is to "encourage positive, respectful relationships and represent the voices of young people on issues which affect their lives". The Education Service will establish a youth panel for Northern Ireland, which will give 36 young people the opportunity to actively participate in democratic life by working closely with the Northern Ireland Assembly. The youth panel will assist the Assembly in its work by representing the views of young people by consulting young people across Northern Ireland about the issues that concern them. The young people

---

<sup>5</sup> Key Stage 1 covers years 3 and 4 at Primary school

<sup>6</sup> Early Years covers 0-6 year olds (pre-school and those in years 1 and 2 at Primary school)

involved will complete an inquiry into an issue chosen by the participants. The recruitment process will ensure the representation of young people from different community backgrounds (nationalist, unionist, other), different social backgrounds and those with disabilities.

### *Older people*

The Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament was launched in 2011 and allows older people from across Northern Ireland to have their say on the issues that matter to them. Organised by Age Sector Platform, 2014 marks the fourth year of the Parliament.

### *Gender, disability and ethnic minorities*

The 2011 Audit also identified that women, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities are all under-represented in public life. In 2013/14, Assembly Community Connect particularly focussed on these groups. Assembly Community Connect aims to:

- Create and deliver an outreach programme which mutually supports the Assembly, MLAs and the community and voluntary sector;
- Build capacity and skills through shared knowledge;
- Develop the community and voluntary sector's understanding of, and participation in, the structures and work of the Assembly;
- Develop MLAs' understanding of the work of the community and voluntary sector and to create understanding about the impact of public policy and decision making; and,

Work with the community and voluntary sector to create better understanding for MLAs through education and experience.

Assembly Community Connect has delivered a range of initiatives in support of these aims, particularly focusing on women, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities. A number of further actions for consideration have been identified. It was requested that women's groups should be afforded greater access to engage with MLAs, an area of work which ACC would aim to progress. The outcome of these discussions led to the following recommendations:

- a) Participation in International Women's Day;
- b) ACC to target specific women's groups and to develop channels of support conducive to facilitating the work they currently undertake;

- c) ACC to support the educational element of the Political Pop-Up Academy;
- d) In conjunction with Politics Plus, ACC to investigate the possibility of developing mentoring opportunities between MLAs and women in the community; and,
- e) ACC to liaise with Department of Social Development in respect of three key groups identified by ACC for support in 2014

It is also worth noting that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee is currently conducting an Inquiry into 'Women and Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly', the findings of which may have implications for the Assembly Commission. Internally, work is also underway in developing a Gender Action Plan for Secretariat staff.

### *Black and Minority Ethnic Parliament*

In association with the Northern Ireland Council on Ethnic Minorities, (NICEM), a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Get Involved and a Black and Minority Ethnic Parliament was held on 30th April. Nearly 100 delegates participated in the Parliament. This provided an opportunity for Members of the Black and Minority Ethnic community to question Ministers on issues important to them.

## **4.2 Function 2: The recruitment and ongoing development of suitably qualified and experienced staff to support the Assembly.**

### 4.2a Recruitment and Selection

As has been the case in the past, consideration will be given to seeking advice from the Equality Commission and action will be taken if necessary. For example, provided that they have demonstrated in their application form that they meet the essential criteria for the post, an applicant with a disability will be offered a guaranteed interview. Consideration is also given to the use of welcome statements in job advertisements for under-represented groups where necessary. A welcome statement was used in 2010 for security officer posts:

*“However, as women and Roman Catholics are currently under represented in the workforce, applications would be particularly welcome from women and Roman Catholics. All applications for employment will be considered on the basis of merit.”*



#### 4.2b Equality issues for existing staff

A number of projects are currently underway to address equality issues for existing staff. Examples include an annual disability audit amongst Secretariat staff, the commissioning of Carecall<sup>7</sup> to undertake a series of staff focus groups and meetings to better understand perceived inequalities in terms and conditions, the Positive Working Relations Initiative and the development of a Gender Action Plan. Further details of the Positive Working Relations Initiative and the development of a Gender Action Plan are contained in section 5.2.

## 5 Findings of the current review

This section considers new data and information since the 2011 Audit. A wide range of sources were considered, namely:

- The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Equality Scheme (2012-16), Audit of Inequalities (2011) and associated action plan;<sup>8</sup>
- Section 75 and Fair Employment monitoring data and the latest Article 55 Review;
- Data used to inform equality impact assessments;
- Minutes of meetings (Assembly Commission, Secretariat Management Group, and Disability Advisory Group meetings) since the introduction of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Equality Scheme (2012-16);
- Annual Reports to the Equality Commission;<sup>9</sup>
- Internal surveys including the Internal Good Relations Survey, Staff Survey, Survey of Services to Members and their Support staff and the Gender Equality Survey;
- Internal data such as data on school visits by school type and Section 75 data on Assembly Community Connect initiative participants;
- Feedback from key stakeholders and groups with an interest in equality;
- Feedback from visitors including the survey of Visitors to Parliament Buildings;
- Questions and complaints raised by MLAs, staff and the public;
- External research findings such the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and

---

<sup>7</sup> A commercial subsidiary of the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health that provides services to improve the mental wellbeing of individuals and organisations.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/ABOUT-THE-ASSEMBLY/Corporate-Information/Policies/Equality-Scheme-2012-2016/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/ABOUT-THE-ASSEMBLY/Corporate-Information/Publications/Annual-Reports-to-the-Equality-Commission>

the 2011 Census; and,

- Data on the composition of MLAs.

## 5.1 Function 1: The acquisition and maintenance of premises and equipment to provide suitable accommodation, facilities and support services in which a fully functioning Assembly can operate.

### 5.1a Access to Parliament Buildings

#### *Disability*

Access to Parliament Buildings for those with disabilities has been discussed and progressed through the external Disability Advisory Group, Secretariat Management Group (SMG) and the Assembly Commission. While access has improved greatly for those with physical disabilities since the last Audit, a number of Members have raised access issues as a result of having their accommodation on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, through both Assembly Questions (as below) and the NIA Survey of Services 2014.

The table below details Assembly Questions regarding access to Parliament Buildings directed to the Assembly Commission during the current mandate.

Ref No.	Member	Question
AQO 6331/11-15	Mr Chris Lyttle	To ask the Assembly Commission to outline its efforts to improve access to Parliament Buildings for people with a disability.
AQW 32853/11-15	Mr Phil Flanagan	To ask the Assembly Commission to detail any plans to make the Assembly Chamber more accessible for (i) Members; (ii) visitors to the public gallery; and (iii) officials in the officials' box who have a physical disability.
AQW 34123/11-15	Mr Ross Hussey	To ask the Assembly Commission what steps have been taken, under welfare at work provisions, to provide suitable office accommodation for Members with physical disabilities.
AQW 34124/11-15	Mr Ross Hussey	To ask the Assembly Commission what reasonable adjustments have been made in relation to Members with a disability who have to attend the Assembly Chamber in a specified timeframe, when the only suitable travel arrangements are lifts.

## 5.1b Access to Services

### *Religious Belief / Political Opinion*

Language is an issue that has been raised in Assembly Questions to the Assembly Commission. Questions have primarily focused on requests for an update on the Language Policy; questions regarding measures to address the needs of Irish language speakers; and plans to reflect the culture and ethos of the Irish language. Language has also been raised as an issue in the NIA Survey of Services 2014.

One Assembly Question related to the use of and cost of translation of Ulster Scots for which there were no costs.

The table below details Assembly Questions regarding Language directed to the Assembly Commission during the current mandate.

