

STATES OF JERSEY



STATES ASSEMBLY: FILMING PROCEEDINGS AND THE INSTALLATION OF CLOCKS

Lodged au Greffe on 16th April 2015
by the Privileges and Procedures Committee

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) to agree that the proceedings of the States Assembly should be filmed and broadcast live on the Internet and that the broadcast of each Sitting should be available online to view again for a period of at least 6 months;
- (b) to agree that the official media should be permitted, at their own cost, to record the proceedings of the States Assembly from the footage made in accordance with the provisions of paragraph (a), and to use it in news reports in accordance with rules to be established by the Privileges and Procedures Committee;
- (c) to agree that 3 digital display clocks should be installed in the States Chamber to indicate the length of speeches and other interventions made by members.

PRIVILEGES AND PROCEDURES COMMITTEE

REPORT

Introduction

When the current Chairman of PPC stood for the position on 7th November 2014, he emphasized that increasing public engagement with the States would be a high priority for him if he was selected by the States. In addition to a number of other measures, he referred to the desirability of filming and streaming the proceedings of the Assembly live. He stated: *“I would go one step further and would like to see live streaming of States Assemblies [Approbation] into the future. The technology exists and it is available in many Parliaments and Assemblies throughout the world and I do not see why we should be lagging behind, particularly if we want to re-engage with the public.”*

The new PPC has worked quickly to investigate the feasibility and cost of installing cameras and streaming the proceedings of the States live on the Internet, as well as the creation of an online archive of footage which could be accessed online after each Sitting. Advice has been sought from the Department of Electronics and the Information Services Department, as well as from potential suppliers and from other legislatures where filming is already in place.

PPC is conscious that filming and broadcasting the States will inevitably have additional resource implications, as set out later in this report, but believes that Jersey is indeed ‘lagging behind’ as stated by the Chairman and that, in the 21st Century, it is no longer acceptable to expect those interested in following the proceedings to do so through an audio-feed only. PPC considers that if members are serious about the need to re-engage with the public and to appeal to younger members of society, it is necessary to accept the additional cost of filming.

Practical arrangements

If this proposition is adopted, 5 remotely controlled cameras, linked to the current audio-feed, will be installed in the States Chamber, with 4 positioned to capture each section of members’ seating, and one focussed on the Presiding Officer and Greffier’s seats. The cameras that would be used are small and unobtrusive and would be installed sensitively to take account of the historic nature of the Chamber. A picture showing one possible camera that could be used is shown in the attached **Appendix**.

Although there are fully automated systems used in some parliaments and local councils elsewhere, usually linked to active microphones, PPC has agreed that a more ‘professional’ output will be achieved if the cameras are operated manually by a member of staff of the States Greffe. This will enable the camera to focus on the area where the speaker sits in the Chamber and allow for the camera to ‘zoom in’ to give a clearer picture if the speech is more than a few minutes long. Whilst large parliaments such as the House of Commons at Westminster might have considerably more cameras and a full broadcast production team operating them, PPC considers that the output from this smaller-scale operation in the States Chamber will still be of an acceptable quality.

The film and sound will be fed directly through a dedicated high-speed line to an outsourced provider and will then be visible live on a dedicated page of the States Assembly website. The streaming will be done at a suitable resolution to allow it to be viewed by any user with a standard Broadband connection and, for users, it will be

similar to viewing a YouTube video or the BBC iPlayer. The cameras to be installed will also have a High Definition output that will enable the footage to be made available to broadcasters for use in news programmes. A feed will be made available to broadcasters who, at their own cost, will be able record all or parts of a Sitting for use in programmes. Discussions have already taken place with Channel Television and the BBC, who are both understandably keen to improve their coverage of States proceedings by the use of film to replace the current audio only output. The BBC is also hopeful that some footage may be used nationally either on the Democracy Live website or on the BBC Parliament channel.

After each Sitting, the film of the proceedings will be available for a period of at least 6 months in an online archive visible through the States Assembly website. This archive will be hosted and managed by a third party supplier to be selected, if this proposition is adopted, through an open procurement process. PPC considers that the ability to view footage again in the archive is likely to be the most useful part of the new system, as it will enable anyone interested in the work of the States who has not been able to listen live to access relevant parts of proceedings for at least 6 months. Each film will hopefully have a basic index attached, linking to each individual debate or other part of the proceedings, to enable users to access the part they want to view more easily. PPC was very encouraged to note the number of ‘hits’ that the hustings videos received during the 2014 election campaign, which exceeded all initial expectations about the likely interest in the footage¹ and believes that the filming of the States Assembly will be of equal interest to many people in Jersey and elsewhere.

Considerations

There is some speculation that the introduction of cameras could encourage some members to speak more frequently or to ‘play’ to an outside audience rather than fellow members. Similar concerns were expressed in Jersey in the mid-1980s when the radio was first allowed to broadcast the proceedings of the Assembly, and in other parliaments such as the House of Commons, when cameras were first introduced but, in both cases, any potential disadvantages were greatly outweighed by the benefits of opening up legislatures to a wider audience. Although in theory some members may initially change their behaviour when cameras are introduced, PPC trusts that members will act in a responsible way and, in practice, members will almost certainly become oblivious to the cameras after a very short while.

