

## The Assembly & Executive

F: The power sharing government of Northern Ireland is made up of the Assembly and the Executive. They have different roles to play. The Assembly is formed by elected MLAs, members of the legislative Assembly, voted in by the people of Northern Ireland, to represent their views. Most MLAs are members of political parties, and parties aim to have as many of their candidates elected as possible. The more MLAs a party has elected, the more ministers it can appoint. Ministers sit on the Executive Committee or Executive, which meets in Stormont Castle.

So how does the Assembly decide who gets what? Step forward Belgian mathematician, Mr D'Hondt. He came up with a mathematical formula for sharing out the government departments between parties, according to how many seats parties win in the Assembly election. Let's see how it works. The largest party picks the first department, and names one of their MLAs to be the minister in charge of that department.

The total number of seats for that party is then divided by one, plus the number of ministers they already have. Let's look at the figures again, to see who the largest party is. It's the largest party at each stage that gets to choose a department, so that party will now make their selection and name one of their MLAs to be the minister in charge of that department. The total number of seats for that party is then divided by one plus the number of ministers they already have.

The D'Hondt formula runs again to determine who the largest party is this time. In this case, the party now has two ministers, so after they choose this time, their total would be divided by three. Remember, the D'Hondt formula is one plus the number of ministers they already have. D'Hondt continues to run until all the departments have a minister in charge. The First and deputy First Ministers (one Unionist and the other Nationalist) are not chosen using the D'Hondt formula.

The largest party in the Assembly chooses the First Minister, and the largest party from the other community (either Unionist or Nationalist) chooses the deputy First Minister. They jointly manage the work of the Executive and have equal powers. Ministers have the power to make decisions in their own departments and are responsible for delivering the services that we all need, such as hospitals, schools, roads and public transport. They develop an action plan called a Programme for Government, and a Budget, stating how much money each department should get.

Ministers also suggest new laws, called Bills. This work must all be passed by the Assembly before it can take effect and the Assembly may make some changes along the way. For every minister, there is an Assembly committee of MLAs that scrutinises the work of that minister. In the chamber, MLAs question ministers during question time, and highlight issues and debates

that they think ministers need to consider. And who holds MLAs to account? We do. The voters at the next election.