<b>Ref No.</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>Question</b>
AQO 1686/11-15	Mr Phil Flanagan	To ask the Assembly Commission what measures it intends to implement in Parliament Buildings to address the needs of the Irish Language Community.
AQO 3047/11-15	Ms Bronwyn McGahan	To ask the Assembly Commission what plans it has to reflect the culture and ethos of the Irish Language.
AQO 3629/11-15	Mr Chris Hazzard	To ask the Assembly Commission when the language policy will be agreed and the Assembly website updated to include Irish.
AQO 4347/11-15	Mrs Dolores Kelly	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on the Irish Language Strategy.
AQO 5808/11-15	Mr Pat Sheehan	To ask the Assembly Commission to outline the steps it is taking to ensure its Members can answer both Written and Oral Assembly Questions in Irish.
AQO 5813/11-15	Mr Dominic Bradley	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on its policy on the use of the Irish language.
AQO 6326/11-15	Ms Rosaleen McCorley	To ask the Assembly Commission how it plans to address the recent criticisms of the Assembly, in relation to the Irish language, contained in the report by the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.
AQO 967/11-15	Ms Jennifer McCann	To ask the Assembly Commission how it intends to implement measures to address the needs of the Irish language community in Parliament Buildings.
AQW 24907/11-15	Mr Cathal Ó hOisín	To ask the Assembly Commission whether one of its Members can respond to a Question for Written Answer in Irish and English if they wish; and for a breakdown of any vote taken on the subject.
AQW 31686/11-15	Ms Rosaleen McCorley	To ask the Assembly Commission for an assessment of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages report regarding the unavailability of Irish simultaneous interpretation in the Assembly and to detail any plans to fulfil its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

AQW 3560/ 11-15	Mr John Dallat	To ask the Assembly Commission how many times Ulster-Scots was spoken in Assembly plenary sessions over the last twelve months; and to detail the cost of translation for this period.
-----------------------	-------------------	--

The Assembly Commission are currently considering the initial findings of an equality screening exercise in relation to the guidance and approach for answering questions to the Assembly Commission for Oral and Written response. The rationale for the screening is based on the Commission's decision "to respond to all questions for written answer in the language which had been used to ask the question" (Minutes from June 2013). One Commission Member has requested to respond bi-lingually in English and Irish to all questions for written answer falling under her current portfolio arrangements. At present all questions for written response are responded in English.

The initial equality screening exercise found that no adverse impact was identified in relation to the procedures governing the administration of questions for oral answer. In relation to questions for written answer, the initial screening indicated an adverse impact in respect of two of the nine equality of opportunity categories, namely religion and political opinion. The Commission's views are now sought on the information presented and on how to proceed with the screening exercise. The Commission has been asked to consider measures that might mitigate the equality impact of the policy in relation to Assembly Questions for written response. The matter is due for further consideration at the Commission meeting in January 2015.

### 5.1c Good Relations

Good Relations is dealt with by the Good Relations Strategy (2012-2016) and action plan. Monitoring and progress against the Good Relations Strategy is discussed and reviewed at SMG on a 6-monthly basis and issues around good relations are discussed at every Assembly Commission meeting.

#### *Feedback from Members regarding Good Relations in Parliament Buildings*

The table below details Assembly Questions regarding Good Relations in general directed to the Assembly Commission during the current mandate.

Ref No.	Member	Question
AQO 1692/1 1-15	Mr Conall McDevitt	To ask the Assembly Commission, in light of the Good Relations Strategy, what consideration has been given to ensuring that Parliament Buildings reflects both sections of the community in historical terms.
AQO 5803/1 1-15	Ms Rosaleen McCorley	To ask the Assembly Commission what steps it is taking to make Parliament Buildings more inclusive.
AQO 6328/1	Mr Danny Kinahan	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on any events planned to commemorate centenaries over the next seven

1-15		years.
AQO 6329/1 1-15	Mr Alex Maskey	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on how it is making Parliament Buildings more inclusive for all communities.
AQO 970/11- 15	Mr Jim Allister	To ask the Assembly Commission why the plaques naming those murdered by the IRA are not mentioned during the guided tours of Parliament Buildings.
AQO 971/11- 15	Mr David McNarry	To ask the Assembly Commission whether it will consider extending the official tour of Parliament Buildings to include a visit to Lord Craigavon's tomb.
AQW 31349/ 11-15	Mr Stephen Moutray	To ask the Assembly Commission what plans it has to scatter poppy seeds in the grounds of Parliament Buildings to commemorate The Great War 1914 - 1918 following the launch of the Royal British Legion 2014 Commemorative Poppy Seed Campaign.
AQW 7303/1 1-15	Mr Daithí McKay	To ask the Assembly Commission what actions are being taken to make Parliament Buildings more welcoming to people from a nationalist or republican background; and how it will ensure that these political traditions will be reflected.
AQW 7763/1 1-15	Mr Daithí McKay	To ask the Assembly Commission whether consideration has been given to the procurement of paintings, statues and other art and antiques that reflect nationalist and republican history, given the make-up of the existing materials on display.
AQW 8108/1 1-15	Mr Daithí McKay	To ask the Assembly Commission, in relation to the tour of Parliament Buildings (i) what reference is made to the old Stormont Parliament of 1921-72; and (ii) whether the views that nationalists held of the old Stormont Parliament are referred to, in order to provide a balanced overview.
AQW 2632/1 1-15	Mr Jim Allister	To ask the Assembly Commission why the script used for official tours of Parliament Buildings has no reference to the memorial tablets to former Members who were murdered by the IRA; and if it will amend the script to include a reference to the memorials.

### *Feedback from Assembly Secretariat staff regarding Good Relations in Parliament Buildings*

The 2012 staff survey found that around two thirds of staff (65.5%) felt that the Assembly Commission is committed to promoting Good Relations. Staff attitudes around good relations in the Assembly Secretariat are improving. Just over a third of staff (36.4%) believe that more could be done to promote good relations in the Assembly Secretariat, a decrease of 10.3 percentage points from the 2010 figure of 46.7%.

### *Good Relations Audit*

The Northern Ireland Assembly Internal Good Relations Audit (June 2011)<sup>10</sup>, conducted by Holywell Consultancy, identified a number of aspects that work well. These include the NIA as a workplace, the historical location, the elections, positive commitments to good relations, positive feedback from visitors, artefacts and memorabilia, shared areas, security, and a range of factors around how the Assembly operates. A number of challenges were also identified in relation to Parliament Buildings and the Assembly and these are being considered by the Assembly Commission.

### *Feedback from visitors regarding Good Relations in Parliament Buildings*

Feedback from the Visitor Survey has been very positive. Data collected from 60 respondents during the period October 2013 to June 2014 showed that:

- All of the visitors who completed the survey felt welcome in Parliament Buildings;
- 52 of the 59 respondents felt that Parliament Buildings is welcoming to people of different ethnic origin, religion and political opinion (5 answering 'Neutral', 2 answering 'No opinion' and no one responded 'No');
- All respondents felt that the staff treated them with respect irrespective of their ethnic origin, religion and political opinion;
- Of the respondents who had viewed the art and exhibitions on display, 31 felt the art work and exhibitions make a positive contribution to good relations and 8 felt that the art work and exhibitions made neither a positive or negative contribution to good relations. One respondent commented that the art work is "representative of the history of times past and current". No respondent said that the art work and exhibitions made a negative contribution to good relations; and,
- 45 respondents felt that the symbols and emblems contributed positively to good relations, 5 respondents felt that the symbols and emblems made neither a positive or negative contribution to good relations and 5 had 'No opinion.' No respondents said that the symbols and emblems make a negative contribution to good relations. One respondent commented on the effort to show an understanding of Northern Ireland's history "architecturally, culturally and philosophically". One respondent commented that "Most symbols inside of the building seem neutral and connected people from different backgrounds in Northern Ireland". Another commented that the art and symbols recognise and represent all of the six counties in Northern Ireland.

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Publications/Good-Relations/NIA-Good-Relations-Report.pdf>

### *Art, Artefacts and Exhibitions*

An Art Advisory Group, Chaired by the Principal Deputy Speaker and consisting of a member from each of the larger parties, representatives from the NI Arts Council, National Museums Northern Ireland, and relevant Secretariat officials has been established:

*“To advise the Speaker generally on matters relating to the display of works of art in Parliament Buildings and to make proposals on the siting of works of art to the Speaker. The working group may from time to time also be asked for its views on other issues where it is considered to have an interest”.*

The Speaker has been clear that the Art Advisory Group has no role in advising on the more politically sensitive areas of the Good Relations policy in relation to art, specifically the display of historic artefacts which instead falls within the corporate responsibilities of the Commission.

