

## BRIEFING NOTE:

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PROCEDURES GOVERNING MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS IN LEGISLATIVE CHAMBERS

23 November 2007

### 1.0 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Committee on Procedures to provide information on the structures and conventions used in legislatures for government Ministers to make statements in the Chamber. Firstly there is a description of the relevant procedures in the Northern Ireland Assembly and then of the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Dail. Finally the paper highlights some of the issues surrounding these procedures.

### 2.0 Definition of Ministerial Statements

A ministerial statement is defined by the Northern Ireland Assembly as a “Statement by a Minister to the Assembly, usually to announce policies and decisions.”<sup>1</sup> It is a method by which the Executive announces departmental policy decisions to the Legislature. Ministerial Statements may also be written statements or oral statements on the floor of the legislative chamber.

### 3.0 Comparing Ministerial Statements

The basis for comparing the procedures in each of the chosen legislatures is on the details of what the standing orders say, of the notice given prior to a statement, what time is allotted for statements and what the convention and practice is regarding public release of statements and if there are procedures in place for written and oral statements. The findings are summarized in the table below.

**Table 1. Practice surrounding Ministerial Statements**

Legislature	Prior Notice for a Statement	Written and Oral Statements	Time allowed for Statements	Release of Statements
<b>Northern Ireland Assembly</b>	2 1/2 hours notice for the speaker.	Only oral statements.	No longer than an hour is allowed for questions after the Statement is made.	No release of statements is allowed prior to being given to members.
<b>Scottish Parliament</b>	At least a week in advance but urgent requests can be taken on the same day if the Presiding Officer agrees.	Only oral statements but written answers can be given to informed statements.	A 2:1 basis ie. 10 minute statement:20 questions, 15 minute statement:30 minute questions.	Text of statements can not be released prior to the statement being made.
<b>House of Commons</b>	Usually on the day of the statement.	Both are allowed.	One hour in total, 10 minutes for statement, 5 minutes for opposition and then questions.	When the Minister takes his seat before making the statement.
<b>National Assembly for Wales</b>	As much as possible but not necessary.	Both are allowed.	10 minutes or 1,000 word statements and then questions – all within half an hour.	Electronic copies go to Members when the minister rises to speak.
<b>Dail Eireann</b>	Whips are notified about a week in advance but the	Only oral statements.	Agreed between the party whips	Copies are not given to members and pre release to media is

	Taoiseach can include statements on the day.			against procedure but only by "long standing principal"
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### 3.1 Northern Ireland

Ministerial statements made in the Northern Ireland Assembly are governed by Standing Order 18<sup>2</sup>. This Standing Order obliges Ministers to make statements to the Assembly on matters that arise from their remit within the Executive. The details of the Standing Order are as follows:

- A Minister, where possible, has to provide a written copy of the statement to members as early as possible before delivering the statement. If an early copy of their statement has not been possible, then the Minister will explain to the Assembly why not.
- Copies of Ministerial statements will not be given to the press before being made available to members.
- Notice of a Ministerial Statement will be given to the speaker at least 2½ hours before they are due to be made and the Speaker will inform members when practicable.
- After the Minister gives the statement, a member can move that the statement is noted and then questions can be asked for no longer than an hour under the supervision of the Speaker.
- Statements are to be made outside the time allotted for Questions and Adjournment Debates except if the statement is urgent or relates to the questions or debate, in which case the speaker will allow for the questions and adjournment debate to take place at another time during that week.

There is no Standing Order or procedure which allows for ministers to make written statements to the Assembly. However the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has put a proposal to the Procedures Committee which would allow Ministers to make written statements for matters which would not merit an oral statement or which can not wait until the next plenary to be announced. The OFMDFM proposal is to amend Standing Orders accordingly and they have provided wording for such an amendment:

*WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS – PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO  
STANDING ORDERS*

*After Standing Order 18 (5) insert: -*

*“(6) A Member of the Executive may make a written ministerial statement to the Assembly on matters for which the Executive is responsible. The statement shall be submitted to the Speaker at least one working day before the statement is due to be published. All written ministerial statements shall be printed in the Official Report.”<sup>3</sup>*

### 3.2 Scotland

Standing Order 13.2 of the Scottish Parliament<sup>4</sup> governs the procedures for Ministerial Statements in the chamber. The Standing Order points out that the Minister will give notice to the Presiding Officer, who will in turn, notify the Parliamentary Bureau, who will inform members by including notice of the statement in the business programme.

