



Northern Ireland
Assembly



Head of Communications

£66,376 - £68,349

Candidate Information Booklet

Completed Application Forms must be submitted no later
than **12 noon (UK time) on 14 April 2025**

Please retain a copy of this booklet for your reference
throughout the selection process.

Foreword

Thank you for your interest in the position of Head of Communications (Assembly Grade 4) in the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission (the Assembly Commission).

The Assembly operates in a dynamic political and parliamentary environment, and as a newly appointed Head of Communications you will be provided with an excellent opportunity to make an important and valued contribution to the work of the Assembly at Parliament Buildings.

The Head of Communications has a key role in developing effective working relationships with a wide range of external and internal stakeholders, ensuring that the business of the Assembly is communicated effectively and in a manner which engages the widest possible audience.

Working at the Assembly offers a rewarding career. This is an exciting opportunity to join a high-profile organisation with a dedicated and inclusive team.

In turn, we offer a competitive salary and an excellent pension provision where you contribute 7.35% of salary and the Assembly Commission will contribute a further 34.25%.

We offer an annual leave allocation of 25 days, increasing by one day per year up to a maximum of 30 days. In addition, we offer 12 days of public and privilege holidays. We also offer a range of other [employee benefits listed on the Recruitment website](#).

Please read the information provided in the candidate information booklet carefully and if you are interested in this exciting post, I would encourage you to submit your application.

If you would like to find out more about the post before making an application please contact stephanie.mallon@niassembly.gov.uk or telephone 02890 521021.



Gareth McGrath

Director of Parliamentary Services

About Us

The **Assembly** is at the heart of political and public life as the democratically elected parliament that represents the interests of Northern Ireland and its people.

Established as a key element of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the Assembly comprises 90 Members and makes laws, scrutinises the work of the Executive and represents the views of the public. It is the prime source of authority in respect of all devolved responsibilities.

The **Assembly Commission** enables the successful operation of the Assembly by providing the staff, services and facilities which are needed to support parliamentary business. The Assembly Commission is a body corporate, comprising the Speaker and five Members of the Assembly. The Assembly Commission delegates the day-to-day running of the Assembly to the Clerk/Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team (SMT).

The priorities of the Assembly Commission, as set out in its [Corporate Strategy 2023 - 2028](#), are that:

- The Assembly will be empowered to achieve its full potential.
- The public will understand and value the role of the Assembly and be engaged in its work.
- Our staff will be a motivated, resilient and expert team.
- Our systems and facilities will be modern, secure and efficient.

The Assembly Commission is a high-achieving and professional organisation, providing impartial support to the Assembly and its Members.

The Assembly Commission has approximately 400 staff and an annual budget of £67m, and is independent of the Executive and the Civil Service. The organisational structure is illustrated on the [recruitment website](#).

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About the Role

The Assembly Commission has a strategic priority that the public will understand and value the role of the Assembly and be engaged in its work. Part of that work means creating greater awareness of the work of the Assembly by explaining its role and showing how the scrutiny work of committees and plenary sessions can lead to improvements in the services we all use every day.

The Assembly's Communications Office is responsible for providing and publishing content and information on the work of the Assembly to the media, the public, government departments and other stakeholders through various means including the Assembly's website, other content channels including social media and streaming, as well as media (i.e. press etc.) engagement. Content and information communicated covers committee and plenary business, public engagement activity (including the Youth Assembly), the representational role of the Speaker and the work of the Assembly Commission.

We want to make sure that the Assembly is at the heart of our public conversation. That means we must work hard to reach all parts of Northern Ireland and all our communities and beyond. The way the public access their news and communicate with organisations is constantly evolving. With the decrease in the breadth and depth of local and national broadcasting of parliamentary business, the Assembly Commission is having to increasingly 'step in' in order to increase the availability and visibility of content relating to the business and the work of the Assembly. As a result, we are bolstering our social media and digital presence and strengthening our focus on content generation and delivery. At a time when there is unprecedented focus on the work of the Assembly, we need to make sure we can explain our work clearly and simply.

The Head of Communications will lead and manage the work of the Communications Office, ensuring that its work is aligned to the [Corporate Strategy and Values of the Assembly Commission](#), is delivered to an excellent standard and is strategically focused, innovative, impactful and forward looking.

Impartiality is key to the work of the Assembly Commission in providing services

to the Assembly and is therefore a key aspect of the role of Head of Communications.

Reporting to the Director of Parliamentary Services, you will lead on how the Assembly tells its story. You will do this by setting a clear direction for the Communications team. The Head of Communications is a high-pressure role which is demanding and challenging and is not 'nine-to-five.' However, the role also provides an opportunity to work in a leading, high-profile organisation which is frequently in the 'public eye' locally, nationally and internationally.

