

Constitutional and Political Group
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Response to Northern Ireland Office

By NIPSA

**‘Consultation on measures to improve the operation of the NI Assembly’
August 2012.**

NIPSA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Office on this public consultation ‘measure to improve the operation of the NI Assembly.’

NIPSA’s main aims are to:

- **Secure jobs for its members within Northern Ireland**
- **Protect Terms & conditions for members**
- **Provide a value for money public service**

NIPSA response to Northern Ireland delinking from Westminster constituency model would be consistent with our aims in that whatever model our political representative favours NIPSA would continue to ensure working conditions for our members are not diluted in pursuit of efficiency savings.

Question 1 ‘What should the future size of the NI Assembly be?’

Proposed reduction of MLAs in NIPSA’s view will not reduce current workloads; in fact if there are fewer MLAs representing a constituency, the MLA workload will increase as they will have a greater number of constituents to service. The proposed reduction of MLAs will also mean a reduced number of party staff support and therefore it will be essential that there is a sufficient non-political impartial secretariat to service the additional needs of our politicians. Also if the proposed RPA changes are recommended then this will reduce the number of councils/councillors and could envisage further increases in MLA workloads.

The reduction in MLAs from 108 to 96 or 80 in NIPSA’s view would not constitute a reduction in the workload of MLAs or Secretariat staff services. Whilst not within the

remit of the A+ER committee it would be encouraging for the committee to recommend gender proofing of new MLA's and follow this on through to Committees. Comparators with other legislatures may be considered although NIPSA would see this as an opportunity for A+ER to review and modernise the working operations of the Assembly, such as roles of the Committees, Plenary timings and debates.

NIPSA would see this as an opportunity to review Committee structures, scrutiny roles within the Assembly. If departments are reduced, amalgamated or new departments are created these departments should be mirrored through the establishment of a relevant statutory committee. NIPSA would also encourage that committee numbers would not include individual MLA's sitting on several committees simultaneously. NIPSA would note that an increased scrutiny and analytical role of new committee structure would have an increased workload. NIPSA would also see a review of standing committees to meet the required needs of a new Assembly structure.

NIPSA would welcome the fact that if the current departments are reduced a sensible approach is taking in creating new departments, for example in the case of DEL, NIPSA supports the case that DEL should be amalgamated with ETI yet consideration of splitting DEL between two departments is not a value for money option. It is an ideal opportunity to realign old departments and also remove a number of ad hoc areas such as Economic Policy and Regeneration into an Economy Department.

Overall whilst there is general agreement that there needs to be a reduction of political representatives and a review of Government Departments and Assembly Scrutiny Committees the current work levels will not decrease but increase and therefore apply more stress on those politicians and staff within the new structures.

Questions 2, 3 and 4 - Length of Assembly Terms:

This doesn't directly affect NIPSA only could be seen as practical and parity across the legislature. And may in the long term save money.

Questions 5, 6 and 7 – Multiple Mandates:

NIPSA would advise the A+ER Committee that while there is a cost saving opportunity in reducing political representation at both Council and Assembly level the front line needs of the community are increasing and the further reduction of secretariat staffing levels will impact on the effectiveness of those politicians to fulfil

their role in providing political leadership in a society that is continuing to evolve in a post conflict environment.

There is also a need for no double jobbing – that NIPSA would not support MLAs also taking offices of MP and or member of the House of Lords. How this is controlled is a matter for the legislatures.

Questions 8:

This is again a political question that NIPSA would not have a strong view on however a coalition government could be argued isn't as effective as there is no opposition to challenge proposals rather a compromise is the norm.

Yours sincerely,

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