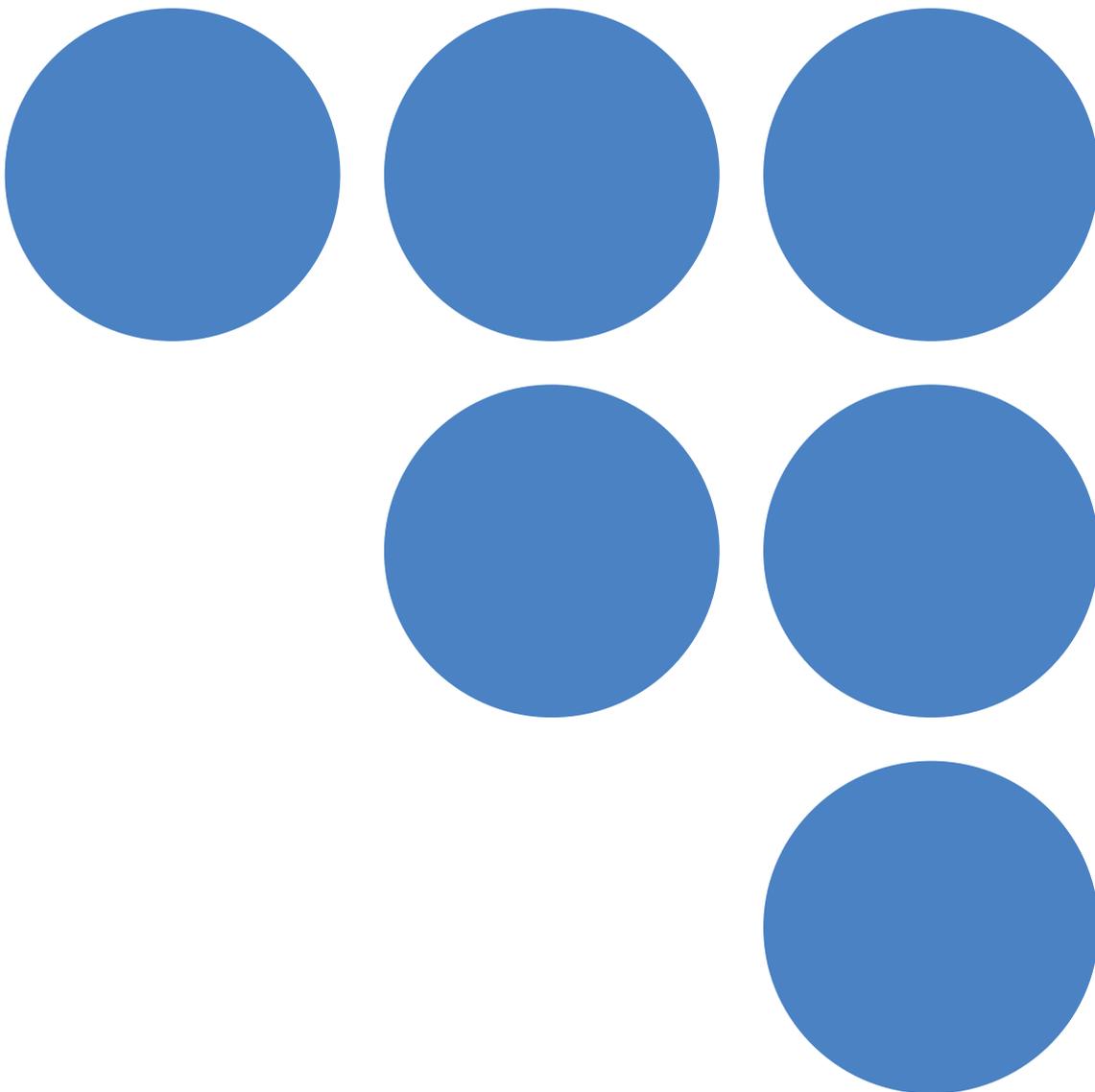




Northern Ireland
Assembly

Engagement Strategy for the Northern Ireland Assembly

May 2010



Working for You

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Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to set out the strategy by which the Northern Ireland Assembly (“the Assembly”) will improve further its engagement with the general public. To put it simply, engagement is the process of giving the public a voice and enabling them to contribute to the democratic process.

An essential element of engagement is the link between an MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and a constituent; this strategy sets out a vision of how that relationship will be strengthened further.

However the beneficiary of engagement will ultimately be the democratic process, as represented by the Assembly.

This engagement strategy has been approved by the Assembly Commission.

Introduction

A key recommendation of the “Northern Ireland Assembly Secretariat Review Report” was that the Engagement Directorate “aim to develop a strategic plan for engagement and outreach by December 2008”. An internal, official-level engagement strategy working group was established early in 2008 to develop:

- A corporate understanding of engagement and outreach; and
- High level corporate objectives and key performance indicators to feed into the 2008/09 Assembly corporate plan.

The work was framed by the purpose of the Assembly Commission, which is:

“To support the Assembly and its Members in their role as elected representatives and legislators, and to facilitate engagement between the Assembly and the public.”

and designed to support the Commission’s vision of:

“An Assembly that strengthens democracy and engages the people (of Northern Ireland) in creating a better future for all.”

The Commission has also set out a number of strategic priorities through which its vision will be accomplished in order to achieve its purpose, including:

“The development of a dynamic and responsive strategy for outreach and public engagement.”

As a result of the working group’s research, a draft outreach and engagement strategy was presented to the Commission in April 2008. The Commission agreed the strategy and confirmed that further baseline research should be initiated with further consideration being given to setting the context for the strategy. Following a number of further workshops and discussions, the Commission approved the engagement strategy in January 2009.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the Assembly’s strategy for outreach and public engagement during the period 2008 to 2013, with a review in 2011. The aim is to make significant progress on the implementation of the strategy by 2011.

This strategy will be the subject of a public consultation exercise.

2.1 Background

The concept of parliamentary engagement is relatively new to Northern Ireland due to the legacy of direct rule – as a result there is a perceived disconnect between politics/democracy and the public. Therefore the challenge is to help to develop and strengthen our new democratic and political culture. In the context of this strategy, engagement refers to the process of giving the public a voice and involving them in the democratic process.

The Northern Ireland Assembly was established in 1998 as a result of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, subsequently enshrined in legislation as the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Following further political discussions in 2006, the St Andrews Agreement, subsequently enshrined in legislation as the Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006, led to the restoration of the Assembly in May 2007.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 resulted in the establishment of the Assembly Commission (“the Commission”). The Commission’s purpose is to support the Assembly and its MLAs in their role as elected representatives and legislators, and to facilitate engagement between the Assembly and the public.”

The Commission’s vision is of:

“an Assembly that strengthens democracy and engages the people in creating a better future for all”.

