The 2022 – 2027 Mandate

Legislation

This ‘shortened mandate’ will mean that less legislation will be passed by the Assembly compared to a full mandate. The last mandate (2017-2022) was also ‘shortened’ and the Assembly passed 46 Bills between January 2020 and dissolution in March 2022. (The last full mandate was 2011 to 2016 when the Assembly passed 67 Acts.)

At the start of a mandate, it takes time for Bills to be brought to the Assembly as there is considerable work to be done before introduction – policy development, consultation, drafting and agreement by the Executive. There are also legal checks to complete to ensure that a Bill is within the ‘legislative competence’ of the Assembly, i.e., that the Assembly has the power to legislate in that area, and that itis compatible with human rights law, including rights under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Bills can be introduced to the Assembly by Ministers (Executive Bills), Committees (Committee Bills), individual MLAs (Members’ Bills) and the Assembly Commission, which is the corporate body of the Assembly. The Commission is responsible for providing the property, staff and services the Assembly needs to function and is made up of the Speaker (Chair) and representatives of the main Assembly parties. Committee and Commission Bills are rare.

From February 2024 to date (11 November 2026), 48 Bills have been introduced to the Assembly – 36 Executive Bills and 12 Non-Executive Bills.

Executive Bills

Of the 36 Executive Bills, 19 have been passed by the Assembly and received Royal Assent. These 19 Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly include:

- Budget Acts;
- the Pensions (Extension of Automatic Enrolment) Act which lowers the age at which you begin contributing to a pension from 21 to 18;
- the Agriculture Act which provides support to the fruit and vegetables sector of the agricultural economy;
- the Defective Premises Act which aims to provide more protection to the owners and tenants of defective properties, increasing the time

period allowed to claim against defective works, bringing NI into line with England and Wales (Building Safety Act 2022);

- the Child Support Enforcement Bill which will give the Child Maintenance Service the power to issue an order for arrears to be paid without having to apply to the courts to do so. This Act brings NI into line with the rest of the UK (parity legislation).
- Sign Language Act (British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language are now official languages and the Department of Communities has a responsibility to promote them and increase access to sign language services);
- Death, Still Births and Baby Loss Act (certificates of acknowledgement);
- School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Act (to reduce the cost of school uniform);
- Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Act (to set up an Inquiry);
- Hospital Parking Charges Act (delays implementation of free parking at hospitals)

Awaiting Royal Assent - The Dilapidation Bill. It will give councils powers to deal with neglected buildings.

Current Executive Bills include:

- Justice Bill (timescales for retaining DNA and fingerprints, bail for children and
- Justice (Sentencing) Bill (new sentencing guidelines
- Victims and Witnesses of Crime (greater support in the criminal justice system)
- School Inspections Bill (teachers can’t opt out due to strike action)
- Adult Protection Bill (to protect vulnerable adults from ill-treatment or neglect)
- Harbours Bill (updating legislation)
- Marriage and Civil Partnership Bill (equality between religious and non-religious marriage, increase in age at which you can get married from 16 to 18)
- Renewable Electricity Generation Bill (grants to encourage low carbon electricity generation and reduce greenhouse gas emission)

- Credit Unions Bill (updating legislation)
- Fish, Aquaculture and Fisheries Bill (to address pollution)

Non-Executive Bills

- 10 Members' Bills
- a Bill introduced by the Assembly Commission – the corporate body of the Assembly to set up a new independent body to determine the salaries of MLAs – now the Assembly Members' (Independent Renumeration Board) Act which established a new body to determine the salaries of MLAs; and
- A Committee Bill - the School Uniform (Trousers) Bill which seeks to give girls the right to wear trousers to school.

The 10 Members' Bills are:

- Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill – Declan McAleer MLA (support for hill farmers)
- Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill - Danny Baker MLA (support during school holidays for children entitled to school meals)
- Irish Medium Education (Workforce Planning) Bill – Pat Sheehan MLA (incentives to recruit people to teach in Irish medium schools)
- Hunting with Dogs Bill - John Blair MLA (a ban on fox hunting)
- Regional Balance Bill Sinead McLaughlin (duty on government to consider regional balance when doing strategic economic planning)
- Conversion Practices (Criminalisation) Bill – Eoin Tennyson MLA (to make it an offence to provide conversion therapy)
- Trees Protection Bill – Peter McReynolds MLA
- Housing Bill – Colm Gildernew MLA (to prevent homelessness)
- Display of Flags and Emblems Bill – Paula Bradshaw MLA (duty on Department for Communities to remove flags and emblems if it is in the public interest to do so)
- Age Discrimination (Goods, Facilities and Services) Bill – Clare Sugden MLA (to stop discrimination against older people – and young people, from 16 years of age)

The one, non-Executive Bill passed by the Assembly so far, is the Assembly Members (Independent Renumeration Board) Act 2025. It was introduced by the Assembly Commission (corporate body of the Assembly) to set up an independent body to determine the salary and pensions of MLAs. The Bill gives the Assembly Commission the role of determining allowances for MLAs.