Art, Artefacts and Exhibitions are regularly discussed by the Assembly Commission (08/05/12, 25/09/12, 19/04/12, 27/02/12, 26/02/14, 02/04/14, and 29/04/14). There is also a Speakers Art Group.

The table below details Assembly Questions regarding art, artefacts and exhibitions directed to the Assembly Commission during the current mandate.

<b>Ref No.</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>Question</b>
AQO 1691/1 1-15	Mr Jim Allister	To ask the Assembly Commission whether it will arrange an exhibition in Parliament Buildings of all the items of art and artefacts that belong to the Assembly and which are currently in storage or on loan.
AQW 12974/ 11-15	Mr Jim Allister	To ask the Assembly Commission whether it is possible for an MLA to view the items of art and artefacts which belong to the Assembly and which are currently in storage.
AQW 32162/ 11-15	Mr Jim Allister	To ask the Assembly Commission whether it has given any consideration to holding an exhibition of art and other materials owned by the Assembly which are currently being held in storage.
AQW 6688/1 1-15	Mr Jim Allister	To ask the Assembly Commission what was the cost of the obelisk marking the Hillsborough Agreement which has been placed in the Members' Lobby of Parliament Buildings; why the obelisk was considered necessary, and why it was placed in the Members' Lobby.

### *Flags*

In addition, the flying of the Union Flag has been raised in a number of questions by staff to the Clerk/Chief Executive, and in the 2012 Assembly Secretariat Staff Attitudes Survey. It has also been discussed at SMG (03/09/14).

This issue has also been discussed at several Assembly Commission meetings (05/06/13, 26/06/13, 29/01/14, and 02/04/14). At its meeting on 29 January 2014, the Assembly Commission agreed that it would procure an independent service provider to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the flying of the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings and the subsequent consultation process. Those tasked with carrying out the consultation will examine and assess all the issues relating to the current position on flying the Union Flag on designated days, as set out in the Northern Ireland Flags Order 2000, amended in 2002. The consultation period began in October 2014 and will last for approximately 14 weeks. A final EQIA report will be presented to the Assembly Commission which will contain the findings of the consultation as well as the assessment of impacts. It is expected that this will take place in March 2015.

The table below details Assembly Questions regarding the flying of flags directed to the Assembly Commission during the current mandate.

<b>Ref No.</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>Question</b>
AQO 1690/1 1-15	Mr Alex Maskey	To ask the Assembly Commission what consideration has been given to the flying of the Irish National Flag in order to better represent Nationalist and Republican communities who use Parliament Buildings.
AQO 5069/1 1-15	Mr Jim Allister	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on increasing the number of days on which the Union Flag is flown from Parliament Buildings.
AQW 36458/ 11-15	Mr Phil Flanagan	To ask the Assembly Commission to detail the estimated cost of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the Review of the Policy on the Flying of the Union Flag at Parliament Buildings.

#### 5.1d Participation

The Northern Ireland Assembly engages with the public through a number of services including the Education Service, the Outreach Unit and Events Office. The public can also attend debates, Committees and take tours.

The Education Service delivers an inward visits programme for schools, youth groups and other groups seeking an educational focus to their visit.

The Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) Outreach Unit is responsible for advancing and encouraging the public's understanding of the Assembly and the political process in Northern Ireland. It provides the business community, voluntary sector and delegations from across the world with the opportunity to engage and learn more about the legislature. The Outreach Unit consists of three business areas Assembly Community Connect (ACC), Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust (NIABT) and Parliamentary Outreach.



The Events Office organises events which range from Report Launches, Charity Fundraisers, Dinners, Receptions and Concerts.

The Northern Ireland Assembly sits in Parliament Buildings and is open to all members of the public. They can attend debates, watch committee hearings or tour Parliament Buildings.

Data is collected on the age, gender and disability of those using Assembly Education and Outreach services as detailed in this section. Data is also held on school type for groups participating in school visits. This is often used as a proxy for religion.

### *Engaging with young people*

An Assembly Question was asked regarding the Assembly Commission's strategy for engaging with young people.

<b>Ref No.</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>Question</b>
AQO 235/1 1-15	Mr Paul Maskey	To ask the Assembly Commission to outline its strategy for engaging with young people.

### *School visits*

The table below shows a gender breakdown of groups who have used the Education Service for the period January 2012 – September 2014. While the majority of groups were mixed (90%), a higher proportion of both groups and participants were female only (6%) when compared to male only (3%). It should be noted that school visits are open to all schools in Northern Ireland.

### **Groups who have used the Education Service by gender, January 2012 – 24 September 2014**

<b>Group Type</b>	<b>No. of groups</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Female</b>	92	6.34%	3,259	6.97%
<b>Male</b>	43	2.96%	1,655	3.54%
<b>Mixed</b>	1,310	90.28%	41,658	89.05%
<b>Total</b>	1,445		46,572	

The following table shows the number of school visits to the Northern Ireland Assembly through the Education Service by school type (a proxy for religion). At primary level, the highest number of school visits were from the controlled sector, while at secondary level the highest number of school visits were by maintained secondary school. At

primary level the difference was much less marked. As stated above, school visits are open to all schools in Northern Ireland.

#### School visits by school type, 2011/12 – 24 September 2014

School Type	2011/2012		2012/2013		01/09/13-24/09/14	
	Total Groups	Total Visitors	Total Groups	Total Visitors	Total Groups	Total Visitors
Controlled Grammar	18	428	20	554	20	622
Controlled Grammar (External Outreach)	3	84	1	60	3	350
Controlled Primary	86	2414	68	2143	61	1748
Controlled Primary (External Outreach)	3	153	4	222	3	206
Controlled Secondary	53	1579	59	2139	44	1357
Controlled Secondary (External Outreach)	2	250	5	306	6	508
Further & Higher Education	9	197	14	271	6	128
Integrated Primary	4	85	1	46	5	172
Integrated Secondary	19	578	13	363	12	332
Integrated Secondary (External Outreach)	4	238	2	88	0	0
Maintained Primary	102	2916	39	1187	48	1706
Maintained Primary (External Outreach)	3	132	0	0	3	284
Maintained Secondary	69	2171	70	2572	57	2053
Maintained Secondary (External Outreach)	10	1056	9	628	9	712
Special Primary	2	70	0	0	0	0
Special Secondary	13	339	4	88	3	65
University	7	170	9	185	5	91
Voluntary Grammar	65	1717	65	1925	58	1778
Voluntary Grammar (External Outreach)	7	226	17	982	8	909
Voluntary Primary	1	25	2	54	5	180
<b>All</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>14828</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>13813</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>13201</b>

A number of Assembly Questions to the Assembly Commission related to school visits, as shown below. These questions tended to focus on the number of school visits, where the schools came, from and school type.

Ref No.	Member	Question
AQO 2347/11-15	Mr Ian McCrea	To ask the Assembly Commission what plans are in place to encourage more schools to engage with the Education Service and visit Parliament Buildings.
AQO 3044/11-15	Mr Declan McAleer	To ask the Assembly Commission how many Irish medium schools have visited Parliament Buildings in the current mandate.
AQO	Ms Michaela	To ask the Assembly Commission what outreach has taken

3632/ 11-15	Boyle	place with schools, colleges and universities in the Republic of Ireland about visiting Parliament Buildings.
AQO 3642/ 11-15	Mr Mervyn Storey	To ask the Assembly Commission how many schools have participated in the Education Service programme in the last 12 months.
AQO 5799/ 11-15	Mr Raymond McCartney	To ask the Assembly Commission for a breakdown of school visits to Parliament Buildings from each constituency since January 2014.
AQO 6327/ 11-15	Mr Phil Flanagan	To ask the Assembly Commission to outline the schools that have visited Parliament Buildings since April 2014.
AQO 6337/ 11-15	Mr Joe Byrne	To ask the Assembly Commission for an overview of the schools and organisations that have visited Parliament Buildings in 2014.
AQW 32534 /11-15	Mr Pat Sheehan	To ask the Assembly Commission to list all the schools from West Belfast that have visited the Assembly in the last 12 months.
AQW 34363 /11-15	Mr Gregory Campbell	To ask the Assembly Commission how many (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools from (a) controlled; (b) maintained; and (c) integrated sectors have paid educational visits to Parliament Buildings in each of the last three years.