If the issue is urgent the Minister can request that the statement is given on that same day that the Presiding Officer is notified. If the Presiding Officer agrees with the urgency then he/she will alter the daily business to allow for the statement and will notify members of the changes.

The Standing Order also points out that a ministerial statement may be debated. The time allowed for Ministerial Statements works on a 2:1 basis, where if a statement is to be 10 minutes long then questions are allowed for 20 minutes or if a statement is 25 minutes long then the questions will be for 30 minutes.

#### **Rule 13.2 Ministerial statements**

1. *Where a member of the Scottish Executive or junior Scottish Minister wishes to make a statement to a meeting of the Parliament ("a ministerial statement"), notice shall be given to the Presiding Officer. The Presiding Officer shall then notify the Parliamentary Bureau who shall include notice of the ministerial statement in a business programme. A ministerial statement may be debated.*

2. *Where a ministerial statement is of an urgent nature, the member of the Scottish Executive or junior Scottish Minister wishing to make the statement may, on giving notice of the statement to the Presiding Officer, request that it be made on that day. If the statement is, in the opinion of the Presiding Officer, sufficiently urgent, he or she shall allow the statement to be made and debated and shall make any necessary alteration to the daily business list. Members shall be notified that any such statement is to be made and of any subsequent alteration to the daily business list.*

Regarding the release of statements to the press the guidance states that<sup>5</sup>:

*The text of Ministerial statements or speeches should **not** be released in advance of them being made to the Parliament. The topic to be covered, including an outline of the problem or issue that the Executive aims to address, may be disclosed, together with an indication of the sort of approach the Executive may take.*

There are no procedures for written statements by Ministers in the Scottish Parliament but there are four other options open to a Minister to make an announcement as well as by Ministerial Statement. These options, listed below, pertain to announcements in order of how important the announcement is:

1. *A Ministerial statement to the Parliament*
2. *An answer to a Parliamentary question lodged for written answer*
3. *An answer in the Chamber to a Parliamentary question lodged for an oral answer*
4. *A ministerial announcement during a debate*

5. *A ministerial statement to a committee of the Parliament*<sup>6</sup>

The closest approximation to a written statement is for a member to ask an inspired parliamentary question (IPQ) and for the Minister to reply by written answer. This option is normally used to announce new policy initiatives, new funding or the outcome of a consultation exercise.

### 3.3 House of Commons

Ministerial Statements are allowed in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords. Notice of an oral statement is usually not given until the day it is to be made. Prior notice is necessary but not permission<sup>7</sup>. Copies of statements are traditionally only given out when the Minister sits down before making the statement although advance copies are usually given to opposition spokesmen as a courtesy. However the Speaker has asked for this to change. In a letter to Members the Speaker stated that<sup>8</sup>:

*The first idea, which the Committee might like to revisit, is that statements should be made available in advance to all Members, rather than simply to Opposition front bench spokesmen. Receiving a statement, say, half an hour in advance would enable Members to digest its contents and to put specific questions to the Minister on points of clarification or elucidation, rather than, as often happens at present, rehearse matters already covered in the Minister's remarks.*

This letter was given in Evidence to the Modernisation Committee, however the current practice remains that only the opposition spokesmen receive the statement in advance. Oral statements are made after Question Time (and any urgent questions that may have been allowed) or at 11am on a Friday. Oral statements often address major incidents, policies and government actions. At the end of a statement MPs can respond or question the government Minister on its contents.

One hour is allowed for statements in the House of Commons, with 10 minutes allowed for the statement itself and five minutes for a response by the opposition<sup>9</sup>.

Since 2002, Government ministers in Westminster can also make written statements to Parliament. Written ministerial statements are normally used to put the day-to-day business of government on the official record and in the public domain. Until 2002 the government mainly used written answers, as in Scotland, to make statements; by getting a backbench MP to table a written question drafted by the government department.

### 3.4 Wales

In the National Assembly for Wales, both oral and written statements are acceptable. Standing Order 7 states that statements by a member of the government may be taken at a plenary meeting without notice. If business is taken without notice then the presiding officer must adjust the timetable accordingly. Standing Order 9.6 points out that written statements can be

made by “the First Minister, a Welsh Minister or the Counsel General” on any matter “relating to his or her responsibilities”. However this is the extent of the detail on statements in the Welsh Standing Orders.