A public sense of perceived disempowerment or disconnect from Government in Northern Ireland has been in evidence since 1998. The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland has reported¹ that turnout at Assembly elections has been in decline, dropping from 69.95% in 1998, to 63.98% in 2003 and to 62.87% in 2007. In addition, over half of Northern Ireland adults believe “people have no say in what government does” – 55% in 2007². A further quarter of adults have no view, and less than one-fifth of adults believe that “people have a say in what government does”.

The process of establishing the Assembly in 1998 arose from a compromise between competing constitutional preferences. The restoration of the Assembly in 2007 still sits against this background, and this engagement strategy is informed by:

- The commitment of MLAs to engage, involve and include the public so that participatory democracy is achieved; and
- The need to enable the public to feel that they have a say in what government does.

Since the restoration of the Assembly, and over much of the period of suspension, the “Assembly” has been used as an all-encompassing term for

1 Electoral Office for Northern Ireland: http://www.eoni.org.uk/percentage_poll-4.pdf

2 Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey: http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2007/Role_of_Government/GOVNOSAY.html

political settlement in Northern Ireland. This is evident in academic studies and in some media reports that fail to distinguish the functions of the Assembly from those of the Northern Ireland Executive. The media reflects public understanding, and the Assembly needs to establish its identity as opposed to a group term which includes the Assembly and Northern Ireland Executive however the settlement that brought a return of devolution has more than 90% of MLAs belonging to parties that form the Northern Ireland Executive. This situation presents unique challenges to the Assembly in establishing a public understanding of its institutional role and independent identity

2.2 Challenges ...

2.2.1 ... facing devolution ...

In general, the public do not distinguish between the Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive. It is therefore important that the Assembly has a clear, consistent and long-term strategy for engaging with the general public, ultimately leading to an increased awareness of the role of the Assembly and a strengthened democracy.

The magnitude of this challenge should not be underestimated, and significant and long-term investment will need to be made in order to increase the public's understanding of the role of the Assembly.

2.2.2 ... facing the Assembly ...

Engagement with the public presents a challenge for the Assembly. Enabling people to engage with the Assembly is a particular challenge for a working institution. The primary function of the Assembly Commission is to support MLAs in their work in plenary sessions, committees and constituencies – we must not lose sight of this essential function.

The Assembly already finds it difficult to meet existing demands for access, particularly to committees. Yet greater public understanding of the role of the Assembly, and fostering a sense that the Assembly welcomes visitors, must be desirable for a democratically representative body.

Various options for the addition of suitable accommodation are being considered as part of an accommodation strategy being developed by the Assembly Commission, however realistically the development of a new building (either standalone or as an extension to Parliament Buildings), is likely to take at least five years. Consequently it is not feasible to delay the implementation of this engagement strategy until such work is considered, and a decision made. As part of the development of an integrated accommodation strategy, a spatial audit of the existing accommodation is

underway. This audit will inform potential options for improving the spaces and facilities available for engagement activities.

In this engagement strategy, educational visitors are the priority. Awareness and understanding of the Assembly should begin at school. The aim is to enable as many school children and young adults as possible to have the opportunity to visit the Assembly as part of the experience of learning about our democratic institutions and processes and how they work.

The existing Education Service, although highly appreciated and effective, is hampered by the constraints of its current inadequate facilities. **A dedicated space will be provided within Parliament Buildings to provide a wider range of programmes for more schools and for more schoolchildren, as well as teachers and adult learners.** This could also act as a hub for the strategy of engagement with the public.

However, this strategy emphasises that learning is not dependent on a visit to Parliament Buildings – the home of the Assembly. **Learning on the work of the Assembly will be facilitated through a Northern Ireland-wide programme of educational activity, together with a satellite structure to deliver this.**

The Assembly's education programme will use a balance of inward and outward programmes to ensure that schools based in, or in close proximity to areas of geographical and social disadvantage, are particularly targeted. **Consideration will be given to subsidising inward programmes through the development of a travel scheme, to enable and encourage schools in areas of geographical and social disadvantage to travel to Parliament Buildings.** This may require discussion with the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Education.

An assessment of the Assembly's Education Service will be undertaken, and be overseen by an educational advisory group, to

- Review and update as necessary current materials, resources and methodologies;
- Produce more sophisticated age specific learning resources, including hard copy and web based;
- Review, and make proposals for, pre-work, delivery and follow-up; and to
- Determine levels of satisfaction.

The educational advisory group will continue to advise, in the longer term, on the development of the Education Service and associated facilities.

2.2.3 ... facing our society ...

In May 2005 the report of the Hansard Society commission on the communication of parliamentary democracy (the "Puttnam commission"),

set up to examine how Parliament presents itself and is presented by others to the public, concluded that the public and Parliament had “stopped communicating”³. The failure of Parliament to connect with the public had contributed towards:

“... public disengagement and cynicism, declining electoral turnout and low knowledge of, and satisfaction with, Parliament.”⁴

Many of our young people have little understanding of how the political system works or the dominant figures within it. Almost a quarter of 18-24 year olds strongly agree with the statement that “people like me have no say in what the government does”. Given the fact that this generation has grown up during the most peaceful period in Northern Ireland over the last forty years, the challenge of strengthening democracy, and creating a better future for all cannot be underestimated.

Therefore it must be recognised that this engagement strategy cannot be achieved by the Assembly alone. The other institutions need to play their part in strengthening democracy. It is important that the government departments as well as local government play their part. In addition, other bodies including the Electoral Office and the Electoral Commission have a key role to play in strengthening democracy. Discussions will be initiated with a wider group of relevant organisations in order to develop a comprehensive and cross-cutting approach to engagement.

2.2.4 ... improving access ...

To quote the Puttnam commission:

“The public have a right to expect a Parliament ... which reaches out to all citizens and invites participation and interaction.”⁵

Improving public access to the Assembly, and knowledge and understanding of its work and role, is a primary objective of this engagement strategy. Whilst recognising that MLAs have primary responsibility for maintaining links between the Assembly and the public, the Assembly Commission has set out the development of a dynamic and responsive strategy for outreach and public engagement as a key strategic priority.

Any new project to develop visitor services will face the challenge of how to improve access to the Assembly whilst ensuring that it remains a secure and effective workplace. The first priority for the Commission must be to ensure that the Assembly is able to conduct its business effectively and to function without interference, that the services required by MLAs to carry out their work are provided, and that the integrity of Parliament Buildings, is maintained.

3 Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye, p 12

4 Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye, p 2

5 Members Only? Parliament in the Public Eye, p 2

Whilst there is already severe pressure on accommodation within Parliament Buildings, the Assembly is a working institution, and while the Commission is committed to the development of facilities for visitors, the provision of facilities that enable the Assembly and its MLAs to operate effectively must take precedence.