Members' Bills

A lot of MLAs expressed interest in introducing a Member's Bill, but not all reached Introduction Stage by the required date – 30 June 2026. To successfully introduce a Bill requires a number of steps to be undertaken by the MLA sponsoring the Bill. The MLA must consult the relevant Minister/Department; the relevant Assembly Committee; the Human Rights and Equality Commissions; key stakeholders in the policy area; and the public (usually by a 12-week e-consultation). They must commission research into the matter in question and seek legal advice on the issue of legislative competence – to confirm that the Assembly has the power to pass legislation in this area.

After this work has been completed, and the Speaker is satisfied that the necessary conditions have been met and, crucially, that the Bill proposal falls within the legislative competence of the Assembly, the proposal may move to drafting stage. The Assembly can call on a team of external drafters. Once drafted and approved for Introduction by the Speaker, a Member's Bill will go through the same stages of the legislative process as an Executive Bill. (NB: The Executive has its own permanent team of drafters, called the Office of the Legislative Counsel or OLC).

Acting on recommendations made by the 2022 Assembly Committee on Procedures Inquiry into Private Members' Bills, the current Speaker, Edwin Poots MLA has advised Members to keep their proposals narrow and focused on a single, specific issue. At the end of the 2017 to 2022 mandate, the Assembly was under considerable time pressure due to the amount of legislation being considered. They had to hold extra plenary sittings and committees had to meet more than once a week, in order to deal with the heavy workload. In September 2024, the Assembly agreed to change the rules relating to the timing of introduction of Members' Bills (another recommendation of the Committee on Procedures Inquiry report). It amended Standing Order No 30 to add a deadline date by which a Member's Bill must be introduced at First Stage in the Assembly – which is the final sitting day in June, the year before the election. This will help ease the pressure on the Assembly towards the end of a mandate.

Some issues relating to recent Acts

In May 2024, the High Court in Belfast ruled that part of the **Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims Act (Northern Ireland) 2022)**, which allowed anonymity for life and 25 years after death for those suspected but not charged with sexual offences, was outside the legislative competence of the Assembly and 'not

law', because relevant sections failed to strike a fair balance between suspects' rights to privacy and press freedom. The law had been challenged by a group of media organisations. This was the first time that the High Court used this power in section 6 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

In June 2025, the High Court ruled against the already delayed upgrade of the A5, saying that the current plans conflicted with climate change targets set out in the **Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022**. The Act commits Northern Ireland to achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with other binding targets along the way. Government departments have to publish targets and plans for cutting emission in their area of responsibility.

In October 2025, the High Court dismissed applications by two Bangor schools for a full judicial review of the Minister of Education's decision not to grant the schools integrated status. The Court ruled that the Minister's interpretation of the relevant legislation (the **Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989** and the **Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022**) was correct. The judge said, '*The Minister cannot in law approve a proposal unless he considers it likely that reasonable numbers* (from both main communities) *presently exist or will be achieved'*. In a statement to the Assembly the Minister referred to criticism he had received from the Chair of the Education Committee and the MLA behind the 2022 Integrated Education Act for being 'narrow and selective' in his assessment of the criteria which must be met to achieve integrated status. He said '*in light of the judgment … it is clear … I correctly identified and applied the relevant statutory test. It was the Chair of the Education Committee and remarkably the author of the Integrated Education Act 2022 that did not properly understand the relevant statutory provisions.*'

See the separate resource on the Justice Bill – The Committee Stage for this Bill was very long. The Minister introduced the Bill but said that she would be adding amendments at a later stage and the Committee wanted to ensure proper scrutiny of the whole Bill. At Consideration Stage, 6 amendments were tabled on the issue of the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility. The age is currently 10 and amendments were proposed to increase it to 12, 14 and 16. Petitions of Concern were submitted on all the amendments and none of them got the cross-community support required to pass.

A Petition of Concern was also submitted at the Final Stage of the Irish Medium Education (Workplace Planning) Bill (10 November 2026). The Final Stage vote will take place after 14 days. If the Petition is confirmed by at least 30 signatures from more than one party, then the vote on whether or not to pass the Bill will require cross-community support.

Keep up to date on the legislation pages of the Assembly website.

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