### *Engaging with Young People*

The proposed Youth Assembly was discussed by SMG on 05/12/12, 04/11/13 and 03/09/12, and by the Assembly Commission on 27/11/13. An update on progress was also provided to the external Disability Advisory Group on 21 March 2012. A number of Assembly Questions to the Assembly Commission related to engaging with young people in general and specifically to the Youth Assembly, as shown below. These questions mainly sought an update on progress and details on how the Youth Assembly would operate.

As already noted, the Northern Ireland Assembly has also just been awarded Erasmus+ funding to develop a Structured Dialogue project. The aim is to “encourage positive, respectful relationships and represent the voices of young people on issues which affect their lives”. The Education Service will establish a youth panel for Northern Ireland, which will give 36 young people the opportunity to actively participate in democratic life by working closely with the Northern Ireland Assembly. The youth panel will assist the Assembly in its work by representing the views of young people by consulting young people across Northern Ireland about the issues that concern them. The young people involved will complete an inquiry into an issue chosen by the participants. The recruitment process will ensure the representation of young people from different community backgrounds (nationalist, unionist, other), different social backgrounds and those with disabilities.

<b>Ref No.</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>Question</b>
AQO 2344/11-15	Mr Alban Maginness	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.
AQO 2351/11-15	Mr Basil McCrea	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on the establishment of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.
AQO 247/11-15	Mr Basil McCrea	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.
AQO 3045/11-15	Mr Chris Lyttle	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on the Youth Assembly.
AQO 959/11-15	Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on the establishment of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.
AQW 17745/11-15	Mr Colum Eastwood	To ask the Assembly Commission to detail what meetings have been held on planning for the establishment of the Youth Assembly.
AQW 17747/11-15	Mr Colum Eastwood	To ask the Assembly Commission, in relation to the Youth Assembly, to detail the (i) terms of reference; (ii) constitution; and (iii) election process.
AQW 17749/11-15	Mr Colum Eastwood	To ask the Assembly Commission when it is envisioned that the Youth Assembly will first sit.

#### *Youth Work*

Since January 2012, three youth worker conferences were organised by the Education Service, two on the theme of ‘Youth Work is Political’ (March 2012 and June 2012) and one on the representation theme, ‘Working for You’ (September 2012). The Education Service also held three youth worker training events in Parliament Buildings. In June 2013, young people from the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) community were involved in a Let’s Talk, Let’s Act event on the theme of ‘The Value of Volunteering’.

#### *Special interest and cross-community groups*

In terms of special interest and cross-community groups, the Education Service has provided programmes for the following organisations since 2012:

- Falls Road Women’s Centre;

- Roe Valley Learning Community;
- Southern Partnership PEACE III Chinese/Islamic Programme;
- Reach Across;
- West Belfast Youth Talks Back;
- Guide Dogs for the Blind;
- Same Difference Project;
- Omagh Young Adult Leadership Programme;
- Military Families;
- Change Makers;
- Save the Children;
- 3P2 Project (Cross-community women's group);
- Accessing Youth Engagement – Strabane;
- Breakout Project; and,
- Belfast YMCA.

#### *Outreach events*

The following table outlines Outreach events focusing on gender, disability and ethnic group that the Assembly has been involved in since 2012.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
14 Oct 14	NI Rural Women's Network Annual Conference	60
22 Sept 14	Guide Dogs for the Blind – How the Assembly Works presentation	20
4 Sept 14	Foyle Women's Information Network – had exhibition stand at networking day	200
24 Aug 14	Belfast Mela – had exhibition stand at intercultural event	2000
24 June 14	'Get Involved' Ethnic Minorities	30
18 June 14	Black and Minority Ethnic Football tournament	60
17 June 14	Guide Dogs for the Blind – How the Assembly Works presentation	20

23 April 14	Black and Minority Ethnic Parliament	60
20 March 14	Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning – had an exhibition stand at the event.	250
13 March 14	NI Rural Women's Network – International Women's Day event. Had an exhibition stand at event.	130
6 March 14	Shankhill Women's Centre – How the Assembly Works presentation	20
5 March 14	Footprints Women's Centre – How the Assembly Works presentation	15
13 February 14	Community Relations Council – How the Assembly Works presentation	20
2 Feb 14	Chinese New Year – exhibition stand	
21 Jan 14	Black and Minority Ethnic Study Visit – How the Assembly Works presentation	30
10 Sept 13	Foyle Women's Information Network – had exhibition stand at networking day	200
25 Aug 13	Belfast Mela – had exhibition stand at intercultural event	2000
5 March 13	RNIB football tournament	
5 Feb 13	Women Leading the Way – How the Assembly Works presentation	40
13 Nov 12	Women in Society – How the Assembly Works presentation	
9 Oct 12	Guide Dogs for the Blind – blindfold tour	15
1 May 12	Carers NI – presentation and tour	15

A number of upcoming events are also planned for 2014 as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
23 Oct 14	AERC Women in Politics stakeholder event – assist Committee with organisation	60
8 Nov 14	Women of the World festival – 'Women in Politics' panel	70
26 Nov 14	Stronger Together Network – encouraging civic participation seminar	27
8 Dec 14	Disability Sport NI – 5 star taster event	50

The table below presents a demographic profile of 'Insight Into' participants in 2014. 'Insight into' is a free Assembly Community Connect seminar series which provides a detailed insight into the Assembly's processes and procedures. Delivered by experienced Assembly Clerks who have worked in Committees, the Bill Office, and Business Office, each session concentrates on a particular theme related to the work of the Assembly and its Committees.

Overall, a lower proportion of those aged over 60 (12.9%) attended the seminars when compared to their proportion in the general population (19.7%, 2011 Census). A higher proportion of participants were female (61.1%) than male (38.9%). A lower proportion of people with disabilities (14.6%) attended these seminars when compared to the estimate of people with disabilities in the general population which is around 20%.

#### Age, gender and disability of 'Insight into' seminar participants, 2014

	May-14	Apr-14	Mar-14	Feb-14	Jan-14	Total	%
<b>Age Group</b>							
<b>Under 25</b>	0	0	0	21	2	23	24.7
<b>25-39</b>	1	6	4	8	12	31	33.3
<b>40-59</b>	0	3	9	6	9	27	29.0
<b>60+</b>	4	1	7	0		12	12.9
<b>Gender</b>							
<b>Male</b>	2	2	4	15	12	35	38.9
<b>Female</b>	3	8	15	19	10	55	61.1
<b>Disability</b>							
<b>Yes</b>	2	2	2	3	4	13	14.6
<b>No</b>	3	8	15	32	18	76	85.4
<b>Mental Health</b>	0	2	1	1		4	
<b>Learning</b>	0			1		1	
<b>Physical</b>	2	1		1	3	7	
<b>Other</b>	0		2	1	3	6	

The table below presents a demographic profile of 'Get Involved' participants in 2014. Get involved is a free Assembly Community Connect conference which brings the Assembly and its work to the local community. Groups learn more about how the Assembly works, and get the opportunity to question their local MLAs about the issues that matter to them.

A higher proportion of those aged over 60 (21,1%) attended these conferences when compared to their proportion in the general population (19.7%, 2011 Census). A lower proportion of under 25 year olds (8.8%) attended 'Get Involved' when compared to the general population. A higher proportion of participants were female (57.9%) than male (42.1%). A slightly higher proportion of people with disabilities (21.4%) attended these seminars when compared to the estimate of people with disabilities in the general population which is around 20%.