2.3 Defining Success

It is difficult to measure the level of engagement directly, however in order for the implementation of this strategy to be successful it needs to contribute to strengthening democracy and engaging the people in creating a better future for all.

An annual audit of public engagement will be undertaken to measure the level of public engagement with the Assembly on an ongoing basis. This could be based on the methodology developed by the Hansard Society and the Electoral Commission. In particular, a number of key metrics will be measured, for example:

- Transparency of proceedings of the Assembly;
- Youth awareness of the political process;
- Number of inward / outward visitors;
- Number of inward / outward events;
- Number of members of the public attending plenary and committee meetings; and
- Level of media coverage.

In addition, it would also be important to measure public understanding of the role of the Assembly, however there are many external factors which will impact on this particular measure. Based on the outputs/outcomes of the audit of public engagement, a number of focus groups will be established. It is likely that 8 to 12 groups will be identified from the survey. The purpose of establishing these groups will be to ensure that the tools which the Assembly is using to engage with them are appropriate, and that progress can be tracked.

In addition to measures of success, it would be anticipated that the perceived level of engagement will have increased significantly by 2013, as potentially described in the Annual Report for that year:

“The public’s perception of the role of the Assembly in strengthening democracy and creating a better future for all has been considerably strengthened. During its first six years of operation, the Assembly has become increasingly externally focussed – whilst delivering its core function of supporting MLAs in their work in plenary sessions, committees and constituencies. The Assembly’s external focus has manifested itself through a programme of outreach, targeting a number of sectors but focussing

on education. A wide variety of educational groups now visit Parliament Buildings, encouraged by travel subsidies.

As a result, the public has a variety of mechanisms through which they can interact with the Assembly, including the new website. Media reporting of the work of the Assembly has also increased significantly due to greater partnership working with the Business Office and committees. All committee proceedings are now broadcast live. Access to Parliament Buildings has been improved: a visitor centre has been established primarily for the benefit of educational visitors. In addition the media and accredited lobbyists have been given significantly improved access to Parliament Buildings. The Assembly has been publicly recognised locally, nationally and internationally as leading the way in improving engagement between a legislature and the public.”

Implementation

This Engagement Strategy is based around 4 principles:

1. Engaging MLAs
2. Engaging committees
3. Engaging channels of influence in order to
4. Engage the public

Engaging MLAs

4.1.1 Supporting MLAs

Supporting MLAs in their plenary work and in committees is a key function of the Assembly Commission, and as stated elsewhere, it is important not to lose sight of this essential function. Whilst the plenary proceedings of the Assembly remain a key focus for MLAs and their staff, much of the major scrutinising work is carried out in committees. This requires the effective and efficient capture and dissemination of the deliberations and conclusions of committees.

A by-product of this is the opportunity to improve understanding and visibility of the key function of committees outside of the Assembly, both among the media and constituents who may not appreciate where much of the significant work of the Assembly now takes place.

The onus is on MLAs, individually and collectively, to ensure that the Assembly finds ways of communicating why they (and it) are important in their own right. Therefore it is essential that the Assembly Commission ensures that MLAs have access to relevant awareness and development programmes to ensure that are able to fulfil the many and varied aspects of their position. For example, induction programmes, running a small business, the legislative process etc. **A MLA continuous professional development coordinator will be appointed, who will be responsible for the development and implementation of a MLA continuous professional development strategy.**

In order to ensure that MLAs have timely access to the research and information they require, an enquiries desk will be staffed in close proximity to the Assembly chamber.

4.1.2 Constituency Offices

The Assembly provides MLAs with funding to enable them to open constituency offices. There is significant potential for constituency offices to provide information on the business of the Assembly, particularly through the distribution of printed publications. This would require the support of the MLA.

4.1.3 All Party Assembly Groups and All Party Groups

All Party Assembly Groups and All Party Groups provide a forum by which MLAs and outside organisations and individuals can meet to discuss shared interests in a particular cause or subject.

Groups whose membership comprises of MLAs only are known as All Party Assembly Groups. Groups whose membership is open to both MLAs and non-MLAs are known as All Party Groups.

A number of All Party Assembly Groups and All Party Groups have been established, however it is unclear as to the general level of understanding of the public on the both entities, and to how the public can engage with them. **Consideration will be given to making additional information on All Party Assembly Groups and All Party Groups available, and to providing additional media and web-based support.** In addition, consideration should be given to removing the distinction between All Party Assembly Groups and All Party Groups.

Engaging Committees

5.1 Introduction

Strand One of the Belfast ('Good Friday') Agreement (1998) set out the scope of the democratic institutions in Northern Ireland. In particular, paragraph 9 stated that:

"The committees will have a scrutiny, policy development and consultation role with respect to the department with which each is associated, and will have a role in the initiation of legislation"

In addition, paragraph 28 stated that:

"Legislation could be initiated by an individual, a committee or a minister."

Committees normally meet in Parliament Buildings however during the past year committees have made significant efforts to engage with communities in their local areas. This has focussed on the quality of engagement, for example, discussing issues relevant to the fishing community during a committee meeting in Portaferry. By its very nature, some of the work undertaken by committees is of necessity routine, and therefore it is essential that committees continue to focus on the quality of engagement rather than the quantity.

Within the Assembly, a major focus of the this engagement strategy will be to refocus the mechanisms by which the Assembly's Research & Library and Media services support the work of committees. A recurring theme of the engagement strategy is the central role that committees play in the effectiveness of the Assembly. However the public and media understanding of the function, role and importance of committees is low.

A Committee Coordinating Group will be established from Assembly secretariat staff from both the Clerking & Reporting (Director of Clerking, Clerk Assistants and Editor of Debates) and Engagement (Director of Engagement, Head of Media Services, Head of Outreach and Head of Research and Library) Directorates to ensure that committees are fully supported in all aspects of their work.

Committees have made significant progress over the past year to improve engagement. For example there has been an increased number of meetings held outside Parliament Buildings, together with other innovations such as 'speed dating' events. An essential element of this strategy will be the continued leadership of staff in the Clerking & Reporting Directorate in making this important dimension of the strategy work effectively.

5.2 Research & Library Service

It is essential that the Assembly's Research & Library Service continues to provide a world-class service to committees – both in terms of ongoing specific issues to inform the committee workplans, but also in terms of horizon scanning to the widest possible extent, and working with committee chairs to ensure that the subjects considered by committees are fully informed. Research has been structured into four teams, each led by a Senior Research Officer (SRO). Going forward, SROs will take a central role in horizon scanning, and in working closely with SRO colleagues, their teams, and their peers in other legislatures in order to support committees. Research Officers must continue to work closely with committee chairs in order to ensure that Research & Library Service outputs are timely, of a high quality, and are fit for MLA's purpose.