You will have strategic input into delivering the Assembly Commission's Corporate Strategy objectives, adding your in-depth expertise and experience to ensure the Assembly is playing the lead role in developing engaged citizens from across all communities in Northern Ireland, and that we are an informed, engaged and participative democracy.

The Person

You will build effective working relationships with key stakeholders including journalists, the Speaker's Office, committee chairpersons and clerks and the Clerk/Chief Executive, and work collaboratively with different Assembly Commission business areas. You will bring creative flair and an innovative approach to the delivery of Assembly communications to help reach new and diverse audiences, particularly in a fast-moving and ever-changing media landscape. You will also have experience of leading a team and will have the ability to motivate and inspire your team and to communicate clearly and effectively as you carry out your new role.

Core Responsibilities

The main duties and responsibilities of the post are:

Strategic

- Cultivate the Assembly's "brand" as the voice of the people of Northern Ireland and design, develop and implement a communications strategy, consistent with our brand to ensure our messages are targeted at specific demographic groups with a focus on ensuring that our social media channels reach and engage parts of society who are dis-interested or dis-engaged in the political process.
- Provide leadership for the delivery of impartial, robust, reactive and longer-term communications advice to the Speaker, Assembly committees, the Assembly Commission and the Clerk/Chief Executive on a range of matters relating to parliamentary business and to the work of the Assembly Commission.
- Support the development of our internal parliamentary culture, and design, develop and implement an internal communications strategy to link communication activity to Assembly Commission-wide activities, initiatives and projects in order to develop an engaged workforce who will meet the opportunities and challenges of the organisation.
- Support the management of the wider Parliamentary Services Directorate, through membership of the Directorate Management Team and membership of corporate working groups, recruitment panels and project boards and teams.
- Lead on project management in broadcasting-related initiatives in order to improve accessibility of content to the public and deliver long term efficiencies.
- Build effective working relationships with a wide range of stakeholders to support the delivery of Assembly Commission strategic priorities.

Leading people

- Lead and develop a high-performing team of approximately eleven staff to provide effective communications advice and support to Assembly committee inquiries and corporate campaigns and work with colleagues from across the Assembly Commission via multi-disciplinary teams.

- Lead and develop a positive and proactive service and ensure that the right resources are in the right place at the right time.
- Continuously improve digital competency and skills, ensuring communications are consistent, simple and engaging.
- Develop and manage the Communications Office financial, staffing and other resources, in compliance with Assembly Commission policies, to support the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and maintain continuous improvement of service levels and standards.

Engagement

- Maintain relationships with key stakeholders, including the media and ensure the work of the Assembly is communicated effectively to them.
- Build relationships with new stakeholder groups to effectively communicate the work of the Assembly in a positive way and maximise opportunities to reach a growing range of diverse audiences.

Supporting the Speaker in their representational role

- Support the Speaker and the Speaker's Office through the development and delivery of a PR and media engagement plan and campaign that are aligned with each Speaker's priorities.
- Lead the development and delivery of a programme of proactive communications advice and support to the Speaker in his representational role, as well as his roles as Presiding Officer of the Assembly, Chairperson of the Assembly Commission, Co-Chairperson of the North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association, and President of the Assembly's Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Content

- Lead the development and delivery of the Assembly Commission's content strategy, ensuring alignment with brand guidelines, target audience needs and business objectives.

- Oversee the creation of high-quality, engaging and innovative content across various platforms, including social media, websites, email campaigns and traditional media.
- Collaborate with other Assembly Commission business areas to identify and generate compelling storytelling opportunities and ensure consistent messaging and tone across all communication channels.
- Manage the redevelopment of the Assembly's website, as well as our social media channels, to increase reach and engagement with the public.
- Develop and deliver the Assembly's broadcasting capability in order to ensure that the largest number of people in Northern Ireland have access to view Assembly proceedings and other work relating to the Assembly in real time or retrospectively.
- Lead the development of digital, video, audio and print content to deliver new and exciting ways of projecting the work of the Assembly in the digital environment and track engagement across various channels to make data-driven communications decisions.
- Work with existing and new external partners to access audiences for broadcasting and bespoke content relating to the business of the Assembly.

PR and Media Relations

- Manage engagement between the Assembly and the media by leading the provision of a professional and efficient 'press office' function, providing routine, proactive and crisis response across all content channels.
- Manage media accommodation and facilities in Parliament Buildings.
- Provide a professional communications support and advice service to internal customers, including the Public Engagement team, the Women's Caucus and the Commissioner for Standards.

Campaign Planning and Delivery

- Develop communications strategies and lead the development and delivery of creative and engaging multi-channel campaigns to raise awareness of the Assembly's work and facilitate engagement with it.

- Proactively work collaboratively with different business areas to develop communications strategies and content which can be used and re-purposed for different channels and audiences and embed a 'digital first' operation and culture.