The procedure governing Ministerial Statements is predominantly laid down in the ministerial code and in guidance from the Presiding Officer. The ministerial code informs ministers that<sup>10</sup>:

- The most important announcements of the Assembly’s policy should be made, in the first instance, in the Assembly,
- If the issue is particularly sensitive then an oral statement is desirable,
- As much notice as possible should be given to the Minister for Assembly Business and the Head of the Business Unit indicating; the broad content of the announcement.
- If agreement is given, a draft of the statement with background notes and Question and Answer briefing should be circulated to the Minister for Assembly Business and the Head of the Business Unit as soon as possible,
- The final version should be sent to the Minister for Assembly Business, the Head of the Business Unit and the head of the Plenary Business team as soon as they are available, but not less than 2 hours before the statement is due to be made.
- A copy of the text of any oral statement to be made at the end of Questions should usually be shown to the Opposition Parties Business Managers at least 30 minutes before it is made.
- Electronic copies will be sent to all Members via the Chamber web when the Minister stands to deliver it.

The Presiding Officer’s guidelines on ministerial statements cover a number of other aspects of the procedure and summarised below in a pronouncement by the Presiding Officer:

**The Presiding Officer:** *Before calling on the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to make the first ministerial statement of the second Assembly, I would like to make a brief statement on statements to remind Members of guidelines for statements made by Ministers in Plenary sessions. As a rule, statements should be distributed to Members half an hour before their delivery. Lengthy statements should be distributed well in advance, and be followed by a shorter oral statement. That would allow appropriate time for questioning.*

*In normal circumstances, oral statements should not exceed 1,000 words, or take more than 10 minutes to deliver. I will then invite one speaker from each political group to respond to the statement by presenting a short and succinct preamble before asking a reasonable number of questions. I will then try to call as many Members as possible within the half an hour usually allowed for statements, but I expect those questions and answers to be succinct.*

### 3.5 Dail Eireann

Standing Order 43 of the Dail Eireann lays down that prior notice should be given to the Ceann Comhairle of Ministerial Statements<sup>11</sup>:

*A member of the Government who has given prior notice to the Ceann Comhairle may make a statement in the House on any matter. No debate shall be permitted on any such statement but further statements may be allowed at the discretion of the Ceann Comhairle from a spokesperson nominated by a Party in Opposition.*

The process for making Ministerial Statements is through convention rather than written procedure. Party whips meet on Wednesday afternoons when the Dail is in session to discuss the following week's business. At this meeting the Government whip will announce that statements are to be made the following week and the subject of the statement. Also at this meeting the whips will decide on the length of time to be given to the statement and given to opposition parties to give statements in reply. The whips will also decide on whether there will be a question and answer session following the statement.

Standing Order 26 also gives the Taoiseach the ability to change the order of business at short notice which allows for ministerial statements to be included<sup>12</sup>:

*26. (1) Every sitting of the Da'il shall be governed by a printed Order Paper, Paper which shall be prepared under the direction of the Ceann Comhairle.*

*(2) (a) Subject to paragraph (b) the Taoiseach shall have the right to determine the order in which Government business shall appear on the Order Paper and, by announcement, the order in which it shall be taken each day; and may propose, on motion made without notice, arrangements for sittings and for the taking of such business until such business has been disposed of; and save where any such proposal is opposed, the Ceann Comhairle shall permit a brief statement from a representative from each party in opposition and the Taoiseach before he or she puts the question thereon. Provided that where a second or subsequent division is demanded on any such proposals on the Order of Business, the period for which the division bells shall ring and the interval between the ringing of the bells and the locking of the doors shall be not less than two minutes and not less than one minute respectively.*

There are no written guidelines on Ministerial Statements and the Procedure and Privilege Committee when called upon to rule on Ministers issuing statements in the press have noted that the Announcement to the Dail is a "long-standing Principal" but this is not in written guidance.

There is no process for written statements to be made in the Dail.

### 4.0 **Issues**

The main issue running through all the legislatures, despite their different procedures is around the release of statements in the media prior to being made in the chamber. For instance in Scotland there have been points of order made about how a statement has been released. In May of this year a Member of the Scottish Assembly as the Presiding Officer to rule on whether a Minister had acted properly in their statement being in the press before it went to the chamber<sup>13</sup>.