5.3 Media Service

The Assembly's Media Service will increasingly play an essential role both in informing the media and stakeholders on the work of committees well in advance. It is evident that, as currently structured and staffed, the Media Service does not have the capacity to support committees adequately. Therefore staff will be appointed in order to build capacity to support raising the profile of committee work specifically, and the Assembly in general. The Media Service will have full responsibility and primacy for liaising with the media on all media related matters. A key enabler of this engagement strategy will be a single, consistent and unified interface with the media.

Members of the media have frequently commented on the relative lack of availability of information on the Assembly in comparison to other legislatures. In particular they have cited the inability to access information on the work of committees and the Assembly from a single source, and are reliant on developing relationships with committee clerks. This is an unsatisfactory solution, both from the perspective of the Assembly and the media. **A weekly briefing will be provided to members of the media on the programme of plenary, committee and commission business.** This will be a factual rather than subjective briefing. This briefing will be accompanied by a weekly press release outlining forthcoming business, and a summary of business during the previous week. This will necessitate committee staff providing the required information in a timely manner. In addition, this will also necessitate close liaison with both the Business Committee and the Chairpersons Liaison Group.

In addition to providing information on the work of committees, the briefings will provide information on forthcoming business, the work of the Commission, and any other relevant matters.

5.4 Committee Facilities

Due to the nature of the work committees undertake, they are of significant interest both to the media, to stakeholders and to the public. However

currently, unless a committee is in open session and gathering evidence, only a limited record of committee meetings is available.

Qualitative research has been carried out on committee facilities in other legislatures, and has concluded that committee rooms in Parliament Buildings are unsatisfactory in a number of aspects. Due to the small size of committee rooms, there is space for only a small number of members of the public, and no space for pre-briefing of witnesses. A key aspect of the Assembly's ongoing accommodation strategy will be to give consideration to the requirement of committees.

A number of measures will be undertaken in order to further improve the support provided to committees, including:

- **Developing an additional committee room in Parliament Buildings with video conferencing facilities and increased seating for the public;**
- **Centralising the arrangement and management of all meetings, either in Parliament Buildings or externally;**
- **Implementing broadcasting facilities in all committee rooms, and live streaming /recorded broadcasting of all committees in public session (in order to allow increased numbers of the public to 'virtually' attend meetings);**
- **Meeting of statutory committees outside of Parliament Buildings at least once per session, with a key driver being the quality of engagement;**
- **Using Internet technologies to allow the public to feed directly into committee inquiries and consultations on draft legislation; and**
- **Considering the role of partnership libraries.**

Engaging Channels of Influence

As highlighted elsewhere, the public (and to an extent the media) do not necessarily discern between the function and roles of the Assembly and the Northern Ireland Executive. Historically, the Assembly has adopted a reactive approach to communication in general, and to media relations in particular. However if the Assembly is to genuinely and transparently hold the Northern Ireland Executive to account, it needs to have a distinct, stronger identity as a separate body. This will require the Speaker and the Clerk/Director General to have a greater public profile than has previously been the case.

6.1 News Media

6.1.1 Introduction

In a democracy the public have a right to understand what the Assembly does and why it does it. The Power inquiry concluded that the media – television, newspapers and radio – remains the single most important source of information that the public draws upon for political news and information.

Demonstrating how the Assembly considers issues and scrutinises legislation, in a way that suits the needs of the media, is key to maximising media coverage of its business. Much progress remains to be made with publicising and communicating the work of committees. However, the Assembly chamber is the heart of the Assembly. Popular perceptions of the role of the Assembly would be transformed if the scheduling of debates was signposted more effectively in order to help drive the media's news agenda.

6.1.2 Media Access

In comparison with other legislatures, members of the media have relatively limited access to Parliament Buildings. Irrespective of the reasons – current and past – for this situation, the rules and guidelines should reflect the ability of the media to have the necessary access to the legislature and its proceedings, and should not be unduly limiting, even where there are real logistic factors to be overcome. Currently the media has access to the Great Hall, the press facilities in the basement, the Press Bar and the Basement canteen, and can film only in the Great Hall or outside Parliament Buildings. To access any other part of the building, the media must be escorted.

Members of the media will be provided with greater but controlled access to Parliament Buildings, in order to improve the level of coverage of the proceedings of the Assembly.

It should be noted that an Assembly broadcasting development strategy is in the process of being developed, which will build on the existing investment on Assembly broadcasting systems and consider new technological innovations.

6.1.3 Development of an Assembly Regional Media Strategy

The Assembly gets reasonable coverage of its proceedings in the large circulation Belfast-based newspapers: Belfast Telegraph, Irish News and News Letter. However coverage of activities outside of the Greater Belfast area is primarily reliant on individual MLAs highlighting their work to local press.

In order to improve regional coverage of Assembly activity, an individual with journalistic experience will be recruited in order to provide articles for regional newspapers and to enable reporting on the business of the Assembly, as it impacts on their locality. In addition, the Speaker will hold regular meetings with the editors of every regional newspaper in order to highlight the role and proceedings of the Assembly and specific plans for engagement at a local level.

6.2 Organisational Partners

The Assembly needs to work with intermediaries and partners who can reach various groups within the population better than the Assembly itself could do directly. Priority groups are teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum authorities, website owners who could re-use Assembly content, organisations with an interest in the Assembly (including non-governmental organisations, trade unions and business).

There are a range of unbiased third parties: the voluntary sector, not for profit organisations, charitable institutions, consumer groups and government bodies which routinely wish to engage with the Assembly, and currently there is no structured mechanism for such groups to do so. In addition, there are a range of biased intermediaries: commercial lobbying organisations, which either directly have a commercial interest in engaging with MLAs, or may do so indirectly through a representative body which could be a charitable and/or not for profit organisation.

It is important that partner organisations are provided with access to the Assembly, both in order to engage with MLAs and committees, but also to ensure that the Assembly's message is communicated in turn to their members and/or stakeholders. However, due to the number of organisations involved, and their interest in engaging with the Assembly, it is not feasible to permit universal access. **As a first step, a communications strategy will be developed, to include consideration of options for future engagement.**

6.3 Young People

6.3.1 Assembly Youth Forum

In addition to engagement between the Assembly and the public, the Assembly has recognised the importance of engaging with key groups in order to understand key issues affecting them. The Assembly is developing a good relations strategy in order to engage with these groups.

Building on the theme of education elsewhere in this engagement strategy, the Assembly will focus on engaging with young people. **A youth forum will be established to consider, debate and make recommendations on issues of particular importance to young people.**

The youth forum will be comprised of young people and representatives of relevant umbrella groups, together with representatives from the Assembly.