Contract and Project Management

- Oversee the Assembly Commission's contract for broadcasting and related services to ensure compliance with the Assembly's rules of coverage, drive innovation, exploit new technology and establish and maintain supplier relationships by serving as a single point of contact for contractual matters.
- Lead a cyclical replacement programme of business-critical broadcasting and infrastructure projects to ensure broadcasting and engineering equipment and facilities are fit for purpose and meet the needs of the Assembly.
- Manage the Assembly Commission's advertising, media monitoring and photography contracts and frameworks to meet the needs of all internal customers.

Accountability and Corporate Governance

- Prepare and present papers to the Senior Management Team and Assembly Commission on resource issues, policies, strategic plans for approval etc.
- Ensure effective risk management and good governance measures to facilitate compliance with statutory responsibilities.
- Contribute to corporate and directorate business planning, risk management, governance processes and related corporate activity.
- Comply with all Assembly Commission staff policies and procedures including Equal Opportunities and Dignity at Work policies and procedures and all mandatory training requirements.
- Manage information and records in accordance with established policies and statutory requirements.
- Carry out other duties that the Assembly Commission reasonably requires of you.

Essential Criteria

Applicants must, by the closing date for applications, have:

1. At least a primary degree, minimum 2:1 classification, in any subject and at least 5 years' experience in each of the areas detailed at a) – f) below.

Applications will be considered from applicants with formal qualifications of an equivalent or higher standard to those stated.

OR

2. At least 7 years' experience in the areas specified at a) – f) below:
 - a) Demonstrable track record in leading successful, impactful communication campaigns for a range of external audiences using excellent written and oral communications skills.
 - b) Proven experience of building relationships with key stakeholders to promote the work of an organisation **with a substantial public profile***.
 - c) Providing briefings and strategic communications advice (including press statements and lines to take) to senior colleagues/stakeholders in a political/sensitive and pressurised organisational environment.
 - d) Providing and managing the interface between the media and an organisation **with a substantial public profile***.
 - e) Knowledge and practical experience of using multiple channels to engage with audiences (web, social, print, press, events etc.).
 - f) Directly leading, developing and managing high-performing teams to deliver communications plans across both media and digital platforms.

* Regular coverage in the media.

Assembly Skills and Behaviours

The following Assembly Skills and Behaviours will be assessed during the selection process:

Delivering a quality service

...is about providing a high-quality and efficient service to our customers. It is thinking ahead, managing resources effectively and delivering work on time and to a high standard. It is also using professional or technical expertise to enhance service delivery.

Building relationships and effective communication

...is creating and maintaining positive, professional and respectful internal and external working relationships through effective and appropriate communications.

Initiating improvement and delivering change

...is looking for and being open to new and innovative ideas and improvements to the service provided. It is being flexible and adapting positively and professionally to sustain performance when the situation changes, workloads increase or priorities change. It is about forming sound, evidence-based decisions and being accountable for results.

Managing and leading self and others

... is setting high standards for ourselves. It is about guiding, motivating and developing others to achieve high performance. It is about engaging others in delivering a corporate vision of excellence, expertise and innovation in support of the Assembly as a legislature.

Parliamentary and political understanding

... is displaying an appropriate understanding of the wider political environment; what the Assembly does and how our role fits in; and the level of public scrutiny to which the actions and decisions of Assembly staff are exposed. It requires impartiality, integrity and political sensitivity.

Equal Opportunities Statement

The Assembly Commission is committed to equality of opportunity in employment and welcomes applications from all suitably qualified applicants irrespective of religious belief, political opinion, race, age, gender, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or people with dependents or without. **All applications for employment will be considered on the basis of merit.**

Location

The successful applicant will be based in Parliament Buildings, Belfast.

The Assembly Commission operates a Hybrid Working Policy and the balance between working in Parliament Buildings and working at home will depend on business and service need.

Completing the form

Only the information presented in the application form will be considered by the selection panel. CVs or other supplementary material will not be accepted in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms. Completed online forms must be submitted by **12 noon (UK time) on 14 April 2025**.

[Launch the application portal and complete the application form.](#)

Application forms submitted after the closing time and date will not be accepted.

Recruitment and Selection Framework

There are five elements within the Recruitment and Selection Framework:

Experience – the knowledge or mastery of an activity or subject gained through involvement in or exposure to it.

Ability – the aptitude or potential to perform to the required standard.

Technical – the demonstration of specific professional skills, knowledge or qualifications.

Assembly Skills and Behaviours – the actions and activities that people do which result in effective performance in a job.

Strengths – the things we do regularly, do well and that motivate us.

The elements that will be assessed for this role are Experience, Ability, Technical, Assembly Skills and Behaviours and Strengths and the selection method(s) that will be used are detailed below. Further information on the [Recruitment and Selection Framework](#) are included in the [Guidance on Recruitment and Selection for Applicants](#).