#### Age, gender and disability of 'Get Involved' conference participants, 2014

	Jun 2014	Apr 2014	March 2014	Total	%
<b>Age Group</b>					
<b>Under 25</b>	3	1	1	5	8.8
<b>25-39</b>	6	3	1	10	17.5
<b>40-59</b>	12	6	12	30	52.6
<b>60+</b>	0	5	7	12	21.1
<b>Gender</b>					
<b>Male</b>	12	9	3	24	42.1
<b>Female</b>	9	6	18	33	57.9
<b>Disability</b>					
<b>Yes</b>	4	2	6	12	21.4
<b>No</b>	17	13	14	44	78.6
<b>Mental Health</b>	1		0	1	
<b>Learning</b>	0		0	0	
<b>Physical</b>	1		1	2	
<b>Other</b>	1		6	7	



The table below presents a demographic profile of 'How the Assembly works' participants in 2014. 'How the Assembly works' is Assembly Community Connect training provides an overview of how the Assembly functions and comprises of four presentations from the Committee, Bill, Business and Outreach Offices. It is aimed at:

- Those who wish to increase their understanding of how the Assembly works; and,
- Those who want to promote greater understanding of the work of their organisation through more effective communication with the Assembly and its MLAs.

Both under 25 years olds and those aged over 60 were under-represented in 'How the Assembly works' training, when compared with their proportions in the general population. Overall, a higher proportion of participants were female (70.8%) than male (29.2%). A lower proportion of people with disabilities (8.8%) attended this training when compared to the estimate of people with disabilities in the general population which is around 20%.

#### Age, gender and disability of 'How the Assembly works' training participants, 2014

	September 2014	June 2014	May 2014	April 2014	March 2014	January 2014	Total	%
<b>Age Group</b>								
<b>Under 25</b>	0	0	0	2	1	2	5	5.5
<b>25-39</b>	2	1	7	11	13	7	41	45.1
<b>40-59</b>	4	6	7	2	8	5	32	35.2
<b>60+</b>	4	4	2	1	1	1	13	14.3
<b>Gender</b>								
<b>Male</b>	4	3	2	5	5	7	26	29.2
<b>Female</b>	6	7	12	11	19	8	63	70.8
<b>Disability</b>								
<b>Yes</b>	1	2	0	4	0	1	8	8.8
<b>No</b>	9	8	16	12	24	14	83	91.2
<b>Mental Health</b>			0	1			1	
<b>Learning</b>			0	0			0	
<b>Physical</b>	1	2	0	3			6	
<b>Other</b>			0	0			0	

### *Pensioners Parliament*

The Pensioners Parliament survey has provided the basis of discussions at each local parliament and determined the issues taken to the two-day Pensioners Parliament in May 2014. Over 1,100 people completed the 2014 survey. The two-day Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament took place on 29-30 May 2014, with almost 200 older people from across Northern Ireland in attendance. The Parliament also saw participation from policy experts, influential people, and high level politicians during its two-day agenda. The 2014 Northern Ireland Pensioners Parliament report will be published in the autumn and distributed to MLAs, MPs, MEPs, councils, statutory bodies, the private sector and other relevant organisations.

### *Results from the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey*

Annex A presents a profile of the Northern Ireland population taken from the 2011 Census. Findings from the 2011 Census and subsequent mid-year population estimates have shown that the population of Northern Ireland is increasing, particularly the older population. The results of the 2011 Census compared to the 2001 Census has also showed that the proportion of the population born outside Northern Ireland is increasing, as is the proportion of the population who consider themselves to be neither Protestant nor Catholic. In considering action to increase participation, these demographic changes should be considered.

Results from the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey by gender, age and religion are presented below. In 2013, there was little difference in the proportion of males and females who think that having a Northern Ireland Assembly is giving ordinary people more say in how Northern Ireland is governed. In 2012, a higher proportion of males than females said this.

#### **NILT Question 'From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that having a Northern Ireland Assembly is giving ordinary people...'**

	Male		Female	
	2013	2012	2013	2012
	%	%	%	%
<b>...more say in how Northern Ireland is governed</b>	21	36	20	26
<b>less say</b>	7	7	7	4
<b>or, is it making no difference?</b>	64	48	63	56
<b>Don't know</b>	9	9	10	13

*Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey*

Those aged 18-34 were least likely to think that having a Northern Ireland Assembly is giving ordinary people more say in how Northern Ireland is governed. Attitudes to the Assembly tend to become more positive with age.

**NILT Question 'From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that having a Northern Ireland Assembly is giving ordinary people...'**

	18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65+	
	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>...more say in how Northern Ireland is governed</b>	15	24	17	25	23	29	19	39	24	32	23	32
<b>less say</b>	3	8	6	2	9	5	8	7	5	6	8	6
<b>or, is it making no difference?</b>	68	45	55	52	61	54	69	49	63	55	63	56
<b>Don't know</b>	14	23	22	21	7	12	5	6	8	7	6	7

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey

In 2013, there was little difference in the proportion of Protestants and Catholics who think that having a Northern Ireland Assembly is giving ordinary people more say in how Northern Ireland is governed. In 2012, a higher proportion of Protestants than Catholics said this. Those with no religion were least likely to think that having a Northern Ireland Assembly is giving ordinary people more say in how Northern Ireland is governed.

**NILT Question 'From what you have seen and heard so far, do you think that having a Northern Ireland Assembly is giving ordinary people...'**

	Catholic		Protestant		No religion	
	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>...more say in how Northern Ireland is governed</b>	23	36	22	29	11	25
<b>less say</b>	6	4	8	7	6	7
<b>or, is it making no difference?</b>	63	49	64	57	65	54
<b>Don't know</b>	8	12	6	8	17	14

Source: Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey

### *Women in Politics*

Following the election of May 2011, 20 of the 108 MLAs were women (18.5%) and there was only one MLA of ethnic minority background (less than 1%). As of September 2014, 22 of the 108 MLAs are women (20.4%) and there remains only one MLA of ethnic minority background. These figures show that, while the number of women MLAs has increased slightly, both women and those of ethnic minority background remain under-represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

A number of Assembly Questions to the Assembly Commission concerned childcare and support for Members and their support staff.

<b>Ref No.</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>Question</b>
AQO 2346/11-15	Mr Roy Beggs	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on the implementation of a revised payroll system so that Members' staff can benefit from the tax efficient Childcare Voucher Scheme.
AQO 2350/11-15	Mr Phil Flanagan	To ask the Assembly Commission to detail the childcare provisions that are in place for MLAs and all staff who use Parliament Buildings.
AQO 3638/11-15	Mr Roy Beggs	To ask the Assembly Commission for an update on extending the Childcare Voucher Scheme to Assembly Secretariat staff.
AQO 5805/11-15	Mrs Karen McKeivitt	To ask the Assembly Commission to outline the criteria used to determine the level of support provided by the Childcare Allowance Scheme to Members and Assembly staff.
AQW 12670/11-15	Mr Roy Beggs	To ask the Assembly Commission when the payroll system, through which Members are obliged to pay their staff, will be able to facilitate those Members who wish to enable their staff to avail of the tax efficient Childcare Voucher Scheme.
AQW 32852/11-15	Mr Phil Flanagan	To ask the Assembly Commission whether it would consider carrying out a survey to assess the demand for crèche provision within Parliament Buildings to encourage and support more parents of young children to be MLAs.
AQW 3536/11-15	Mr Roy Beggs [R]	To ask the Assembly Commission when Assembly Secretariat staff will be able to benefit from the tax efficient Childcare Voucher Scheme.
AQW 5171/11-15	Mr Phil Flanagan	To ask the Assembly Commission (i) what provision is made to meet Members' childcare requirements; (ii) for its assessment of the adequacy of this provision; and (iii) what improvements are planned to encourage more parents, and particularly women, to become MLAs.
AQW 8949/11-15	Ms Michaela Boyle	To ask the Assembly Commission if it would undertake a survey of Members and staff in Parliament Buildings to assess the demand for crèche facilities.
AQW 8950/11-15	Ms Michaela Boyle	To ask the Assembly Commission whether it will consider providing crèche facilities at Parliament Buildings to encourage more women to get involved in politics.
AQW 9109/11-15	Mr Roy Beggs [R]	To ask the Assembly Commission why staff who work outside Parliament Buildings are unable to join a Childcare Voucher Scheme and are excluded from its Childcare Scheme.

The Assembly has been involved in numerous projects to encourage women to get involved in democracy. Since the start of the new mandate, the Outreach Unit has hosted and attended 19 events specifically targeting women's groups to inform them about how they can get involved with the Assembly, the political process and political life. A detailed list of the events can be seen in Annex B. Additionally, women's groups regularly take part in Assembly Community Connect monthly training.