There is some likelihood that the archive footage on the Internet might be downloaded and doctored for political or satirical purposes by users. In practice, just as with any other Internet video, there is no technical way to prevent the footage being copied and used in this way, and this risk must be accepted if an online archive is to be created. Nevertheless the official version of the footage on the States Assembly will always remain in its original form, and any attempt to ‘edit’ or change what members have said can always be countered by comparison to the original version. Although the opportunities to produce satirical or critical videos of States members will be greatly increased by the online archive, this is not seen by PPC as a sufficient concern to outweigh the significant benefits of opening up the proceedings to a much wider audience. Anyone producing a satirical or critical video will be subject to all normal rules on libel and defamation, and it has always been part of normal political life for members to have to accept a degree of criticism from the media and public.

¹ Some 11,000 hits overall and over 800 hits for one single senatorial hustings film

It is recognised that, just as in other jurisdictions, it would not be acceptable for the footage to be used by official broadcasters in an inappropriate way. Footage of the parliament at Westminster, for example, cannot be used in satirical programmes, and can only be used in accordance with rules established by Parliament. PPC will, in a similar way, be drawing up rules for broadcasters to ensure that the footage provided is used for genuine news and current affairs coverage of the Assembly. Initial discussions with local broadcasters have shown that they would welcome such rules to ensure that there are agreed parameters for everyone about the use of the footage.

Installation of clocks in the States Chamber

In addition to the broadcasting of proceedings, PPC has investigated the installation of clocks within the Chamber which could alert Members to the length of their speeches. Clocks showing the length of time that members have been speaking are in place in many parliaments around the world, and have proved to be useful in chambers such as the House of Lords to inform members how long their speeches are lasting.

In Jersey all members have the right to address the Assembly without any time limit during debates, and PPC wishes to stress that there is no intention to link the installation of clocks to the introduction of time limits on speeches. Nevertheless the mere fact of seeing on a screen how long a speech has lasted will hopefully assist members to be concise and relevant. In the House of Commons at Westminster there are annunciators (television screens) which show the subject under debate, the name of the Member speaking, the time when they started to speak and the current time, but not the total length of time a speech has lasted. PPC considers it would be more productive for a simple clock system showing the total time a member has been speaking to be used in the States Chamber. Hopefully, having a conscious and visible reminder of the duration of a speech or debate will focus the person speaking on participating in an efficient manner.

The existing Auditel computer system has a clock feature built-in, but needs to run in a different mode to the voting element for it to work. It was therefore considered better to look at a third party application to give the functionality required. A standalone system has been investigated for this purpose, and it will be the Greffier's responsibility to start, stop and reset the clock in the same way as his Westminster colleagues. The Department of Electronics has made contact with a company which produces timer displays that can be centrally linked. This is ideal, as it will be necessary to have at least 3 clocks placed over the main 3 exit doors in the Chamber. The clocks will appear on a simple flat-screen television display showing a digital clock display.

A quote was received in the sum of £1,748.64 for the supply and installation of 3 'elapsed time counters' in the States Chamber. Originally, PPC had intended to trial the operation of the clocks but, in view of the costs involved, the Committee considered that the installation should be considered a permanent measure, for it would be difficult to justify such an expense for a trial period.

Financial and manpower implications

Filming and web-streaming

Officers from the States Greffe have already held initial discussions with potential third party partners to manage the web-streaming and archiving of the filming of the Assembly and, if this proposition is adopted, a formal tender process will be organised to select a supplier. As a result it would be unwise, for commercial reasons, to indicate too precisely the maximum amount that PPC believes will be needed for this service, although the Committee recognises that States members need an indication of likely costs to enable them to make a decision, and Standing Orders also require a financial and manpower statement to accompany any proposition.

The equipment costs for the filming and web-streaming could be funded in one of 2 ways. The initial equipment costs are, with some suppliers, paid for as an initial capital payment, whereas other suppliers provide the equipment as part of an overall annual contract which covers the leasing of the equipment and the running costs of the web-streaming. The decision on the most cost-effective option will therefore be taken as part of the tender process.

If the equipment is to be purchased at the outset, the estimated cost of the initial set-up should not exceed some £40,000 to £45,000. Under this option, the annual running costs, including the need for a dedicated SDSL line and maintenance costs, based on 48 meetings a year, would be between £22,000 and £27,000, depending on whether the footage was kept online for 6 or 12 months. Leased equipment options are available for less than £30,000 per annum.

As indicated above, the cost of the installation of the 3 clocks is estimated to be some £1,800.

PPC has considered whether the cost of the web-streaming and of the installation of the clocks could be accommodated by making savings in other areas of the States Assembly budget and is satisfied, after discussing this with the Greffier of the States as Accounting Officer, that this could be done. PPC is conscious that in the coming years the States Assembly will, in common with ministerial departments, no doubt be required to find more savings to meet States spending targets, but the Committee considers that this public engagement initiative is an important one that should be funded within existing resources.

Example of possible camera to be used in the States Chamber

The camera below gives an indication of the possible type of camera that could be used, although the precise equipment will depend on the supplier selected after the formal tender process. The HD camera shown below is ceiling mountable and measures 145 x 164 x 164 mm. with a weight of 1,550 g. (3 lb. 7 oz.).

