Northern Ireland Assembly Commission
Filming and Photography Policy and Procedure

A. Policy

1. Introduction

One of the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission's ("the Assembly Commission") strategic aims is to ensure that the public understands and values the role of the Assembly and is engaged in its work.

Parliament Buildings, as the seat of a democratically elected parliament, occupies a position of significant historical and civic importance. The purpose of this Filming and Photograph Policy and Procedure is therefore to set out the principles and procedures governing the assessment, approval, and facilitation of filming and photography within Parliament Buildings and its curtilage.

In doing so, the Policy seeks to balance openness and public engagement with the need to protect the dignity of Parliament Buildings and to ensure that Assembly business can proceed without interference or disruption.

All filming and photography must be subordinate to the Assembly's primary constitutional functions and must not impede or interfere with Assembly business.

2. Scope and application

This Policy applies to any person or organisation seeking to undertake filming or photography within Parliament Buildings or its curtilage, whether acting in an individual capacity or on behalf of a political party, public body, private organisation, charity, or other entity, regardless of whether the activity is commercial or non-commercial in nature.

This Policy does not apply to:

- Filming or photography undertaken as part of a tour of Parliament Buildings for personal, non-commercial purposes; or
- Filming or photography undertaken during a sponsored event within a designated event space, which is governed by the 'Events in Parliament Buildings and its Grounds Policy'.

Nothing in this Policy displaces or overrides the application of the Assembly Commission's 'Conduct and Behaviour of Visitors in Parliament Buildings Policy', which continues to apply concurrently to all visitors undertaking filming or photography within Parliament Buildings and its environs.

3. Governing principles

In considering requests for filming or photography, the Assembly Commission and its delegated authorities will have regard to the following principles:

- The primacy of Assembly plenary and committee business;
- The dignity, reputation, and proper use of Parliament Buildings;
- Safety, security, and access for Members, staff, visitors, and the public;
- Political impartiality and neutrality, particularly during periods of dissolution; and
- The proportionate use of Assembly resources.

4. Responsibility and decision-making

The Assembly Commission's Communications Office is responsible for receiving, assessing, and determining requests for filming and photography within Parliament Buildings and its curtilage, in consultation with other relevant business areas as appropriate.

Where necessary, the Communications Office may consult with:

- Usher Services;
- Visitor Experience Team;
- Director of Parliamentary Services;
- Clerk/Chief Executive; and/or
- Assembly Commission.

The Assembly Commission reserves the right to refuse permission for filming or photography.

Filming or photography within the Assembly Chamber is not normally permitted and, where exceptionally considered, requires the express permission of the Speaker.

5. Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy:

- **Filming** encompasses any organised recording of moving images within Parliament Buildings or its curtilage, regardless of format or intended audience, except where expressly exempted by this Policy.
- **Photography** encompasses any organised or intentional capturing of still images within Parliament Buildings or its curtilage, regardless of device, format, or intended use, except where expressly excluded by this Policy.

6. General permissions and restrictions

Filming and photography may be permitted, subject to prior approval from the Communications Office, only in those public or designated areas of Parliament Buildings approved for such use by the Assembly Commission or its delegated authorities.

Public or designated areas include:

- The Great Hall;
- The external steps of Parliament Buildings; and
- Within the curtilage of Parliament Buildings.

Such activity must not:

- Impede or disrupt Assembly plenary or committee business;
- Obstruct access or egress for Members, staff, visitors, or the public;
- Compromise safety or security; or
- Undermine the dignity or impartiality of Parliament Buildings.

Filming or photography for the purposes of direct commercial or monetary gain is not permitted.

Where filming or photography requires additional Assembly Commission resources, the Assembly may require reimbursement on a cost recovery basis.

7. Members of the Legislative Assembly

Members occupy a distinct constitutional position within Parliament Buildings as elected representatives discharging parliamentary, representational, and public-facing functions. This Policy recognises that Members (including Ministers, and party or departmental staff acting on their behalf) will, in the course of those functions, wish to undertake filming or photography within Parliament Buildings and its curtilage.

Filming and photography by Members form part of the Assembly's wider commitment to openness, transparency, and public engagement and are capable of being accommodated within the framework set out in this Policy. Such activity is not treated as exceptional, but is subject to the same overarching requirement that all filming and photography must be subordinate to the Assembly's primary constitutional functions.

Filming and photography by Members must take place only in locations that are compatible with the proper conduct of Assembly business and the use of Parliament Buildings as a working parliamentary estate, having regard in particular to circulation,

access, privacy, security, and the effective operation of parliamentary facilities. Activity that interferes with circulation, access, privacy, security, or the operation of parliamentary facilities may be restricted, redirected, or declined in accordance with this Policy.

Members (including Ministers, and party or departmental staff acting on their behalf) may undertake filming or photography without prior approval from the Communications Office in the following locations:

- The Great Hall;
- The external steps of Parliament Buildings; and
- Within the curtilage of Parliament Buildings.

Such activity must not:

- Impede or disrupt Assembly plenary or committee business;
- Obstruct access or egress for Members, staff, visitors, or the public;
- Compromise safety or security; or
- Undermine the dignity or impartiality of Parliament Buildings.

In addition to the areas listed above, limited filming or photography by Members may also take place in clearly designated areas of the first floor balcony overlooking the Great Hall, as signposted. Filming or photography must not take place in proximity to the Members' Dining Room, or at times when it could interfere with access to dining facilities. For this reason, filming or photography in balcony areas must not take place between 12.00 noon and 2.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Where a Member, including a Minister, (or their team) wishes to use:

- A room within Parliament Buildings (other than their own Member's or Ministerial office, or party office);
- The external balcony; or
- Any space not ordinarily accessible to the public;

prior permission must be obtained through the Communications Office.