**Business Motion**

**Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** *On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It is four years since I have been in this chamber, and I am concerned that already it appears that ministers are trailing their statements in the press before they make them. When I was last here, the Presiding Officer made it clear that that should not occur. I would be grateful if you could indicate whether it was appropriate for the Executive's policy on bridge tolls to be clearly stated in the press this morning.*

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** *I welcome Dr Simpson back to the chamber and say that I hope that his name will be in the caption when he appears on television rather than mine, as used to happen all those years ago.*

*I thank Dr Simpson for prior notice of his point of order. I refer members to the good practice guidance on announcements by the Scottish Executive that the Presiding Officer issued in the first session. As has long been the case, under that guidance major policy announcements by the Executive should be made to the Parliament in the first instance and should not be made through the media. I take that principle seriously.*

*However, while I have no knowledge of what the First Minister is about to say, I have considered this morning's press coverage and I am satisfied that it appears to contain nothing that was not previously in the public domain in relation to this matter. I also understand that the Executive provided parties with the text of today's statement in advance. I am, therefore, satisfied that, on this occasion, no breach of the guidance has occurred.*

There are a number of examples of such exchanges in the Official Report of the Scottish Parliament (appendix A).

In the House of Commons the Speaker suggested a possible solution. In a letter to members, the Speaker gave some guidance regarding the public release of Statements by government Ministers<sup>14</sup>:

**4. Statements**

*Oral Ministerial Statements should be a high point of a Parliamentary day. A Minister coming to the House of Commons to announce some important measure or to clarify some urgent topic is what Parliament should be all about. However what happens in reality is that the details of the statement are given to the media at least a day in advance so that the Government gets an additional news cycle from the Statement.*

*I am fed up being telephoned early in the morning by a newspaper or local radio station for my comments on a statement that is going to be made later that day in Parliament. They have full details of the statement yet as a Member of Parliament I have none.*

***Therefore I recommend that your Committee considers making it a breach of Parliamentary Privilege for Ministers or Departments giving details of a statement prior to it being made in the House. An additional benefit of this would be that the media would have to attend the press gallery to find out what important issue was being discussed.***

## **Appendix A: Points of order regarding Ministerial Statements in the Scottish Parliament**

**Official Report 13 June 2007**



Col 625

**Points of Order**

14:34

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My point of order is about the statement on higher education that we are about to hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Reference to the contents of the statement appeared in a number of newspapers at the weekend, trailing an Executive announcement on the abolition of the graduate endowment. I understand that it was not idle speculation on the part of the newspapers involved, but rather that the media was briefed expressly on the content of the statement. Moreover, I understand that various student leaders have been invited to Parliament today and that their availability for interview by the media has been circulated, presumably on the basis that they will welcome the contents of a statement that members of this Parliament have yet to hear. Presiding Officer,

"I am concerned that—yet again—we seem to be reading about Government announcements in the press rather than hearing them in the chamber."—  
[*Official Report*, 2 November 2000; c 1259.]

Those are not my words, but those of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop.

While in opposition, members who are now on the Executive benches complained regularly about the then Executive trailing ministerial announcements in the press in advance of Parliament being informed. Although I am sure that the Executive would not wish to appear to be guilty of double standards, this is surely a case of gamekeeper turned poacher.

Presiding Officer, will you rule on whether the Executive is in breach of parliamentary procedures on this matter? At the very least, gross discourtesy has been shown to Parliament and members of all parties.

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** I thank the member for notice of his point of order. In response, I refer, once again, to the good practice guidance on announcements by the Scottish Executive and repeat that major policy announcements should in the first instance always be made to the Parliament.

However, in this specific case, I have reviewed the press coverage in some detail since the weekend, and can find no evidence that the Executive has breached the terms of the guidance. Moreover, I have not come across any knowledge of any press briefings that have been given. That said, I urge all members to have

## Official Report 20 June 2007

Col 875

### Points of Order

14:34

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Last Wednesday, I made a point of order in connection with a statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning on higher education, the contents of which had appeared in a number of newspapers the previous weekend, in articles that trailed an Executive announcement on the abolition of the graduate endowment.

I regret that today there seems to have been a repetition of the same offence. Today's edition of *The Herald* carries a story, which is tagged as an exclusive, that there will be an announcement today from the Executive on extra free nursery provision. The article says:

"Fiona Hyslop, the Cabinet Secretary for Education, is expected to unveil the £15m initiative during a debate on education at the Scottish Parliament."

That might be deemed educated guesswork from the journalist, but I suspect that he would have needed clairvoyancy talents akin to those of Mystic Meg to be so right and to be able to tag the story as an exclusive. He goes on to quote the Minister for Children and Early Years, Adam Ingram, as saying that the announcement on free nursery education is a "significant step".