The remit of the youth forum will be:

- To give young people better access to information and understanding of the role of the Assembly;
- To provide a forum through which MLAs and committees can be provided with information on issues or concerns that affect young people;
- To help the Assembly to better understand the dynamics of this group; and
- To help provide mutually beneficial networking opportunities.

The youth forum will meet typically on a quarterly basis, and will develop an action plan and monitoring framework. The forum will additionally be supported using Internet technologies. The Assembly will provide secretarial support and accommodation for meetings.

The youth forum will culminate annually in a youth assembly which will be held in the Assembly chamber, the outcome of which will be a draft motion(s) for consideration by the Assembly's Business Committee during a plenary session. This may require a change to the Assembly's Standing Orders.

6.3.2 Assembly Internship Programme

The Northern Ireland Assembly is the most important political institution in Northern Ireland. **An internship programme will be developed to offer university graduates the opportunity to experience working in the Assembly.**

The Assembly internship programme will be structured along the following lines:

- There will be four to eight 12-month internships per annum;
- Internships will be open to graduates in any subject;
- Selection will include an application, initial sift, exam and interview;

- The internships will include nine months working in core business areas e.g. Bill Office, committees, working with MLAs etc., and a three month research project, supervised by a research officer; and
- Overseen by the Assembly's External Liaison Unit.

The Assembly has also operated a placement scheme for third year university students. This scheme will continue to operate along side the internship programme.

6.4 Strategic Partnerships

In order to achieve the Assembly Commission's vision, a wider number of organisations need to be involved through the development of a wider partnership. These include the Northern Ireland Executive, government departments, the Electoral Commission, the Electoral Office, and local councils. In addition, there are a number of other organisations, for example the Hansard Society, with whom it would be advantageous to develop links.

Engaging the Public

There are three aspects to engaging the public:

- Using the web
- Welcoming visitors
- Reaching out

7.1 Using the Web

“Technology can play a pivotal role in helping strengthen and renew democracy and its relevance to citizens. It can bring often distant Parliaments much more directly into our daily lives – improving democracy, visibility and accountability.”⁶

The internet is rapidly becoming the preferred source of information and much communication for young people, and it is already an essential source for journalists and for professionals in major businesses. It offers the Assembly a future in its own hands for informing and engaging with the public.

However the Assembly website is not fit for purpose and needs to be completely overhauled. If the Assembly thinks it is important in our society, this is its shop window, unmediated and direct. It is where resources and professionalism should focus and its existence should be widely publicised.

The existing website has been in place for some years, and while it is content rich, it is functionally and presentationally poor, and provides limited integration with new Assembly capabilities (e.g. the Assembly information management and broadcasting systems).

Building on the audit of engagement and focus group work set out earlier, **the Assembly website will be completely redeveloped**. This will be at least a two-year programme of work, and will require the development of an outline business case and an output based specification by an external consultant.

A redesign of the website must enable the public to gain a full understanding of the role of the Assembly, its workings and its proceedings, and will include:

- A review of all of the information on the current website. For example, it should be possible to enable the virtual visitor to see more of the interior of Parliament Buildings and offer an opportunity for the public to leave online comments;
- Improved presentation of the rich content already available to the public, in a manner which meets their needs;

- Building on and exploiting the Assembly's investment in technology:
 - Broadcasting equipment replacement project; and
 - Assembly Information Management System;
- Building on and exploiting educational information technology developments such as the Department of Education's Classroom 2000 project to computerise the classroom;
- Providing an intuitive website that explains what the Assembly does, is easily searchable, well used and appreciated and integrates video, audio and text;
- Providing MLA profiles, speeches in the Assembly chamber, voting record, written and oral questions asked (together with answers), links to the official report regarding their contribution in the Assembly chamber, membership of committees, presentations made at external events (in their capacity as a member of a committee);
- Providing a single content management system which will be used to populate both the Assembly intranet and internet sites;
- Driving responsibility for content management into the various business areas of the Assembly; and
- To build on the experiences of other legislatures with similar projects.
- Additional functionality could include:
 - Live streaming / playback of plenary sessions and committee meetings.
 - E-petitioning;
 - Use of technology to allow the public to feed directly into committee inquiries and consultations on draft legislation;
 - Book seats at committee meetings;
 - Subscription service;
 - Text message alerts; and
 - Contact your MLA.

7.2 Welcoming the Public

7.2.1 Introduction

The Assembly hosts a wide range of visitors each year through its Education Service, events, MLA sponsored tours, public tours, the public and visitors on business either with MLAs or with the Secretariat.

A number of measures have been undertaken to improve the security and safety of MLAs, staff and visitors. These measures included the installation of railings around Parliament Buildings and the construction of a search facility. Whilst the case for the new arrangements is clear, the perception of some MLAs, staff, visitors and the media is that Parliament Buildings has become

less welcoming. A review of the delivery of security and related services is due to commence in early 2009, and this review will help to inform how the perception of some MLAs, staff, visitors and media can be reversed.

However, the reality is that Parliament Buildings now receives greater numbers of visitors than ever, and greater numbers of educational events. In addition, significant investment has been made to provide improved facilities for disabled MLAs, staff and visitors.

Unfortunately, a number of minor incidents have been widely reported, and have continued to prolong the perception that Parliament Buildings is unwelcoming. In addition, visitors have limited access within Parliament Buildings, and practically no access to any facilities.

In order to work towards reducing this perception, and to ensure that the Assembly is perceived to be a welcoming institution, **improvements will be made to the operation of the Assembly in Parliament Buildings, including:**

- Giving consideration to how the welcome that the public currently receives can be improved further.
- Providing a ticket office for public tours of Parliament Buildings.
- Improving the coordination of event bookings, including public tours, MLA tours, educational visits, Speaker's inward and outward visits and events, MLA events, ministerial events and committee room bookings.
- Centralising the planning and delivery of all events in the Parliament Buildings.
- Centralising responsibility for the logistics of planning and delivering the event in order to allow other Assembly directorates to concentrate on their core activities, which would include leading on the content of the event.
- Introduce an electronic centralised booking and information system for all visits and visitors, to produce adequate management information to facilitate planning and monitoring, as well as daily operations.

Other improvements will be implemented within Parliament Buildings, including:

- Developing a public café.
- Reviewing all material for visitors.
- Enhancing visitor orientation and information through the provision of improved signage and increased staff intervention – externally and internally.
- Briefing all public-facing staff daily.

