



Democracy Works

Introduction

Young people in Northern Ireland are often viewed as uninterested and apathetic in regards to the democratic process. This has provoked much discussion and debate as to how to encourage young people to take an active role in politics, democracy and more specifically to both register for and vote during elections.

“In Northern Ireland the political situation has meant that young people are not only apathetic about politics but also sceptical about the capacity of the political process to deliver positive change¹. However, as research by Democratic Dialogue highlighted, 50% of young people expressed that they would like to be more involved in the political process².

Five possible reasons for young people’s apathy have been identified as³

- Limited opportunities to participate in the political process; Ignorance or lack of understanding about how to participate
- Feeling they have better things to do;
- Perceiving that there is a lack of interest in their views; and
- Believing there is no point in voting because it is unlikely to bring about change.

Studies have indicated that “... many young people are not interested in politics and indeed find the subject area boring. However, many feel passionate about the issues which affect their lives...”⁴ one young person sums up the difficulty “it is the linkage between politics and issues which causes the problem as young people don’t think it (politics) will make any difference”⁵

Democracy Works? is a political education model, based on non-formal education processes used in youth work. The processes support the principle of encouraging the active participation of young people with the aim that they begin to create their own agenda for decision making, action, evaluation and learning. Through this they are empowered to take on new responsibilities and courses of action that recognise their own needs and the needs of others.

In more specific terms Democracy Works? uses experiential learning, group work and participation techniques to encourage and support young people to realise the link between issues that are passionate about and the political process that makes decisions affecting these issues.

1. Smyth, M and Scott, M (2000) The Youthquest 200 Survey: A report on young people’s views and experiences in Northern Ireland. Belfast Community Conflict Impact on Children.
2. Democratic Dialogue (1997) Politics: the next generation. Belfast, Democratic Dialogue
3. Molloy, D (2002) Understanding Youth Participation in Local Government, London, DTLR
4. Youth participation in the democratic process, Institute for Conflict Research
5. Youth participation in the democratic process, Institute for Conflict Research

The Programme

Democracy Works? explores local and national politics; how politics affects peoples' lives, who are the decision makers and how to influence change.

The programme is divided into 5 subject areas that provide a broad introduction to democracy and politics. Some of the topics may be delivered in one session, others may take more time. If the group is new to working together then some preliminary capacity building may be necessary. This may include exploring prejudice, perceptions, skills based work, conflict resolution etc.

The Democracy Works? Programme

Section 1: I Don't Do Politics

- Aims to enable participants to gain an understanding of how politics and the decisions Politician's make affects their everyday lives

Section 2: Power and the Decision Makers

- Aims to enable participants to gain an understanding of who holds the power to make decisions in and about their community and how they get the power.

Section 3: Levels of Government

- Aims to enable participants to gain an understanding the levels of government and at which levels certain decisions are made
- It covers local councils, the Northern Ireland Assembly, UK Parliament and European Parliament

Section 4: Your Democracy

- Looks at the concept of Democracy
"of the people, by the people, and for the people."
- Aims to enable participants to gain an understanding of how they can participate in politics and
- influence the decisions being made through campaigning and lobbying

Section 5: Youth Participation

- Explores organisations and opportunities for young people to participate. These include NIYF, Big Deal and local youth participative structures.



I Don't Do Politics

Learning Outcome: Is for participants to explore and understand how they do 'do' politics. How they encounter politics in their everyday lives. It also allows participants to gain an understanding of the wide range of issues that are impacted by politics, law and government.

Did you know?

Politics even affects the music you listen too – it affects what musicians can and can't do on the stage, prevents DJs playing songs with explicit lyrics on the radio and is responsible for the funding of public music events.

Useful Tips

- Give examples of how politics impacts the participants that are relevant to that group –e.g. if they love football explain how the government need to issue permits to foreign players, football stadiums must adhere to health and safety laws etc
- Don't go into too much detail in the first session – this is just to help young people see that politics does affect them and their communities.

Bytes Foyer

A group of young people who live in Bytes at Belfast Foyer took part in the Big Deal's Democracy Works programme as part of an OCN they were completing. They focused on how politics affects them personally and how they can influence decisions around issues that affect them particularly homelessness and education. They also visited Parliament Buildings Stormont to watch the plenary and meet MLAs.