When I made my point of order last week, I pointed out that when members who now occupy the Executive benches were in opposition they complained regularly about the then Executive trailing ministerial announcements in the press before informing the Parliament. There have been three incidents in the past week in which details—on the graduate endowment, on fees for free personal care and on nursery education—have gone into the press before the Parliament was informed about them. That is deeply discourteous to members. The new Executive appears to be a serial offender at a very early stage in the new parliamentary session.

After he was elected, the First Minister told the Parliament:

All of us in the Parliament have a responsibility to conduct ourselves in a way that respects the Parliament that the people have chosen to elect. That will take patience, maturity and leadership on all sides of the chamber. My pledge to the Parliament today is that any Scottish Government that is led by me will respect and include the Parliament in the governance of Scotland over the next four years.—[*Official Report*, 16 May 2007; c 36.]

Those were fine words from the First Minister, but the events of the past two weeks suggest that they have been all too quickly forgotten. Presiding Officer, will you rule on whether the Executive is in breach of parliamentary procedures in this matter? Should this not be a case of three strikes and you're out?

**Karen Whitefield (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab):** On a point of order on the same matter, Presiding Officer.

I make the Parliament aware that, as the newly appointed convener of the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee, I received a letter this morning from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, which advised me that she intended to make a statement about early years provision and asked that I and other members of the committee treat the letter's contents as confidential until the statement had been made. I am sure that I and committee members were more than happy to do so, but given that the contents of the statement appeared on the front page of *The Herald* this morning and that the committee did not receive the letter until after that newspaper had been published, it would have been rather difficult for us to comply with the cabinet secretary's request on this occasion, no matter how keen we were to oblige her.

In addition, given that during an interview on "Good Morning Scotland" this morning, the cabinet secretary commented on class sizes for primaries 1, 2 and 3, we can expect her to make an announcement on the matter in her speech. However, there was no reference to such an announcement in her letter to me of 19 June.

When Hugh Henry asked the cabinet secretary about probationary teachers, she said that she would make an announcement on the matter before the recess. This is her final opportunity to do that, so it is likely that she will make such an announcement today. However, again, there was no reference to the matter in her letter to me of 19 June. [*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson):** Order. The member is making serious points.

**Karen Whitefield:** It is unfortunate that the cabinet secretary has chosen to ride roughshod over the Parliament and its committees. I seek the Presiding Officer's guidance on whether that is appropriate conduct for a minister in the Scottish Government.

**The Presiding Officer:** I point out that members who wish to make a point of order have three minutes in which to do so—that is their inalienable right. I thank Murdo Fraser and Karen Whitefield for giving notice of their points of order.

This is the third occasion in recent weeks on which points of order have been raised regarding an announcement in the Parliament. As I did on those previous occasions, I refer members to the good practice guidance on

Executive announcements, which I understand has been reissued to all business managers. The purpose of that guidance is to ensure that the Parliament is treated with respect and is properly the place in which major spending and policy announcements are first made. I understand that, as Karen Whitefield pointed out, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning somewhat belatedly attempted to forewarn the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee before details of today's announcement appeared in the press. However, I stress to the Executive the importance of adhering to the guidance and ensuring that its terms are followed. I believe that the Executive is sailing slightly close to the wind on the issue and I exhort it to err on the side of caution in future.

**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** On a different point of order, Presiding Officer. I draw your attention to reports in the press yesterday that the First Minister has signed an historic pact with Northern Ireland's political leaders. One report stated:

"Details of the joint statement ... include proposals for collaboration on education, transport and tourism. The Scottish and Northern Irish Executives have also agreed to work closely on gaining the right to set their own rates of corporation tax and securing greater fiscal autonomy."

It went on:

"One area where Northern Ireland's politicians want to make quick progress with Scotland is over higher education."

The Scottish Parliament might have expected advance consultation on matters of such importance but, at the very least, there should be a statement to the Parliament. Presiding Officer, I draw your and the Parliament's attention to the statement made by the First Minister in the Parliament on 7 June, when he said:

"matters of such importance will rightly be brought to the chamber—members of the Parliament are entitled to nothing less."—[*Official Report*, 7 June 2007; c 587.]

If that is the case, why are we to have no statement on the agreement with Northern Ireland?

Presiding Officer, I ask you to discuss with the First Minister the possibility of his making a statement later this afternoon. After all, we have questions to ask. Members of the Scottish Parliament rightly want to ask a number of questions on the issue and surely they are entitled to nothing less.

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank the member for giving me notice of his point of order. However, the First Minister is entirely at liberty to sign agreements with other institutions as he feels fit. Whether he intends to make a statement to the Parliament is a matter for him in the first instance. There will be opportunities

during this and next week's parliamentary debate to put questions to the First Minister.