7.2.2 Tours

The tour programme will be refined to offer the following:

- **MLA tours:** MLAs if available will “meet and greet” their group in a dedicated meeting room, the group will be taken on a guided tour by a Parliament tour guide and will be returned to the room for a question and answer session with their MLA. This service will be provided on demand (with advance notification) on business days. On non-business days, the tour will be incorporated as part of the general public tours programme.
- **Education tours:** Staff will “meet and greet” school groups in a dedicated meeting room. They will be taken on a specialised, tailored education tour/workshop by Education Service staff and returned to the room for a question and answer session with their MLA, if available. This service will be provided on demand during school term time (weekdays, session periods only).
- **General public tour:** Tour covering the history and architecture of Parliament Buildings but also raising awareness of the Assembly. This will be provided as a fixed programme on non-business days.

7.2.3 Education Service

Parliament Buildings is not a museum; it is the home of a working Assembly.

Visitor facilities should not compromise the efficiency and effectiveness of the Assembly’s work. The public is entitled to see their Assembly in action and to expect an open welcome with guidance and information to make their visit productive and memorable. However, the severe pressure on accommodation within Parliament Buildings means that it is necessary for us to prioritise among our visitors.

Parliament Buildings hosts a very large number of events each year, and in order to ensure the availability of suitable accommodation, events are typically booked very far in advance. This results in little, if any, suitable accommodation being available if an event needs to take place at short notice. In particular, the Assembly’s Education Service continually suffers from a chronic shortage of suitable space, and this strategy argues that the service must be a priority when it comes to being able to book accommodation.

The strategic priority of engaging the public cannot be achieved in the context of current services provided to visitors, particularly those provided by the Education Service which are already at capacity. As the Assembly promotes the limited facilities and resources it has to offer, the demand for visitor services provided by the website, Education Service and Media Service is likely to increase beyond current capacity. The Education Service in particular will not be able to continue to expand its services without a dedicated teaching space.

The current service for visitors, if it continued as it is, could not achieve the level of engagement and connection with the public that is necessary, for the following reasons:

- A single room is available as a dedicated teaching space, located on the third floor, resulting in limited capacity. Consequently, there is a lengthy waiting list.
- The lack of space and dedicated facilities for the Education Service mean that it will be difficult for the service to expand its current activities for visiting schools groups despite strong demand. The Education Service is already competing with MLAs for space in meeting rooms to cope with the demand from schools for programmed visits.
- The Education Service is unable to adequately cater for students with special needs, informal learners, adult learners or community groups.

To do nothing would bring into question the Assembly's commitment, through its strategic plans, to engaging with the public. Some improvement in services is necessary in order to provide both a signal of commitment and an opportunity to deliver substantial change. It is important that the Assembly is not seen as exclusive, unwilling to open up and welcome the public who pay for its upkeep. This could be damaging to the reputation of the Assembly.

Young people are widely regarded as a particularly disengaged group and therefore likely to benefit from participation in Education Service programmes, whether or not they are in formal education. Education has the potential to provide the most effective means by which young people can be helped to understand the work of the Assembly and become interested and engaged in the democratic process and continue to be so in later life.

However with its current level of resources, the Education Service is not able to meet the current demand for its programmes or reach out to those schools which are either unaware of its services or unable to visit the Assembly. It is important that voters of the future are engaged in the work and role of the Assembly in order to promote a lifetime's interest and participation in the democratic process. The best way to reach most young people is within an organised learning environment, with direct relevance to what they are being taught every day in the classroom.

Consequently, the highest priority for an improvement in visitor services must be to provide dedicated facilities for educational groups. If the Education Service is to expand its activities and programmes at Parliament Buildings it should also reproduce these new activities online. The redevelopment of the Assembly website provides an ideal opportunity to make information more accessible for people interested in the democratic process and how the Assembly works, particularly for those who are unable, or disinclined, to visit Parliament Buildings.

The Education Service would also like to involve organisations outside of formal education in partnerships in order to reach as many young people as

possible in activities such as workshops and seminars, but at the moment it is difficult for the Service to arrange these kind of activities on a regular basis due to a lack of suitable learning accommodation. Focussing on educational or youth groups, with similar expectations and needs to that of schools, would enable the Education Service to make maximum use of its facilities without having to clear down displays or exhibits created by school children.

The time and cost of travel to Parliament Buildings are disincentives to schools visiting from further away. Schools booking the programmes run by the Education Service are predominantly from the east of Northern Ireland.

Facilities that are offered at the Assembly should be made as accessible as possible to schools from all over Northern Ireland. Therefore school visits to Parliament Buildings from more remote constituencies will be subsidised, and a pilot scheme will be introduced for schools to ensure that schools that have never visited Parliament Buildings are given priority in the next financial year.

Subject to the development of the Assembly's accommodation strategy, a visitor centre will be established within Parliament Buildings, to include a permanent exhibition explaining the work and role of the Assembly, together with a retail/bookshop, a dedicated education room and a 'mini' Assembly chamber.

The visitor centre would:

- Provide a welcome to visitors;
- Provide an interesting and friendly environment;
- Provide Internet kiosks so that people can access the website while they are there.
- Make the Assembly more accessible, allowing visitors to see at least something of what the Assembly is and does without necessarily having to visit the galleries, committees or take a tour, and
- Improve public understanding and knowledge of the work and role of the Assembly.

7.2.4 Tourists

There is scope for the Assembly to provide better facilities for tourists interested in visiting. However, in the current climate of pressure on accommodation and in the interests of concentrating resources where they are most needed, the allocation of a new dedicated space will focus on educational groups.

However, the summer recess offers the potential to open up access to Parliament Buildings to tourists. **A business case will be prepared in order to develop a cost/benefit analysis of opening Parliament Buildings for organised tours on weekdays and weekends.**

7.3 Reaching Out

In order to be effective, the Assembly needs to combine improvements to the experience visitors receive when they come to Parliament Buildings with improvements to the way the Assembly connects with those not able to come here.

Any visitor facilities at Parliament Buildings would need to complement and reinforce work on the website, education programmes with schools, relations with the media and broader outreach in constituencies across the country.

7.3.1 Public Petitions

The process of public petitioning is widely used in a number of legislatures, and in particular in the Scottish Parliament which is perceived to be operating best practice in this area. By raising a public petition, the public can have a direct influence and role in the policy development process by raising issues of concern directly with MLAs. Eight public bills resulting in Acts of the Scottish Parliament in the last full legislative year came about as a result of a public petition. The House of Commons Procedures Committee has recommended the establishment of a public petitioning system, and this proposal has been endorsed by the government in a written ministerial statement by the Leader of the House of Commons in July 2008:

“The Government hopes that the House will endorse this way forward, allowing it take a significant step forward in helping to promote better engagement with the public. The Government notes that in due course the House of Lords may also wish to look at its own petitions procedures.”