“It was really good because it helped me to realise that politics does affect me and that there are ways I can get involved.”

Additional Information

- Democracy Cookbook – including street scene poster. Available from the Do Politics Centre 020 7271 0592
- www.dopolitics.org.uk
- www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Exercise 1 - Stay Standing

Aim:

To support the participants to gain an understanding of how their day-to-day activities are influenced by politics.

Duration:

20 mins

Resources:

Statement Cards

Activity

Ask the group to stand. Then read the following questions – if the group has taken part in the activity described they stay standing. If not they sit down. To those still standing ask – what has this to do with politics? Share ways that politics impacts those activities.

Stay Standing If.....

- You have ever been to school
- You have ever driven a car
- You have ever downloaded music
- You have ever listened to the radio
- Eaten a bar of chocolate
- Used public transport

Make up your own as required



Exercise 2 - Street Scene

Aim:

For participants to explore the range of issues that are influenced by government in their communities and their day-to-day lives.

Duration:

This exercise is designed to last 20-30 mins

Resources:

Street Scene Poster (available from Democracy Cookbook)

Markers

Flipcharts

Activity

Split the participants into groups and give each group a marker, paper and a Street Scene Poster.

Give each group 15 mins to examine the poster and record all the ways they can find as to how politics affects the people and places in the poster.

After participants feedback and discuss their findings.

Power and Decision Makers

Learning Outcome: To help participants explore who has the power in their communities. To examine and increase young people's awareness of decision makers including politicians and political parties.

Did you know?

That in Northern Ireland there are 582 Councillors, 108 MLAs and 18 MPs. That's a total of 708 elected representatives.

Useful Tips

- To introduce this section it would be useful to help participants to explore what decisions they make about their own life and who and what decisions others make about their life.
- When looking at politicians try to get photos so that participants will have a picture of them. This familiarisation may make other aspects of the programme gel together more easily.

Local Council and NI Assembly Visits

Limavady High School's Wider Key Skills group took part in the Big Deal's Democracy Works programme in spring 2010. As part of the programme and to give them more insight into the political institutes that make decisions that affect them locally and regionally, they visited Limavady Borough Council and the NI Assembly. Here they had the opportunity to learn more about the work they do as well as to meet councillors and MLAs and explore the roles they fulfil.

Westminster Visit.

East Belfast Youth Forum and a young men's group from WAVE had the opportunity to visit Westminster after the completion of the Democracy Works programme. The group got a tour of the building, watched the pre election Budget debate and met with MP Nigel Evans.

Additional Information

- Democracy Cookbook
- www.niassembly.gov.uk
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/northern_ireland/default.stm



Exercise 1 - The Power Exercise

Aim:

To help the participants to look at the issue of power. Who has it? Who doesn't? How do they get it? To reflect on the use of power in their communities.

Duration:

20 min

Resources:

Chara Character Profile Cards ct

Activity

Give out character profiles to each person. Ask each person to present the character on their card. Then the group discuss how much power that person has.

Get the group to put the characters in order of power, the one with the most power at one end and at the other the one with the least power.

Discussion points – Why do some people have more power than others? Where do they get their power from? Do they use their power wisely?

Policeman	Young Person	Teacher
Politician	Crossing Patrol Person	Doctor
Single Parent	Shop Keeper	Student
Person with Disability	Community Worker	Child
Older person	Unemployed person	Business Owner

Exercise 2: - My Decision Makers

Aim:

For participants to be aware of who the main decision makers are in their area and community.

Duration:

20 mins

Resources:

Internet Access

My Decision Makers Handout

List of useful websites:

- http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/northern_ireland/default.stm
- <http://www.wimps.tv/>

Activity:

Give everyone a 'My Decision Makers' Handout

Get the group to use the internet and the websites listed to find out who are their Councillors, MLAs, MP and MEPs.



My Decision Makers

My name is _____

The date that I will be eligible to vote at an election is _____

My Northern Ireland Assembly constituency is _____

My Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) are _____

My UK Parliamentary constituency is _____

My Member of Parliament (MP) is _____

My local council is _____

My ward is _____

My councillors are _____

My European Parliamentary region is _____

My Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are _____

Three ways I could get involved in politics Three questions I have about politics

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 3. _____ |

Three things that I can do to improve my local area Three things that I would do if was Prime Minister

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 3. _____ |

Levels of Government

Learning Outcome: Participants will be aware of how Local Councils, the NI Assembly and Westminster Parliament work. Therefore, participants will be aware of the decisions that are made and how they are made in each of these institutions..

