


# EXPLANATORY NOTES

## Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016

Chapter 29

£4.25

# ASSEMBLY MEMBERS (REDUCTION OF NUMBERS) ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2016

## EXPLANATORY NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. These Explanatory Notes relate to the Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, which received Royal Assent on 22 July 2016. They have been prepared by the Executive Office in order to assist the reader in understanding the Act and have not been endorsed by the Assembly.

2. The notes need to be read in conjunction with the Act. They are not, and are not meant to be, a comprehensive description of the Act. So where a section or part of a section does not seem to require an explanation or comment, none is given.

### BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

3. The need for this Act arises from the provisions set out in the Stormont House Agreement and Section F, paragraph 56 of the Stormont Agreement and Implement Plan which state: "The number of Assembly members should be reduced to five members per constituency, or such other reduction as may be agreed, in time for the 2021 Assembly election, and the Assembly will legislate accordingly".

4. Section 33 (Constituencies and numbers of members) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (NIA) provides for each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland to return six members to the Northern Ireland Assembly. The purpose of the Act is to reduce this number from six to five. As there are at present 18 constituencies, the effect of the Act will therefore be to reduce the number of members of the Assembly from 108 to 90.

5. Section 6 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 provides for the alteration of the number of members of the Assembly returned for each constituency to be a reserved matter, except where the alteration is to a number lower than five or higher than six, or where provision is made for different numbers for different constituencies. As a reserved matter, the Secretary of State's consent to the Bill was required and granted. Section 6 also required that a Bill brought by the Assembly making provision for such a change had to have cross community support at the point at which the Bill was passed by the Assembly. This support was demonstrated on 23 February 2016.

6. The provisions of the Act will be brought into effect in advance of the 2021 election to the Northern Ireland Assembly and will also apply to any Extraordinary election which might be held between the election in 2016 and that in 2021 in accordance with Section 32 of the NIA.

## OVERVIEW

7. The Act consists of two sections.

## COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

8. A commentary on each of the sections follows:

### Section 1: Reduction of number of members returned for each constituency

This section amends Section 33(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by changing the number of Assembly members returned for each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland from six to five and contains provisions for the commencement of the legislation.

### Section 2: Short title

This section provides that the Act shall be known as the Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

## HANSARD REPORTS

9. The following table sets out the dates of the Hansard reports for each stage of the Act's passage through the Assembly and the date Royal Assent was received.

| STAGE | DATE |
|---|---|
| First Stage | 12 January 2016 |
| Second Stage | 25 January 2016 |
| Consideration Stage | 2 February 2016 |
| Further Consideration Stage | 16 February 2016 |
| Final Stage | 23 February 2016 |
| Royal Assent | 22 July 2016 |

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