Stages of the Selection Process

Online Testing

Online testing may be used as a shortlisting tool. Invitation to test does not imply that an applicant possesses the essential criteria. The tests will be held online, and instructions and further information will be issued to applicants after the closing date for applications on 14 April 2025. Only those applicants who meet the minimum standard and who score highest in the tests will be considered for the next stage of the selection process: the eligibility sift.

Online testing (if required) is planned for week commencing 14 April 2024.

Eligibility Sift

The essential criteria reflect the experience and knowledge that an applicant must possess in order to be able to undertake the role. An eligibility sift will be carried out on the basis of the information contained in the essential criteria section of the application form. **You must therefore demonstrate clearly in your form how, and to what extent, you meet with the essential criteria for the post.**

Assessment Stage

As part of this stage of the selection process, applicants will be required to complete a written exercise. Applicants who meet the minimum standard in the written exercise will be invited to attend an interview.

Interview Stage

Applicants invited to interview will be assessed using the essential criteria, Strengths and Assembly Skills and Behaviours as outlined above.

Part of the interview process will be the delivery of a presentation. The subject of the presentation will be advised to the applicant in advance of the interview and the applicant will be expected to present information to the selection panel.

Interviews are planned for week commencing 26 May 2025

Further Interview Stage

The Selection Panel reserves the right to hold a further interview stage if deemed necessary.

Disability Confident

The Assembly Commission is a Disability Confident Committed Employer and for our recruitment, we have committed to:

- ensuring our recruitment process is inclusive and accessible;
- communicating and promoting vacancies;
- offering an interview to disabled people who meet the essential criteria for the job (the Guaranteed Interview Scheme); and
- anticipating and providing reasonable adjustments as required.

The Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) supports applicants with disabilities or those with a long-term impairment or health condition, which is expected to last for at least 12 months by offering an interview to disabled people who meet the essential criteria for the job. If you are applying under GIS it is therefore

important that you include all relevant information in your application form. You should refer to the Guidance on Recruitment and Selection for Applicants for more information.

If an assessment or test is used as a shortlisting tool, then applicants applying under GIS will not be required to complete the assessment or test and will be offered a guaranteed interview, provided that they demonstrate in their application form that they meet the essential criteria for the role.

In instances where an assessment or test forms part of the selection process and is not a shortlisting tool, then all applicants must meet the minimum standard required for that assessment or test, including those applying under GIS.

If you wish to submit your application under the GIS, or if you require adjustments to enable you to participate in any part of the selection process, please indicate this on the application form or contact us at recruitment@niassembly.gov.uk.

Please note that you will be required to provide written confirmation of your disability or long-term health condition from a general practitioner or an appropriate specialist, by the closing date for applications.

You can get advice or assistance with making an application from your local Jobs and Benefits Office – contact details are available on nidirect: [Find contact details for your local Jobs and Benefits Office](#).

Key Employee Benefits

We offer a competitive salary, excellent pension provision and generous annual leave allowance.

We also offer a range of non-salary benefits which include hybrid working; supportive family friendly policies; flexi-time; health and wellbeing initiatives including an Employee Assistance Programme; supported learning and development; Cycle to Work Scheme; Payroll Giving; and volunteering opportunities.

The successful applicant will be given suitable training, including formal specialised courses, as necessary.

As an equal opportunities employer, we are happy to talk about the possibility of flexible working in this role with the successful applicant.

[View further details of our employee benefits.](#)

Terms and Conditions of Appointment

This is a permanent appointment. The successful candidate will be an employee of the Assembly Commission. All appointments are subject to the satisfactory completion of pre-appointment enquiries which include an Access NI basic check and the satisfactory completion of a six-month probationary period.

The standard working week is 37 hours, (excluding meal breaks). Working hours will be dictated by the mode of operation of the Assembly and will involve work into late evenings and on occasions, at weekends and on public holidays.

The taking of annual leave may be influenced by the parliamentary timetable.

Equality Monitoring

Under Fair Employment legislation, we are required to monitor the community background and gender of those applying for jobs. You must therefore complete the equal opportunities monitoring section of the application form when applying for the post.

Merit List

The merit list of applicants deemed to be appointable will normally remain “live” for 18 months from the date it is signed and may be used to fill any further permanent or fixed term opportunities for the same post.

Communication during the recruitment process

The Assembly Recruitment Team will issue most communication electronically. You should therefore regularly check your email account to make sure you do not miss any important communication. Please note, sometimes the Recruitment Team emails are automatically filtered as spam by email providers.

Further Information

If you require more information on the recruitment process, please contact the Assembly Recruitment Team on 028 9052 1741 or email us at recruitment@niassembly.gov.uk.

Further information about the Assembly can be obtained on the [Northern Ireland Assembly website](#).

The Candidate Information Booklet does not constitute any term or condition of employment.