### **Scottish Parliament**

*Thursday 18 April 2002*

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 09:30*]

#### **Points of Order**

**Fiona Hyslop (Lothians) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. This morning we received intimation of a ministerial statement on the United Kingdom budget, which is to be made this afternoon at 2 pm. As everyone knew the date of the budget, I am not sure why the statement is of an urgent nature. No doubt all will be revealed this afternoon.

As members will want to raise a number of points of interest and ask questions, half an hour is not sufficient time for the statement. It would have been helpful to have had the statement at 12.30 pm, as that would have allowed us to move on. However, at 2.30 pm, we are up against the buffers of question time.

Will the Presiding Officer take representations to move forward the start time of the statement to 1.45 pm, as that would allow more time for questions, in particular from back benchers? I would be grateful if the Presiding Officer would intimate his view to the chamber and to members who are not in the chamber this morning.

**The Presiding Officer (Sir David Steel):** I assure the member that I have already given careful thought to the matter. I agree that the problem with a statement is that it comes up against the buffers of 2.30 pm, in which case the Presiding Officers have no discretion to extend the statement.

However, this morning, I received an assurance that the statement will be very brief—something in the order of seven minutes. In that circumstance, I am quite happy to limit the questioning so that we can get it all done in half an hour. I have taken note of the point that was made by Fiona Hyslop.

**Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The Presiding Officer has received an assurance that the statement will be brief. Even if it is brief by ministerial statement standards, it will take 10 or 15 minutes.

**The Presiding Officer:** No.

**Alex Neil:** I am sorry, but the subject of the statement is the budget. It is an absolute absurdity to give only half an hour to the statement. Back benchers, as is usual in this place, will have no opportunity to participate in the questions. This place is supposed to be run on the consultative steering group principles, but it is being run more like the Kremlin.

**The Presiding Officer:** No. I can assure the member that I have taken that point carefully into account. I was prepared to ask for the statement to be made at 1.45 pm, but I have been assured that the statement will be brief. Questions that follow it will therefore be correspondingly brief.

**Alex Neil:** Will the Presiding Officer limit front-bench speakers to 10 minutes in total in order to give back benchers 20 minutes to ask questions? Back benchers are being treated like second-class citizens.

**The Presiding Officer:** The member will have to leave that to my discretion. Immediately after the ministerial statement, Opposition parties will have the opportunity to put their points.

**Alex Neil:** With all due respect—

**The Presiding Officer:** No. I take the member's point that there has to be enough time for back benchers. That is why I sought assurances this morning that the statement will be brief. If it had been a statement of more than 10 minutes, I would not have allowed half an hour.

**Alex Neil:** With all due respect, Presiding Officer, the minister may take 10 minutes—

**The Presiding Officer:** No. He will not. I assure the chamber that the minister will not take 10 minutes. He will be brief.

**Alex Neil:** Can the Presiding Officer define brief?

**The Presiding Officer:** That will be in the hands of the Presiding Officers. I have already looked into the matter very carefully this morning.

**Alex Neil:** How brief will contributions from the front bench be before back benchers get a chance?

**The Presiding Officer:** We will have to wait and see.

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<sup>1</sup> A Parliamentary Glossary, Research and Library Factsheet, Northern Ireland Assembly, Feb. 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Standing Orders for the Northern Ireland Assembly, SO 18.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to the Clerk of the Committee on Procedures from Mr Alan Rogers of Machinery of Government, OFMDFM, 22 June 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament, 3rd Edition (1st Revision) (September 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Good Practice Guidance by the Presiding Officer on Announcements by the Scottish Executive.

<sup>6</sup> Good Practice Guidance by the Presiding Officer on Announcements by the Scottish Executive.

<sup>7</sup> Erskine May Parliamentary Practice, 23<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2004, Lexis Nexis.

<sup>8</sup> Conventions and Courtesies of The House, Letter from the Speaker to Members, 16 May 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid p358.

<sup>10</sup> Ministerial Code, A code of conduct and guidance on procedures for Ministers, National Assembly for Wales, <http://www.assemblywales.org/3c020f77000cf74a00004f3500000000.pdf> .

<sup>11</sup> Dail Eireann, Standing Orders Relative to Public Business, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Official Report, *Wednesday 23 May 2007*, Scottish Parliament.

<sup>14</sup> Conventions and Courtesies of The House, Letter from the Speaker to Members, 16 May 2005.