

From Transition to Devolution

The Transitional Assembly

The Transitional Assembly came into operation on 22 November 2006. Its role was 'to take part in preparations for the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland, in accordance with the St Andrews Agreement. Before devolution day, the Transitional Assembly worked in Parliament Buildings.

The Transitional Assembly produced a number of reports which examined the Comprehensive Spending Review, Northern Ireland's economic challenge, the Review of Public Administration, Northern Ireland's schools admission policy, the devolution of policing and justice, and Workplace 2010. This work paved the way for the Programme for Government presented in January 2008. The Transitional Assembly also prepared draft Standing Orders, the draft Ministerial Code, and nominated the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

The Transitional Assembly was preceded by the Hain Assembly, named after the then Secretary of State. Established under the Northern Ireland Act 2006, the Hain Assembly met between 8 May and 22 November 2006 and was responsible for laying the preparatory work for government. Three committees formed the backbone of this Assembly, producing papers on many issues including the economic challenges facing Northern Ireland, policing and justice, and law and order.

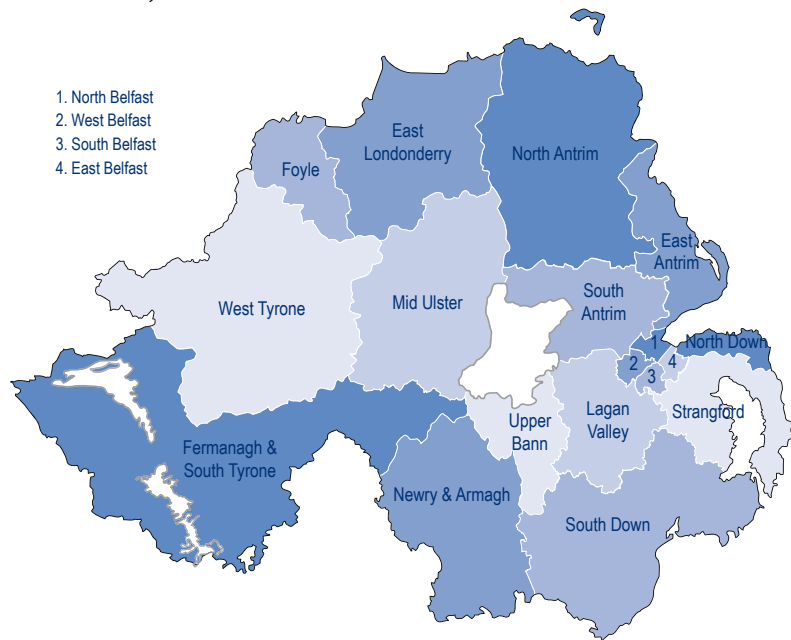
Elections and Voting

The Northern Ireland Assembly is made up of 108 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Each Member is elected directly by the people of Northern Ireland. Elections are based on a single transferable vote system of proportional representation. This allows the people to vote for candidates in order of preference. Each of the 18 parliamentary constituencies officially announces six members, who either represent a political party or sit as Independents. All



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current MLAs were elected to the Assembly in 2007. The next election is scheduled for May 2011. There are 90 male and 18 female MLAs in the Assembly.



2007 Election Results

Party	Number of seats
Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	36
Sinn Féin (SF)	28 ¹
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	18
Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)	16
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI)	7
Green Party (Green)	1
Independent (Ind)	1 ²
Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)	1

1. In December 2007, Mr G McHugh resigned from SF and became an Independent Member of the Assembly.
2. In May 2007, Mr K Deeny MLA changed his status as an Independent to become leader and a member of the Independent Health Coalition Party in the Assembly.

Devolution

The restoration of the Assembly on 8 May 2007 was a significant milestone in establishing democratic structures in Northern Ireland. Devolution Day was the result of complex negotiations at St Andrews. It brought jubilant scenes to Parliament Buildings, where the creation of a new Executive marked the end of five years of direct rule.

One year on, devolution has been followed by evolution. From changes in personnel to alterations in the Parliament Buildings themselves, the year has seen the Assembly adopt a central role in Northern Ireland's political and cultural life.

Politically, the Executive, under scrutiny from the Assembly's committees, has introduced Northern Ireland's first Programme for Government, Budget and a new Investment Strategy, and 14 pieces of primary legislation have received Royal Assent since 8 May 2007. Bread-and-butter issues such as the economy, water reform and post-primary transfer have been debated throughout the sitting period.

As well as being home to the devolved government, 2007/08 saw the Assembly welcome dignitaries from across the globe and play host to events including pop concerts, rally championships, and even a soap box derby.

It is likely the Assembly will see further changes over the coming years as it develops its role at the heart of politics in Northern Ireland.





May 8, 2007 – Devolution Day