The Assembly Commission will explore the possibility of establishing a system of public petitioning. As a first step, the Commission will write to the Assembly’s Procedures Committee commending the development of a system of public petitioning. If a system is established, a public petition could be raised by at least one member of the public, and would raise issues in relation to matters that fall within the competence of the Assembly. A public petitions committee would then meet to consider admissible petitions, and to ensure that the appropriate action is taken in respect of each. This could include hearing oral evidence from the petitioners or seeking evidence from organisations with an interest in the issues raised. Following consideration of the written and any oral evidence, a decision would be taken as to whether the issues raised merited further consideration. The committee could also refer a petition to another committee of the Assembly, if appropriate, for further investigation. The committee would also be able to bid for time for a petition to be debated by the Assembly as a whole.

The outcome of the petitioning process would be to allow members of the public to have direct influence in the political process, to further inform the scrutiny of legislation, lead to changes in the law, or to be considered as part of a policy review.

7.3.2 Assembly Festival

A number of other legislatures, particularly the Scottish Parliament and the Oireachtas, have led the way in the development of festivals based around the work of their respective legislatures. **An annual assembly festival will be held in order to raise the profile of the Assembly and to increase engagement with the public.** The festival would be held in each constituency, and would be held in Belfast once every four years.

Examples of activities that would take place during the Assembly Festival include:

- A focussed programme of activities during one week in a single venue;
- Speakers, e.g. Bill Clinton / debates each evening with MLAs, particularly 'local' MLAs;
- An exhibition (which would remain in the venue for 3 months);
- Educational workshops (Monday to Friday); schoold debate. March 2009, Plenary of the Assembly on the Monday, Plenary of the Youth Assembly on the Tuesday.
- Evening seminars / interviews;
- A number of committee meetings;
- Events led by the Speaker;
- 'Let's Talk' / Newslite / Good Morning Ulster; and
- Comedy Club (based on politics).

7.3.3 Educational Outreach

A number of programmes will be developed in order to increase the scope of the Assembly's educational outreach activity. These are outlined in the following paragraphs.

MLAs in Schools

Pre session teaching: Class teachers are requested to carry out a small amount of pre teaching as a starting point for the session: matters devolved to the Assembly; political parties in Northern Ireland and know who their six MLAs are.

Session 1 A member of the Education Service facilitates this interactive session building on the pre session teaching and includes a presentation, extending Assembly knowledge, with the opportunity to learn through a range of activities

Session 2 Local MLAs are invited to attend and to work with the students: the school may choose to invite them directly or the Education Service can arrange the second session at a suitable time for the class and the MLAs. The Education Service will provide guidance on this session for class teachers.

Seminars for Teachers

The Education Service will offer teachers' seminars for primary or secondary which include: services offered by the Assembly; learn about the Assembly through a typical class presentation and the opportunity to work with Assembly resources. These seminars can be held either in Parliament Buildings or in a local school.

Colleges and Universities

The Education Service will offer outreach education or information sessions for colleges, universities and students' associations. These sessions will be provided at the appropriate curriculum level and will include how the Assembly works and how to engage and participate in its work.

7.3.4 Community Outreach

The Assembly will organise and deliver outreach events, public meetings, and talks in local communities throughout Northern Ireland. These events will deliver on the commitment to facilitate engagement between the Assembly and the public.

By meeting with groups in the heart of local communities, these events will raise awareness of what the Assembly is, how it works and how local community groups and individuals can engage with the democratic process.

It is anticipated that these meetings will frequently be attended by MLAs thus providing the opportunity for local residents to question MLAs about local issues. Key partners in this ongoing programme of community-focused outreach include: community groups, senior citizens groups, residents and housing associations, ethnic minority groups, youth groups and associations, disability forums, and many others.

In the longer term we will aim to use technology to bring the Assembly - and MLAs – closer to the public. For example, we will arrange video-conferencing sessions, where community group representatives based in local communities can put questions to their MLAs in Parliament Buildings.

In general, sessions will aim to:

- Distinguish between the Assembly and that of the Northern Ireland Executive;
- MLAs – who they are and what they do;
- The powers of the Assembly;
- Examples of Assembly legislation; and
- How to get involved.

The key focus is on describing the various ways in which local community groups and associations, as well as individuals, can become involved with the

Assembly and their MLAs, and can ensure that their voice is heard by their elected representatives.

7.3.5 Major Events

The Assembly will be represented at local events of strategic importance, for example, the Balmoral Show, the Belfast Festival at Queen's, summer schools etc.

7.3.6 Parliamentary Outreach

The Assembly is represented on a number of external bodies including the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Northern Ireland Assembly and Business Trust and the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. **The Assembly's External Liaison Unit will continue to ensure that the interests of the Assembly are represented at a parliamentary level, and that business plans are developed in order to provide a focus for ongoing development.**

In addition, a number of other devolved legislatures have established offices outside of their home nation, for example in Brussels. Consideration will be given to whether, how and at what level the Assembly should establish a similar presence.

Management and Reporting Arrangements

8.1 Introduction

It is important to note that, whilst this strategy has been developed by the Assembly's Engagement Directorate, its implementation requires the full support of the Commission, MLAs and all of the Assembly's directorates.

It is proposed that the implementation of this strategy be overseen by a steering group with representation from each of the Assembly's four directorates.

Implementation Plan

9.1 Outline Project Plan

No.	Action	Priority ⁷	Completion Date	Primary Responsibility
1	This strategy will be the subject of a public consultation exercise.	Immediate	May '09	Director of Engagement
2	A dedicated space will be provided within Parliament Buildings to provide a wider range of programmes for more schools and for more schoolchildren, as well as teachers and adult learners.	Medium	Sep '09	Director of Properties
3	Learning on the work of the Assembly will be facilitated through a Northern Ireland-wide programme of educational activity, together with a satellite structure to deliver this.	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Engagement
4	Consideration will be given to subsidising inward programmes through the development of a travel scheme, to enable and encourage schools in areas of geographical and social disadvantage to travel to Parliament Buildings.	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Engagement
5	An assessment of the Assembly's Education Service will be undertaken, and be overseen by an educational advisory group, to:			
5a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review and update as necessary current materials, resources and methodologies. 	High	Jun '09	Director of Engagement
5b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Produce more sophisticated age specific learning resources, including hard copy and web based. 	Medium	Oct '09	Director of Engagement
5c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review, and make proposals for, pre-work, delivery and follow-up. 	Low	Nov '09	Director of Engagement
5d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Determine levels of user satisfaction. 	Medium	Jun '09	Director of Engagement
6	Discussions will be initiated with a wider group of relevant organisations in order to develop a comprehensive and cross-cutting approach to engagement.	Medium	Jun '09	Director of Engagement

⁷ Immediate = To commence within 1 month; High = To commence within 1 to 3 months; Medium = To commence within 3 to 6 months; Low = To commence within 6 months to 1 year

