

# Reports

## The Speaker's Office Corporate Report 1999-2002

### **FUNCTION**

The role of the Speaker's Office is to provide support to the Speaker in the execution of his duties which include:

- Presiding over plenary sessions of the Assembly;
- Chairing the Business Committee;
- Chairing the Assembly Commission;
- Representational duties, for example, hosting events for VIP visitors, attending conferences and linking with other Parliaments in the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe and elsewhere;
- Scrutinising legislation at pre introduction and final stages;
- Ruling on the admissibility of Assembly Questions and amendments to Bills and Motions;
- Ruling on Assembly procedures;
- Responsibilities in relation to filling vacant Assembly seats and appointing Ministers, including the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister and Committee Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons;
- Nomination of members to various bodies, for example, the Senate of the University of Ulster, the British Irish Inter Parliamentary Body etc;
- Excluding a political party or Minister on the direction of the Secretary of State;
- Responsibilities in relation to summoning witnesses to Committee hearings;

- President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (Northern Ireland Assembly Branch); and
- President of the Assembly and Business Trust.

### **ACTIVITY DURING THE PERIOD TO 31 MARCH 2002**

During this period, the Speaker:

- Presided over seven sittings of the Assembly prior to the appointment of the Deputy Speakers on 31 January 2000 and together, the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers presided over a further 118 sittings of the Assembly.
- Chaired 79 meetings of the Business Committee and 47 meetings of the Assembly Commission;
- Scrutinised 30 Executive Bills, three Assembly Commission Bills and one Private Member's Bill;
- Considered all amendments to Bills and Assembly motions;
- Dealt with the appointment of all Ministers, Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of Committees and with the resignation and reappointment of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, the resignation and replacement of four Ministers and the replacement of two Assembly Members;
- Hosted a visit to the Assembly by the President of the United States and the Prime Minister

and, separately, by the First Lady of the United States as well as a visit by the Prime Minister of Canada;

- Hosted thirteen visits by parliamentarians from, for example, Canada, Georgia and Moldova as well as representatives from the US Congress;
- Hosted visits by the Presiding Officers from Scotland and Wales;
- Represented the Assembly at two meetings of the Conference of the Regional Assemblies of Europe in Florence and Madeira respectively;
- Attended the 2000 and 2002 Commonwealth Speakers' Conferences in Australia and Botswana respectively;
- Led delegations of Assembly Members to Brussels, Westminster and Washington DC;
- Met with 23 Ambassadors and six other diplomatic representatives;
- Initiated an annual St Patrick's Day celebration for Assembly Members and guests from all sectors of Northern Ireland;
- Initiated and arranged for the presentation of

the first Assembly Award (to the Fire Service); and

- Hosted 15 receptions for organisations visiting the Northern Ireland Assembly.

#### **THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR 2002/2003**

- To continue to contribute to achieving the objectives of the Assembly Commission and the Business Committee;
- To maintain and develop external linkages to learn from the experiences of others and to offer assistance to other legislatures as a result of the experiences gained in the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- To foster a better understanding of the work and role of the Assembly among all sectors in Northern Ireland;
- To prepare for the next mandate including orientation and training for new Assembly Members; and
- Publication of an Assembly Companion detailing Speaker's rulings, procedural advice, and legal and constitutional information.