

Behind the Scenes at the Northern Ireland Assembly

KEY:

N: Narrator
NB: Norah Anne Barron
M: Male Speaker
F: Female Speaker

(BEEPS) (RADIO STATIONS CHANGING)

M Radio Speaker: This is BBC Radio Ulster... Political parties will announce today who will appoint to lead the various departments at Stormont.

N: It's a big day for the Assembly. After the May elections, it's time to find out who the new ministers will be and there's lots of interest in what's going to happen. We join the broadcast team as they prepare for the day.

NB: We're on from 12:00 to 12:45 and then we're back on air from 2:00 to 3:30. Anne is taking the lead on directing, Chris is taking the lead on cameras, Justin on sound...

N: As well as briefing her team, Norah Anne also liaises with the media, who want to broadcast what's happening in the assembly chamber.

NB: And there's quite a lot of the media in today, who will need support.

N: The team starts the day with sound and camera checks, to make sure everything is working properly. With six cameras and 88 microphones in the chamber, the team must make sure everything is working properly before we go live. During the checks, a problem is found with the sound in the chamber.

M: Sean, it's Alan up in the switcher here. There seems to be an audio fault. There's a lot of feedback coming into the press gallery.

N: There's feedback coming from the speakers in the press gallery and it's affecting the sound on the floor of the chamber, and it can be heard on the live output used by the media.

NB: But if you talk to Justin, I think you'll find out that you can't leave it off because the old PA upstairs has fallen out.

N: It's all hands on deck to try and fix the problem before MLAs start to arrive and TV and radio programmes go on air.

NB: Right, so can we do a test now with two or three mics on? What's happening, please?

M: That's two mics on...

N: The team tries lots of different things to fix it, but it's not working. With five minutes to go, things are getting a little frantic. ...

NB: ...12:45 until two o'clock, then do an investigation. I'm not starting out to turn stuff on and off with five minutes to go.

M: Is that working with you at Hansard speakers, Justin?

N: With literally minutes to spare, a short term fix has been found and the speakers in the press gallery of the chamber are unplugged. It's not perfect but it means the debate begins on time and the media get their footage. Everyone is in place, ready to begin the live broadcast of the Assembly sitting.

F: Here, on the six with sound... One next, probably.

N: The cameras and microphones in the assembly chamber are controlled remotely from a suite in the basement. There is a team of five on today, controlling cameras, sound, colour and captions. The team don't know who's going to speak next, so Anne, Programme Director, is keeping an eye on every camera and decides which ones should be used, depending on who stands up to speak.

F: Five over the shoulder.

M: The Minister of Justice. All those in favour, say 'Aye' (AYE). Do we have any 'No'? (NO). Order members, do we have tellers?

F: Coming to six.

N: Quick reflexes are needed to make sure the right camera and microphone is on the right person. Despite the initial panic at the start of the day, coverage of the sitting goes without any further hitches. All ministers have been appointed and the speaker brings proceedings to a close.

M: The sitting is by leave, suspended. (CHATTER)

N: But even after the sitting has finished, the team's work goes on. The great hall becomes a hive of activity with press conferences and interviews. The broadcast team has to make sure the media can hear what's being said. It can all get very frantic as everyone wants their shot and their interview. So next time you watch or listen to an assembly debate, you'll know what goes on behind the scenes to make it all happen.

M: Radio Speaker: Stormont's new Executive Ministers have been formally appointed at the Assembly.