No.	Action	Priority⁷	Completion Date	Primary Responsibility
7	An annual audit of public engagement will be undertaken to measure the level of public engagement with the Assembly on an ongoing basis.	Medium	May '09	Director of Engagement
8	A MLA continuous professional development coordinator will be appointed, who will be responsible for the development and implementation of a MLA continuous professional development strategy.	Low	Oct '09	Director of Resources
9	Consideration will be given to making additional information on All Party Assembly Groups and All Party Groups available, and to providing additional media and web-based support.	Medium	Mar '09	Director of Engagement
10	A Committee Coordinating Group will be established from Secretariat staff from both the Clerking & Reporting (Director of Clerking, Clerk Assistants and Editor of Debates) and Engagement (Director of Engagement, Head of Media Services, Head of Outreach and Head of Research and Library) Directorates to ensure that committees are fully supported in all aspects of their work.	High	Feb '09	Director of Clerking & Reporting; Director of Engagement
11	A weekly briefing will be provided to members of the media on the programme of plenary, committee and commission business.	High	Mar '08	Director of Engagement
12	A number of measures will be undertaken in order to further improve the support provided by the Assembly to committees, including:			
12a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Developing an additional committee room in Parliament Buildings with video conferencing facilities and increased seating for the public. 	Low	Dec '09	Director of Properties
12b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Centralising the arrangement and management of all meetings, either in Parliament Buildings or externally. 	Low	Sep '09	Director of Engagement
12c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implementing broadcasting facilities in all committee rooms, and live streaming / recorded broadcasting of all committees in public session (in order to allow increased numbers of the public to 'virtually' attend meetings). 	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Engagement
12d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Meeting of statutory committees outside of Parliament Buildings at least once per session, with a key driver being the quality of engagement. 	Medium	Mar '09	Director of Clerking & Reporting

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No.	Action	Priority ⁷	Completion Date	Primary Responsibility
12e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Using internet technologies to allow the public to feed directly into committee inquiries and consultations on draft legislation. 	Low	Jun '10	Director of Engagement
12f	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Considering the role of partnership libraries. 	Low	Jun '09	Director of Engagement
13	Members of the media will be provided with greater but controlled access to Parliament Buildings, in order to improve the level of coverage of the proceedings of the Assembly.	Medium	Feb '09	Director of Engagement
14	In order to improve regional coverage of Assembly activity, an individual with journalistic experience will be recruited in order to provide articles for regional newspapers and to enable reporting on the business of the Assembly, as it impacts on their locality.	Medium	Jun '09	Director of Engagement
15	A communications strategy will be developed, to include consideration of options for future engagement.	Medium	May' 09	Director of Engagement
16	A youth forum will be established to consider, debate and make recommendations on issues of particular importance to young people.	High	Nov '09	Director of Engagement
17	An internship programme will be developed to offer university graduates the opportunity to experience working in the Assembly.	Medium	Jun '10	Director of Engagement
18	<p>The Assembly website will be completely redeveloped, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Technical design study. ■ Design, including graphic design of Internet and Intranet. ■ Migration and cataloguing of content (1998 to present). ■ Redesign of business processes and development of supporting workflows. ■ Integration with key Assembly systems (e.g. Assembly information management system and broadcasting system). ■ Development of live streaming / playback functionality. ■ E-petitioning. ■ Development of educational functionality. 	High	Jun '10	Director of Engagement
19	Improvements will be made to the operation of the Assembly in Parliament Buildings, including:			

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No.	Action	Priority ⁷	Completion Date	Primary Responsibility
19a	■ Giving consideration to how the welcome that visitors currently receive can be improved further.	Low	Mar '09	Director of Properties
19b	■ Providing a ticket office for public tours of Parliament Buildings.	Low	Sep '09	Director of Properties
19c	■ Improving the coordination of event bookings, including public tours, MLA tours, educational visits, Speaker's inward and outward visits and events, MLA events, ministerial events and committee room bookings.	Low	Sep '09	Director of Engagement
19d	■ Centralising the planning and delivery of all events in Parliament Buildings, including those currently delivered by the Assembly's External Liaison Unit and committees.	Low	Sep '09	Director of Engagement
19e	■ Centralising responsibility for the logistics of planning and delivering events in order to allow other Assembly directorates to concentrate on their core activities, which would include leading on the content of the event.	Low	Sep '09	Director of Engagement
19f	■ Introducing an electronic centralised booking and information system for all visits and visitors, to produce adequate management information to facilitate planning and monitoring, as well as daily operations.	Low	Sep '09	Director of Engagement
20	Other improvements will be implemented within Parliament Buildings, including:			
20a	■ Developing a public café.	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Properties
20b	■ Reviewing all material for visitors.	Medium	Apr '09	Director of Engagement
20c	■ Enhancing visitor orientation and information through the provision of improved signage and increased staff intervention – externally and internally.	Medium	Apr '09	Director of Properties
20d	■ Briefing all public-facing staff daily.	Low	Sep '09	Director of Engagement
21	Subject to the development of the Assembly's accommodation strategy, a visitor centre will be established within Parliament Buildings, to include a permanent exhibition explaining the work and role of the Assembly, together with a retail/bookshop, a dedicated education room and a 'mini' Assembly chamber.	Medium	Sep '09	Director of Engagement

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Immediate = To commence within 1 month; High = To commence within 1 to 3 months; Medium = To commence within 3 to 6 months; Low = To commence within 6 months to 1 year

No.	Action	Priority⁷	Completion Date	Primary Responsibility
22	A business case will be prepared in order to develop a cost/benefit analysis of opening Parliament Buildings for organised tours on weekdays and weekends.	Low	Sep '09	Director of Engagement
23	The Assembly Commission will explore the possibility of establishing a system of public petitioning.	Medium	May '10	Director of Clerking & Reporting
24	An annual Assembly festival will be held in order to raise the profile of the Assembly and to increase engagement with the public.	Low	Oct '09	Director of Engagement
25	A number of programmes will be developed in order to increase the scope of the Assembly's educational outreach activity.	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Engagement
26	The Assembly will organise and deliver outreach events, public meetings, and talks in local communities throughout Northern Ireland. These events will deliver on the commitment to facilitate engagement between the Assembly and the public.	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Engagement
27	The Assembly will be represented at local events of strategic importance, for example, the Balmoral Show, the Belfast Festival at Queen's, summer schools etc.	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Engagement
28	The Assembly's External Liaison Unit will continue to ensure that the interests of the Assembly are represented at a parliamentary level, and that business plans are developed in order to provide a focus for ongoing development.	Medium	Aug '09	Director of Engagement

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Immediate = To commence within 1 month; High = To commence within 1 to 3 months; Medium = To commence within 3 to 6 months; Low = To commence within 6 months to 1 year

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