Assembly Community Connect has also developed an active contact database of over 250 women's groups from across Northern Ireland that it engages with regularly to promote training opportunities and events which encourage greater participation of women in politics.

The Outreach Unit has also helped facilitate the Assembly's involvement in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) group which is part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). The CWP was established to find ways to increase female representation in Parliament and works towards the mainstreaming of gender considerations in all CPA activities and programmes. Jo-Anne Dobson MLA stood for election for the role of Regional CWP Representative in 2013 but was unsuccessful. However, she is a member of the CWP and attended the British Islands and Mediterranean Region (BIMR) Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Inaugural Conference, in March 2014, with the theme of Enhancing the Participation of Women in Politics.

The Assembly, in conjunction with Belfast City Council, is also about to embark on a project with Cinemagic which will encourage young women to create a short film to inspire a new generation of young women to step up, participate and become leaders in public, political and civic life. Three teams will create a film that will educate, inform and inspire young women to engage and influence the Northern Ireland political decision-making process.

The Head of Communications and Outreach is a member of WINNET – an organisation made up of senior women in leadership roles from all sectors in Northern Ireland. She sits on the network's media sub-committee, which aims to increase women's visibility in the media, and to build experience and confidence for women participating in media interviews. The Network's mission statement is:

“WINET is a cross-sector network of female leaders committed to the advancement of more women into leadership roles in Northern Ireland.”

The Education Service has also been involved in projects to promote female involvement in public life. On 22 Oct 2013, the Education Service collaborated with Politics Plus on an event involving over 100 female students from a range of schools in Belfast. A similar event will take place in Feb 2015.

### *Disability*

The Health and Safety Officer and Fire Precautions Officer are made aware of guests who need assistance, in advance of scheduled events and tours. This data is not currently collated for monitoring purposes. It is recommended that consideration be given to recording and collating this information in a way that is easily accessible.

## **5.2 Function 2: The recruitment and ongoing development of suitably qualified and experienced staff to support the Assembly.**

### 5.2a Recruitment and Selection

Data on disability, age, gender and community background is gathered for Assembly Secretariat staff. Data on the other Section 75 categories is not collected at present. As at December 2014, there were 33 members of Secretariat staff with a declared disability. The following tables show the age breakdown of Secretariat staff as at December 2014.

<b>Age group</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
20-24	0	0
25-29	17	4.545455
30-34	56	14.97326
35-39	67	17.91444
40-44	67	17.91444
45-49	60	16.04278
50-54	45	12.03209
55-59	39	10.42781
60-64	19	5.080214
65 +	4	1.069519

The following tables show the breakdown of Secretariat staff by grade, gender and community background as at December 2014.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Protestant</b>		<b>Roman Catholic</b>		<b>Not determined</b>		<b>All</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
1,2	5	0	2	0	0	0	7
3	2	1	4	2	0	0	9
4	8	7	10	11	0	2	38
5	9	14	9	10	3	3	48
6	16	16	18	21	2	0	73
7	36	27	21	19	1	1	105
8	55	15	11	8	3	2	94

The below table shows the gender and community background of Assembly Secretariat staff as at 01 December 2014 (Fair Employment Monitoring Return, 12 February 2014) when compared with the Northern Ireland Public Sector<sup>11</sup>. Roman Catholics continue to be under-represented in Standard Occupation Classification<sup>12</sup> 9 which comprises of Ushering staff, despite affirmative action being undertaken when recruiting for these posts.

### Comparison of Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) Secretariat staff to the Northern Ireland Public Sector by Standard Occupational Classification, gender and Community Background

Standard Occupational Classification	Male				Female			
	Protestant		Roman Catholic		Protestant		Roman Catholic	
	NIA	NI Public Sector	NIA	NI Public Sector	NIA	NI Public Sector	NIA	NI Public Sector
SOC 1	51.3	56.4	48.7	43.6	45.2	50.7	54.8	49.3
SOC 2	52.6	50.2	47.4	49.8	48.1	47.1	51.9	52.9
SOC 3	43.5	62.1	56.5	37.9	47.1	55.4	52.9	44.6
SOC 4	60.6	48.0	39.4	52.0	61.3	52.2	38.7	47.8
SOC 9	86.9	54.5	13.1	45.5	71.4	52.9	28.6	47.1

*Note: Employees whose community background cannot be determined have been excluded due to low numbers (9 males and 8 females in total)*

#### Gender equality

Gender equality within the Assembly Secretariat has been discussed at meetings of the Assembly Commission (13/05/14) and SMG (04/10/13, 04/02/14, and 04/07/14).

In terms of gender, there is an under-representation of females at the most senior grades of the NIA Secretariat, with no females in Secretariat Management Group (Clerk/Chief Executive and Directors). There is also a gender imbalance amongst the Usher/Control Room Operative group, the majority of whom are male.

As of 30 April 2014, the majority of staff working in the NIA Secretariat at grades 1-3 were male (80%) whilst a minority (20%) were female. There was a higher proportion of males than females at grades 7 (56.4% compared to 43.6%) and 8 (69.3% compared to 30.7%). There was a higher proportion of females than males at grades 4

<sup>11</sup> Fair Employment Monitoring Report 24, ECNI, <http://www.equalityni.org/Delivering-Equality/Addressing-inequality/Employment/Monitoring-Report-24/Fair-Employment-Monitoring-Report-24>

<sup>12</sup> Standard Occupational Classification is a common classification of occupational information. Within the context of the classification, jobs are classified in terms of their skill level and skill content.

(52.6% compared to 47.2%), grades 5 (52.8% compared to 47.2%) and grades 6 (54.1% compared to 45.9%); although the gender gaps are smaller.

SMG (Senior Management Group), which comprises the Clerk/Chief Executive (Chair) and 5 Directors, are all male. Staff in Facilities Directorate (and particularly ushering) and in the IS Office are predominately male. Staff in Human Resources are predominately female.

In comparison with the Northern Ireland workforce, there is a higher proportion of males employed in the NIA Secretariat as Managers, Directors and Senior officials (SOC1), in Associate Professional and Technical occupations (SOC3), and in Elementary occupations (SOC9). In contrast, there is a higher proportion of females in Professional occupations (SOC2), and Administrative and Secretarial occupations (SOC4) in the NIA Secretariat when compared with the Northern Ireland workforce.

### 5.2b Equality issues for existing staff

NIA conducts the Staff Attitudes Survey every two years, with the latest staff survey conducted in 2012. It includes a section on Equality to find out the views staff have on equality issues within the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Results from the Staff Attitudes Survey 2012 show that:

- Around two thirds of staff (65.5%) feel that the Assembly Commission is committed to promoting Good Relations. Just over a third of staff (36.4%) believe that more could be done to promote good relations in the Assembly Secretariat, a decrease of 10.3 percentage points from the 2010 figure of 46.7%;
- 83.6% of staff said that they are familiar with and know how to access the Assembly Secretariat's equal opportunities policies; and
- Almost half of staff (48.6%) said they believe that the Assembly Secretariat offers appropriate support to staff with disabilities, an increase of 13.5 percentage points on 35.1% in 2010.

#### *Positive Working Relationships*

The Positive Working Relations Initiative (PWRI) was introduced within the Ushering Business Area in response to a number of work related issues, including the number of complaints raised under HR policies, the 2012 staff survey and poor absence statistics.

The first action of this Initiative was for an external facilitator to conduct interviews with all Ushering management and staff, focussing on personal experiences of behaviours in the workplace. The facilitator produced a report outlining the key themes that



emerged from the interviews and making recommendations on how positive working relationships could be developed and sustained within Ushering Services.

This led to Stage 1 of the PWRI in which the external facilitator ran a series of workshops with all Ushering staff, allowing them to reflect on the report, focus positively on the way forward, integrate the Assembly's corporate values into day-to-day working practices and highlight organisational expectations and consequences.

