



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

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# Sitting Times in the Swedish Riksdag

## 1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared in the context of the review by the Assembly and Executive Review Committee into women in politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly<sup>1</sup>.

At evidence the session on the 7 October 2014 there was discussion on family friendly sitting times in the Swedish Riksdag<sup>2</sup>. This paper summarises procedures in the Riksdag with regard to sitting times and some comparison is made with sitting time procedures in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> Review into 'Women in Politics and the Northern Ireland Assembly': <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Committees/Assembly-and-Executive-Review/Reviews/Women-in-Politics-and-the-Northern-Ireland-Assembly/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Research and Information Service Research Paper 93/14 *The Swedish General Election 2014 and the Representation of Women*, 1 October 2014: [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/assembly\\_exec\\_review/9314.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/9314.pdf).

## 2 Sitting Times in the Riksdag and the Northern Ireland Assembly

This section summarises arrangements for sitting times in the Swedish Riksdag and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

### Sitting Times in the Riksdag

Rules of procedure for the Riksdag are determined by the Riksdag Act, which is periodically updated<sup>3</sup>.

Article 2 of Chapter 6 of the Riksdag Act states: *The Speaker determines the planning of the work of the Chamber and when the Chamber shall meet.* Sitting times or dates are not more closely defined in this law.

In general, the Riksdag meets in two sessions<sup>4</sup>:

- Autumn: mid-September to just before Christmas
- Spring: mid-January to the second half of June

The spring session includes a break at Easter<sup>5</sup>.

One week per month is usually set aside for no debates or votes in the chamber. Usually, plenary sittings are on Wednesday and Thursday, but by the end of a parliamentary session, almost all days are occupied<sup>6</sup>.

Planning for parliamentary sessions usually takes into account school holidays when determining plenary-free weeks in the month. Where possible, votes are usually planned in advance, for 4pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays, but they may also be held at other times when they cannot be scheduled ahead of time<sup>7</sup>.

Riksdag sittings are restricted to 23.00 at the latest. After that time, debate is usually suspended until the next day. In the past parliamentary year there were 134 plenary days, of which 51 had sittings beyond 18.00<sup>8</sup>.

### Sitting Times in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Procedures of the Northern Ireland Assembly are determined by Standing Orders<sup>9</sup>. Standing Order 10(2) states:

*Subject to the authority of the Business Committee to determine the time for commencement of business in plenary session, the sittings of the Assembly shall be arranged as follows –*

<sup>3</sup> Riksdag Act (2014: 801): <http://www.riksdagen.se/Global/dokument/dokument/laws/the-riksdag-act-2014.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Information from the Riksdag information service 24 October 2014.

<sup>5</sup> 'A year in the Riksdag', Riksdag website, accessed 3 November 2014: <http://www.riksdagen.se/en/How-the-Riksdag-works/What-does-the-Riksdag-do/A-year-in-the-Riksdag/>.

<sup>6</sup> Information from the Riksdag information service 24 October 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Information from the Riksdag Secretariat 28 October 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Information from the Riksdag information service 28 October 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Standing Orders of the Northern Ireland Assembly, as at June 2014: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Standing-Orders/Standing-Orders-17-06-2014.pdf>.

*Monday noon – 6.00 pm*

*Tuesday 10.30 am – 6.00 pm.*

However, Standing Order 10(3) states:

*Where business on the Order Paper has not been disposed of by 6.00 pm on Monday, the Speaker may allow business to continue until 7.00 pm or until the outstanding business is completed, whichever is earlier.*

But the Monday session may also be extended beyond 7pm through an appropriate motion, as set out in Standing Order 10(3A):

*Where it appears that Monday's business may not be completed by 7.00 pm, a motion to extend the sitting into the evening may be moved by –*

*(a) a member of the Executive Committee (in respect of outstanding Executive Committee Business);*

*(b) a member of the Business Committee (in respect of any other outstanding business).*

Table 1 indicates the number of sittings of the Northern Ireland Assembly which adjourned after 6.00pm<sup>10</sup>.

*Table 1: Number of Assembly sittings which adjourned after 6.00pm*

Month/Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
January	SUSPENSION	2	3	1	3	0	1	4
February		4	3	2	8	3	4	5
March		3	3	4	5	3	2	5
April		2	1	2	DISSOLUTION	0	3	3
May	1	2	2	1	0	2	5	1
June (up to July recess)	3	4	3	7	0	5	7	5
July	SUMMER RECESS							
August								
September	1	0	4	1	1	4	3	3
October	4	2	1	1	2	4	3	4
November	2	2	6	3	2	6	4	
December	1	2	1	1	1	0	3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>	

Standing Order 10(9) states that the Business Office determines dates for recess, with no further stipulation. In practice, recess dates tend to coincide with school holidays, with recesses for Halloween, Christmas, Easter and the summer<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Information from the Northern Ireland Assembly Business Office 23 October 2014.

<sup>11</sup> See recess dates for 2014-15: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/ABOUT-THE-ASSEMBLY/General-Information/Recess-Dates/>.

### 3 Summary

Arrangements for sitting times in both the Swedish Riksdag and the Northern Ireland Assembly include family-friendly provisions<sup>12</sup>. However, both legislatures have processes that can suspend such arrangements where parliamentary business determines.

Provisions for sitting times for both legislatures are summarised in Table 2<sup>13</sup>.

*Table 2: Provisions for Sitting Times in the Riksdag and the Northern Ireland Assembly*

<b>Provision</b>	<b>Riksdag</b>	<b>Northern Ireland Assembly</b>
Usual sitting days	Wednesday and Thursday	Monday and Tuesday
Time limit to sittings	23.00	18.00
Recess	Christmas, Summer, Easter	Halloween, Christmas, Easter, Summer
Plenary-free week per month	Yes	No
Scheduled voting times	Yes: 4pm on sitting days	No

<sup>12</sup> For a summary of family-friendly procedures, see Research and Information Service Briefing Paper 46/12 *Family-friendly practices* 10 February 2012:

<http://assist.assemblyni.gov.uk/services/rsrchlib/products/researchpubs/dept/procedures/2012/mccaffrey4612.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> A calendar for the forthcoming year in the Riksdag is available on the Riksdag website, 'Kalender':

<http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Start/Kalendern/?icalid=81391#81391>; the Business Diary for the Northern Ireland Assembly is available on the Northern Ireland Assembly website, 'Business Diary':  
<http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/assemblybusiness/businessdiary.aspx>.