Members may undertake filming or photography within their own offices or party offices within Parliament Buildings. Assembly Commission provided photographic backdrops or totems may be used for this purpose but must remain within Parliament Buildings and must not be relocated to public areas or used externally. Ministers may additionally undertake filming or photography within their own Ministerial offices within Parliament Buildings.

Filming or photography relating to party political campaigning is not permitted anywhere in Parliament Buildings or its curtilage, including Assembly rooms or formal parliamentary spaces, and all such activity remains subject to the restrictions set out elsewhere in this Policy, including during periods of dissolution.

For the purposes of day-to-day operation, the Communication's Office is responsible for determining how this Policy is applied in practice by Members, and their interpretation of its application shall be treated as authoritative. The Communications Office or Usher Services may intervene and require relocation or cessation if the conditions of this Policy are not met.

8. Elections and political activity

During the period of dissolution before an Assembly election, filming and photography for political or electoral purposes is not permitted anywhere within Parliament Buildings or its environs.

This includes filming or photography intended to promote a political party or a person seeking election to the Assembly. Media filming of political or election related material during this period is also prohibited.

Material filmed or photographed prior to dissolution must not be used in election material by candidates.

9. Drones

The use of drones is not permitted within the curtilage of Parliament Buildings or over Parliament Buildings and its immediate environs.

The Stormont Estate lies within a restricted flight zone. Any request to operate a drone elsewhere within the Estate must comply with all aviation and estate management requirements and does not override the prohibition on flying over Parliament Buildings or its curtilage.

10. Procedures

Requests for filming or photography must be made to the Communications Office, which will issue the appropriate application form and assess the request in accordance with this Policy.

Applicants will be notified by email of the decision. Where permission is refused, the decision is final.

11. Policy Review

This Policy will be reviewed every three years to ensure that it remains effective, proportionate, and aligned with the Assembly Commission's strategic objectives.

B. Operational Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions

This guidance explains how the **Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Filming and Photography Policy** operates in practice. It should be read alongside the Policy itself.

1. Do I need permission to film or take photographs?

Yes, permission is required for any organised or intentional filming or photography within Parliament Buildings or its curtilage, unless an explicit exemption applies.

Permission is not required for:

- Personal, non-commercial photography undertaken as part of a public tour of Parliament Buildings; or during an individual visit to Parliament Buildings or its curtilage
- Filming or photography undertaken as part of a sponsored event in a designated event space, where permission has already been granted under the Events in Parliament Buildings and its Grounds Policy.

All visitors must continue to comply with the Conduct and Behaviour of Visitors in Parliament Buildings Policy at all times.

2. What counts as "filming" and "photography" in practice?

Filming includes (non-exhaustive examples):

- Television or broadcast filming;
- Documentaries or factual programmes;
- Student or educational films;
- Promotional or informational films; and
- Filming for online or digital platforms.

Photography includes (non-exhaustive examples):

- Staged or organised group photographs;
- Photography for publicity or communications purposes;
- Photography to launch or publicise projects or programmes;
- Photography associated with officially sponsored events; and
- Photography of Parliament Buildings, its interiors, or its environs.

These examples are illustrative only. The need for permission is determined by purpose and organisation, not by device or format.

3. Where may filming or photography take place?

Subject to approval, filming and photography may be permitted in the following locations:

- The Great Hall;
- The steps of Parliament Buildings (down to the curtilage);
- Within the curtilage of Parliament Buildings, including the front and side lawns;
- Other locations within Parliament Buildings, such as the Assembly Library or Committee Rooms, considered on a case-by-case basis; and
- Members only – first floor balconies overlooking the Great Hall within the designated areas and times – see section 7 of Policy.

Access to specific locations will depend on:

- Assembly business requirements;
- Security considerations;
- Visitor access and safety; and
- Operational capacity on the day.

4. Is filming or photography allowed in the Assembly Chamber?

Filming or photography within the Assembly Chamber is not normally permitted.

Any request to use the Chamber requires the express permission of the Speaker, through the Speaker's Office, and will be considered only in exceptional circumstances.

5. Is commercial filming or photography allowed?

Filming or photography undertaken for direct commercial or monetary gain is not permitted.

Where filming or photography requires additional Assembly Commission resources (for example, staff support or out-of-hours access), the Assembly may require reimbursement on a cost-recovery basis.

6. What happens during Assembly elections?

During the period of dissolution before an Assembly election:

- Filming or photography for political or electoral purposes is not permitted anywhere within Parliament Buildings or its environs, including material intended to promote a political party or a person seeking election;
- Media filming of political or election related material is also prohibited; and
- Material filmed or photographed prior to dissolution must not be used in election material by candidates.

7. Are drones permitted?

No. The use of drones is not permitted:

- Within the curtilage of Parliament Buildings; or
- Over Parliament Buildings or its immediate environs.

The Stormont Estate lies within a restricted flight zone. Any request to operate a drone elsewhere on the Estate must comply with all aviation and estate management requirements and does not override this prohibition.

8. How do I apply for permission?

All requests for filming and photography in Parliament Buildings and its curtilage must be made to the Communications Office. The Communications Office will:

1. Issue the appropriate application form;
2. Assess the request against the Policy and this guidance;
3. Consult with Usher Services and other relevant business areas as required; and
4. Notify the applicant of the decision in writing.

Where permission is granted, relevant internal teams will be informed and provided with a copy of the approved application.

9. What if permission is refused?

If permission is refused, the applicant will be informed in writing.

Decisions are final. There is no right of appeal.

10. Who should I contact?

All enquiries and applications should be directed to the Communications Office (communications@niassembly.gov.uk) in the first instance.

In some cases, applicants may be directed to the Department of Finance Estate Management Unit for permissions relating to areas outside the curtilage of Parliament Buildings.