Stage 2 of the PWRI was then implemented to build on this work, begin changing the culture of Ushering Services and embed new working behaviours in staff. This was done through facilitated meetings to establish working agreements and goals; individual coaching sessions for managers and team workshops for managers and staff.

The outcome of Stage 2 has been an improvement in the trust and rapport between Ushering staff and in particular between AG8 staff and their managers. It has also provided the opportunity to equip managers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to deal better with inappropriate behaviour and to be more supportive in encouraging positive behaviours in staff. Finally it has helped to equip AG8 staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to interact positively with their managers and, when necessary challenge the behaviour of their colleagues.

A report on the results of Stage 2 has now been shared with all Ushering staff and we are asking for their views on how we continue the positive work and momentum created through the PWRI. This may result in further actions being taken in 2015.

### *Gender equality*

The Gender Action Steering Group was established in June 2013 to discuss how the secretariat might examine the existence of any barriers in relation to gender in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and to consider necessary actions. In late 2013, a questionnaire was developed by the Gender Action Plan Steering Group in consultation with the Equality Commission and the Assembly's internal communications group. In February 2014, the questionnaire was circulated to secretariat staff, with 192 respondents. The full report will be made available after it is presented to the Assembly Commission this autumn.

The results showed that most staff agreed that they are treated equally regardless of their gender in the Secretariat. The majority of staff also reported that they have not experienced any barriers or difficulties in the Assembly Secretariat because of their gender.

The main barriers or issues highlighted by the research were in relation to:

- The lack of females at senior management level and in decision-making;

- The gender imbalance in certain business areas;
- Unacceptable behaviours and particularly inappropriate comments and attitudes relating to gender (experienced by both males and females);
- Balancing working and caring responsibilities, including negative attitudes towards those with caring responsibilities;
- Carrying out duties because of stereotyping and gender roles; and,
- Paternity provision.

### 5.2c Contracts and agency staff

Work is currently underway in relation to the fair employment practices of contractors such as Assembly Broadcasting and Related Services Contract and Support services Contract. Advice is being sought regarding this. Information is being gathered on the fair employment practices of all companies with contracts where employees work in Parliament Buildings. This includes the community backgrounds of these employees, including agency staff.

## 6 Data Gaps

Data on seven of the nine equality categories exists, namely for persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group and age; men and women generally; persons with a disability and persons without and persons with dependents and persons without. Further, representative from the LGBT community, namely the Rainbow Project, Lesbian Line and Cara are on the Assembly Commission's equality consultation list and no specific issues have been raised by these groups. There is no data for persons of different marital status.

It is recommended that consideration be given as to how data collection and monitoring can be improved. For example, the Events Office could record data on organisations representing Section 75 groups that use Parliament Buildings to host events.

## 7 Summary of inequalities identified in the review

The purpose of this mid-point review of the audit of inequalities is to provide a strategic picture of inequalities relevant to the role and functions of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission, as recommended in the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's 'Advice to Public Authorities: Approaching an 'Audit of Inequalities.'<sup>13</sup>

The table below summarises the inequalities identified in this review for each of the Section 75 categories and the ongoing work in addition to that identified in the 2011 Audit of inequalities. The inequalities identified below have already been identified by the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission and work is on-going to address these complex issues.

	<b>Issues identified in the review</b>
Religious Belief	<p>Work is on-going, through a number of activities, to ensure Parliament Buildings is welcoming to all persons regardless of their religious belief including those with no religion.</p> <p>Consideration will be given to seeking advice from the Equality Commission, where necessary, and relevant actions will be considered as appropriate e.g. affirmative action when advertising future vacancies.</p>
Political opinion	<p>Work is on-going, through a number of activities, to ensure Parliament Buildings is welcoming to all persons regardless of their political opinion.</p> <p>Development of a Language Policy is ongoing.</p> <p>An EQIA on the review of the policy on the flying of the Union Flag from Parliament Buildings is underway.</p>
Racial group	<p>Work is on-going, through a number of activities such as Assembly Community Connect, to ensure Parliament Buildings continues to be welcoming and to engage with all racial groups, including minority ethnic groups and new migrants.</p>

<sup>13</sup>

[http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/Public%20Authorities/Public\\_Authorities\\_Audit\\_of\\_Inequalities\\_Mar12.docx](http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Employers%20and%20Service%20Providers/Public%20Authorities/Public_Authorities_Audit_of_Inequalities_Mar12.docx)

	<b>Issues identified in the review</b>
Age	<p>Work is on-going to engage with young people through the Education Service and funding has been secured to establish a youth panel.</p> <p>Work is on-going to develop new ways to engage with young people e.g. through social media and Digital First EQIA.</p> <p>Work is on-going to continue to ensure participation of older people and the aging population.</p>
Marital status	No data available
Sexual orientation	No issues raised by stakeholders
Men and women generally	<p>Work is on-going to develop and implement Gender Action Plan for Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat.</p> <p>Work is on-going to encourage the participation of women in politics including support for female Members.</p>
Disability	<p>Work is on-going, through the Disability Action Plan, to optimise access in Parliament Buildings for Members, visitors and staff with disabilities.</p> <p>Work is on-going to engage with those with disabilities.</p>
Dependants	Work is on-going to address the needs of Members and staff with child care responsibilities.

## 8 Next steps

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland's 'Advice to Public Authorities: Approaching an 'Audit of Inequalities' states that 'the review of an audit of inequalities is an opportunity to assess whether current actions aimed at addressing existing inequalities already identified need revised. It is also an opportunity for a public authority to assess whether there are additional / new inequalities that need addressed and whether further action can be taken in order to address those inequalities.' It is clear from the evidence presented that the Assembly Commission has been proactive in addressing 'new inequalities' as they arise. The associated action plan should now be updated to reflect this.

## Annex A Section 75 profile of the Northern Ireland population

### Gender of usual residents (Census 2011)

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
All usual residents	1,810,863	
Males	887,323	49.0
Females	923,540	51.0

### Age of usual residents by Broad Age Band (Census 2011)

<b>Age Band</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
0-15 years	379,323	20.9
16-24 years	227,634	12.6
25-44 years	498,046	27.5
45-59 years	347,850	19.2
60-64 years	94,290	5.2
65-74 years	145,600	8.0
75+ years	118,120	6.5

### Marital Status of residents 16+ years (Census 2011)

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
All usual residents aged 16+ years	1,431,540	
Married	680,831	47.6
Single	517,393	36.1
Same-sex civil partnership	1,243	0.1
Separated	56,911	4.0
Divorced	78,074	5.5
Widowed or surviving partner	97,088	6.8

### Ethnic Groups in Northern Ireland (Census 2011)

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
White	1,778,449	98.2
Chinese	6,303	0.4
Indian	6,198	0.3
Mixed	6,014	0.3
Other Asian	4,998	0.3
Other	2,353	0.1
Black African	2,345	0.1
Irish Traveller	1,301	0.1
Pakistani	1,091	0.1
Black Other	899	0.1
Bangladeshi	540	0
Black Caribbean	372	0

**Religion (or religion brought up in) (Census 2011)**

<b>Religion (or religion brought up in)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Protestant and Other Christian	875,717	48.4
Catholic	817,385	45.1
Other religions	16,592	0.9
None	101,169	5.6

**National Identity of usual residents (Census 2011)**

<b>National Identity</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
All usual residents	1,810,863	
British only	722,379	39.9
Irish only	457,482	25.3
Northern Irish only	379,267	20.9
British and Northern Irish only	111,748	6.2
Irish and Northern Irish only	19,132	1.1
British, Irish and Northern Irish only	18,406	1.0
British and Irish only	11,877	0.7
Other	90,572	5.0

**Long-term conditions (Census 2011)**

<b>Long-term conditions</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No condition	1,241,785	68.6

**Households with dependent children (Census 2011)**

<b>Households with Dependent children</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Total number of households	703,275	
Households with dependent children	238,071	33.8

**Residents who provide Unpaid care to those with a long-term physical or mental health disability (all ages)**

<b>Unpaid Care</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
All usual residents	1,810,863	
Provides no unpaid care	1,596,883	88.2
Provides 1-19 hours unpaid care per week	122,301	6.8
Provides 20-49 hours unpaid care per week	35,369	2.0
Provides 50+ hours unpaid care per week	56,310	3.1

**Care of a Dependent Older Person**

<b>Unpaid Care</b>	<b>N</b>
Number of residents providing unpaid care to those aged 65 or over	32,328

## Annex B: Events focusing on women

### Assembly Community Connect

#### Past women's events:

#### **6 Jun 11            Leading Ladies (Attendees – 48)**

Leading Ladies is an initiative developed within the Irish Peace Centres (IPC) Consortium. It is an event-based training that brings together small numbers of women from throughout Belfast from all walks of life, to meet some of Ireland's leading ladies.

