

Assembly Information

Public Information Service
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Belfast, BT4 3XX

NIA General Enquiries
Tel: +44 (0)28 9052 1333
Fax: +44 (0)28 9052 1980
Email: info@niassembly.gov.uk



The Legislative Process for Public Bills

Reconsideration Stage

The Reconsideration Stage is triggered if a Bill is found to be defective after Final Stage. If this is the case, the Bill is placed on a list of pending future business for further discussion.

The reconsideration debate is restricted to proposed amendments for the Bill. These amendments are presented in the same manner as for the Consideration Stage.

Where a Bill is amended during reconsideration, the question of approving the Bill, as amended, is put to and decided by Members, but without debate and subsequent amendment.

Accelerated Passage Procedure

Under the Accelerated Passage Procedure a Bill can pass all stages in as little as ten days, but in no less time. This process skips the Committee Stage.

Accelerated Passage Procedure requires cross-community support within the meaning of the Act.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has the power to make its own 'primary legislation', or law, within the areas devolved to it under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act).

Assembly Members make the law mainly through proposing, debating, amending and eventually approving a Public Bill. When fully approved by the Assembly and the Secretary of State, and given Royal Assent, Public Bills become Acts.

There are three types of Public Bill:

- An Executive Bill which is introduced by a Minister;
- A Private Members Bill which is introduced by a Member; and
- A Committee Bill which is introduced by a Committee Chair.

First and Second Stage

The legislative process begins when a Minister or other elected Assembly Member proposes to 'introduce' a Public Bill. They present a full text of the proposed Bill to the Speaker at least seven working days before its anticipated introduction in the Assembly along with a

statement confirming its 'legislative competence' under the Act.

The Speaker will not introduce a Public Bill if it lacks legislative competence. Legislative competence refers to whether the Assembly has the powers to pass the legislation under the Act.

Sometimes there are issues about 'ancillary provisions' which could relate to 'excepted' matters (defined in the Act). In this case the Secretary of State must be consulted and, if necessary, consent given to authorise the Assembly's consideration of the Bill.

If all is in order the Speaker tells the proposer that the Bill may be properly introduced. The Clerk of the Assembly reads the Bill's title to the Assembly, and this is the Bill's First Stage. After this the Bill is set down on the list of future Assembly business for its Second Stage.

Debate at the Second Stage is confined to the general principles of the Bill. So far in the Assembly all Bills voted on at Second Stage have progressed to the Committee Stage.

Committee Stage

Following the Second Stage, the Bill is referred to the appropriate Assembly committee for scrutiny. The committee, under the Assembly's Standing Orders, has 30 working days (excluding adjournments of more than three working days) to consider and take evidence on the Bill's provisions. The committee works out its opinion on the Bill and presents a report to the Assembly. The report may include proposals for its next stage.

To close the Committee Stage, the Bill is set down on the list of pending future business until the Assembly fixes a date for its next stage, the Consideration Stage.

Consideration Stage

During the Consideration Stage amendments are deposited with the Clerk of the Assembly in time for inclusion on a Notice Paper which is circulated to Members. Amendments are arranged on the Notice Paper in the order in which the Bill is to be considered by the Assembly. Exceptionally, amendments may be allowed without the required notice.

The Assembly usually considers the Bill's constituent parts, clauses and schedules in the order in which they appear. The 'question is put' to the Assembly as to whether each clause and schedule should become part of the Bill.

During the Consideration Stage Members may speak more than once.

Further Consideration Stage

The Further Consideration Stage is a final opportunity to amend the Bill. The amendments procedure is similar to the previous Consideration Stage, but this time the debate is limited solely to new amendments. If there are no amendments there is no debate.

Final Stage

Following completion of the Further Consideration Stage, the Bill is placed on the list of pending Assembly business until a date is set for the Final Stage. The date is set when the Speaker is satisfied that the Bill is still within the legislative competence of the Assembly, taking the amendments into account. The debate at the Final Stage is confined to the content of the Bill.