The Outreach Unit worked with Leading Ladies to host an event to encourage women to get involved in political life. The group received the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation, a round table discussion with female MLAs, sharing experiences on women in public life and talking about women's under-representation in political and public life, and a tour of Parliament Buildings

#### **21 Nov 11            Women into Public Life (Attendees – 16)**

and

#### **20 Mar 12            Women into Public Life (Attendees – 42)**

Women into Public Life (WIPL) is a unique partnership project between three women's organisations, Foyle Women's Information Network (FWIN), Derry/Londonderry, Second Chance Education Project for Women (SCEPW), County Donegal and Engender in Scotland. WIPL aims to address the continuing under representation of women in decision making fora and to influence the development of policies to address this issue.

The Outreach Unit worked with Women into Public Life to host an event to encourage women to get involved in political life. The group received the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation, a round table discussion with female MLAs, sharing experiences on women in public life and talking about women's under-representation in political and public life, and a tour of Parliament Buildings.

**13 Nov 12          Women in Society (Attendees – 30)**

The overall aim of the project is to continue good relations built between women aged 50 + across Ballysillan, Ligoneil and Oldpark. The project will look at women in specialised roles in Northern & Southern Ireland.

The Assembly Outreach worked with Women in Society to host an event to encourage women to get involved in political life. The group received the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation, a round table discussion with female MLAs, sharing experiences on women in public life and talking about women's under-representation in the political and public life, and a tour of Parliament Buildings

**5 Feb 13          Women Leading the Way (Attendees – 22)**

A group of women made up of cross community, cross sector, and a small number of German Muslims. Most had never visited Stormont before, and were keen to learn the basics about decision making, women's role and how the Assembly works.

This group received the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation, a tour of Parliament Buildings, a meeting with the Speaker – William Hay MLA, and a speed networking session with female MLAs. They shared experiences on women in public life, and talked about women's under-representation in the political and public life.

**10 Sep 13          Foyle Women's Information Event (Attendees – 200)**

and

**4 Sep 14          Foyle Women's Information Network (Attendees – 200)**

The aim of this event was to inform women at grassroots level about the range of services, support, advice and training that is available to them by the Assembly.

Assembly Community Connect hosted an information stand providing information on how women's groups can get involved with the Assembly and the political process.

**11 Sep 13          Women & Leadership Programme (Attendees – 11)**

This event involved a group of women from North Belfast who are completing a Women and Leadership Programme.



This group received the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation, a tour of Parliament Buildings, a speed networking session with female MLAs sharing experiences on women in public life and talking about women's under-representation in political and public life.

**5 Mar 14                      Footprints Womens Centre (Attendees – 20)**

Footprints Women's Centre has provided services for women within the Colin Neighbourhood since 1991. Responding to the needs of local women and their families, Footprints Women's Centre has filled recognised gaps and offers a relaxing and welcoming environment, where local women are encouraged and supported to build self-esteem, confidence and develop skills through participation in the range of programmes and activities on offer.

As part of the International Women's Day series of events, Assembly Community Connect visited Footprints Women's Centre and delivered the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation to the group to provide information on how they can get involved in the Assembly and the encourage them to get involved with the political process.

**6 Mar 14                      Shankill Women's Centre (Attendees – 30)**

Shankill Women's Centre formed in 1987, is located in a disadvantaged ward in North Belfast. It arose because of an expressed local need for women specific education, support and training.

As part of the International Women's Day series of events, Assembly Community Connect visited Shankill Women's Centre and delivered the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation to the group to provide information on how they can get involved in the Assembly, and to encourage them to get involved with the political process.

**13 Mar 14                      NI Rural Women's Network (Attendees – 130)**

The Northern Ireland Assembly Community Connect Team was invited to attend the Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) International Women's Day. This cross community event, funded by the Community Relations Council, was held at Glenavon Hotel, Cookstown.

Assembly Community Connect hosted an information stand to provide information on how women's groups can get involved with the Assembly and the political process.

**20 Mar 14      Women & Peace Building (Attendees – 300)**

'Sharing the Learning' Conference - involving participation of international guests from the *Foundations for Peace* network.

Assembly Community Connect was invited to attend the conference. The Assembly had an information stand at this event to provide information on how women's groups can get involved with the Assembly and the political process.

Upcoming events:

**15 Oct 14      Rural Women's Network (Attendees – Approx. 150)**

NIRWN will celebrate International Rural Women's Day in Parliament Buildings, Belfast, in partnership with the Northern Ireland Assembly through Assembly Community Connect.

This group will receive the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation and take part in a speed networking session with female MLAs sharing experiences on women in public life and talking about women's under-representation in political and public life. They will also receive a presentation on the inquiry process and practical advice for responding to inquiries to encourage participation.

**NIABT**

Past women's events:

**16 September 2010 Women in Leadership Seminar (Attendees – 60)**

Organised in partnership with the Institute of Directors, women from the businesses across Northern Ireland attended. Women in leadership positions from the business sector and politics spoke about their roles in public life and how important it is for women to have a voice in the NIABT and NI Assembly.

**11 March 2013      Women in Business Event (Attendees – 35)**

Organised in partnership with Women in Business, women from the business sector received the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation and took part in a speed networking session with female MLAs, sharing the experiences and challenges women face in public life and how important it is for women to have a voice in the NIABT and NI Assembly.

**15 May 2014      International Business Women's Conference Women in Philanthropy Breakfast & Networking Walk (Attendees – 40)**

The NIABT hosted a session during the Women in Business, International Business Women's Conference 2014. Women from Northern Ireland and across the world attended this breakfast event, which aimed to inspire women.

Upcoming events:**27 January 2015      Women in Business Event (Attendees – Approx. 50)**

To be organised in partnership with the Institute of Directors and Women in Business, women from the business sector will receive the 'How the Assembly Works' presentation and take part in a speed networking session with female MLAs, sharing the experiences and challenges women face in public life and how important it is for women to have a voice in the NIABT and NI Assembly.

**Parliamentary Outreach****14<sup>th</sup> March 2011      Commonwealth Day (Attendees – 61)**

Women, from a variety of backgrounds, with connections to the Commonwealth spoke to invited guests on the subject of 'Women as Agents of Change'. Attendees included children from local secondary schools and representatives from Commonwealth connected community groups.

**23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013 Visit by Jessica Grounds (Attendees – 9)**

The Assembly hosted a visit by Ms Grounds, the Executive Director of Running Start, a non-profit organisation that she co-founded which inspires girls and young women to run for elected office. Jessica is also the founder and principal strategist for Solid Grounds Strategy, a firm she created to consult women candidates who have never run for office before. In 2010, she co-founded Women's Campaign Consortium, a collaboration of female campaign consultants dedicated to serving women candidates.

Ms Grounds visited Dublin and Belfast in a week-long visit to discuss her work and to find out more about the role of women in politics in Northern Ireland. During her visit to Northern Ireland Ms Grounds met MLAs to discuss how to encourage women into politics and public life.

**19<sup>th</sup> May 2014 Visit by Mexico Electoral Office (Attendees – 7)**

Elections to the European Parliament took place in Northern Ireland on 22 May 2014. The delegation from INE were in Northern Ireland to participate in a joint mission to observe these elections alongside members of the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy at Queen's University Belfast. The mission had a gender focus, aiming to observe the effect of key aspects of the electoral administration, political context and institutional arrangements that affect women's participation and representation in Belfast.

During their visit to Northern Ireland they met MLAs to discuss the issues of women's participation and representation in Northern Ireland.