Did you know?

The Northern Ireland Assembly's logo is the Linen or Flax plant. There are 6 flowers to represent the 6 counties of Northern Ireland.



Useful Tips

- Stormont Education Service

The Stormont Event

In March 2009 the Big Deal brought together 4 groups of young people, who had completed the Democracy Works programme, for a day of debates and questions in Stormont. The groups were from EOTAS (Education Other Than at School), Training for Success (Opportunity Youth), Wider Key Skills (Limavady High School) and YMCA Bangor.

Each group proposed a motion that was debated in the Senate Chamber, the motions ranged from Increasing EMA and reducing the age for driving.

In the afternoon the young people had the opportunity to ask questions to a panel of MLA's including Basil McCrea, Ian Parsley, Simon Hamilton, and chaired by BBC Political Editor Mark Davenport.

Additional Information

- Democracy Cookbook



Exercise 1 - Democracy Tree

Aim:

To support the participant to increase their awareness of where decisions are made on various issues.

Duration:

20 min

Resources:

Post it notes

Democracy Tree Posters

Pens

Activity

Divide the group into several small groups and give each group a Democracy Tree Poster. Distribute post-it-notes to the group. Ask them to write down issues that they think are important, such as health care, local leisure facilities, defence, etc. Encourage participants to think of local, UK-wide and European issues.

The poster is divided into 4 branches – Local Council, NI Assembly, UK Parliament and EU Parliament. Each group must stick their post-it-notes with the institution that makes decisions about that issue. Some issues may have aspects dealt with in different institutions.

Your Democracy

Learning Outcome: To explore the concept of Democracy and how each person can be an active citizen even if they are not able to vote. Participants will be more aware of the ways in which they can influence the public, decision makers and political decisions.

Did you know?

Democracy is not a new concept. It originates from Ancient Greece around 500 BC. Democracy means 'Rule by the People', there are a number of pillars or building blocks of democracy including freedoms such as Freedom of Speech, Freedom of the Press, also, Rule of Law and Elections these are all crucial in maintaining a democratic system.

Useful Tips

- Look at high profile campaigns or local campaigns that the participants will be aware of e.g. Jamie Oliver's School Meals, Make Poverty History, Road Safety Campaigns etc
- Youtube is a great resource for campaign videos and advertising campaigns.
- Don't forget to explore the impact of social networking for campaigning as it has the ability to reach huge numbers of people very quickly – Social Networking campaigns brought back the Wispa!
- Before completing the exercises it would be useful if the group could identify a change within their community that they would want to campaign and lobby for. This will make learning more interesting and meaningful.
- It may be useful to explore the concept of democracy – what it means and what are the alternatives.

Finaghy Youth Club Road Safety Campaign.

Finaghy Youth Club is based on a busy main road in South Belfast. A group of young people in the club decided to form a road safety group to campaign for traffic lights or a zebra crossing at the youth club so that members could cross the road safely. Their campaign lasted over two years and involved writing letters, meetings with DOE and local decision makers, petitions, getting local residents on side and going to the media. Eventually, due to the persistence and dedication of the group their campaign was successful and there is now an island outside the club slowing down traffic and making crossing the road to the club much safer.

Additional Information

- Democracy Cookbook



Exercise 1 - How to Lobby?

Aim:

To help participants to examine the various ways in which that can participate in a democracy and can influence politics and policy making.

Duration:

45 mins

Resources:

Flip Chart
Markers

Activity

Lobbying is “?????”

In small groups list as many ways as possible you could persuade decision makers on an issue you care about and want to see changed.

Some examples;

Writing Letters/Emails
Petitions
Meetings
Questions
Public Meetings
Presentations – Findings/research

Discuss what methods would be most effective for your groups and why?

Exercise 2: - Who to Lobby?

Aim:

To support participants to identify the key influencers and decision makers when lobbying.

Duration:

60minutes + this will depend on the availability of information.

Resources:

Paper & Pens

Internet

Telephone access

Activity:

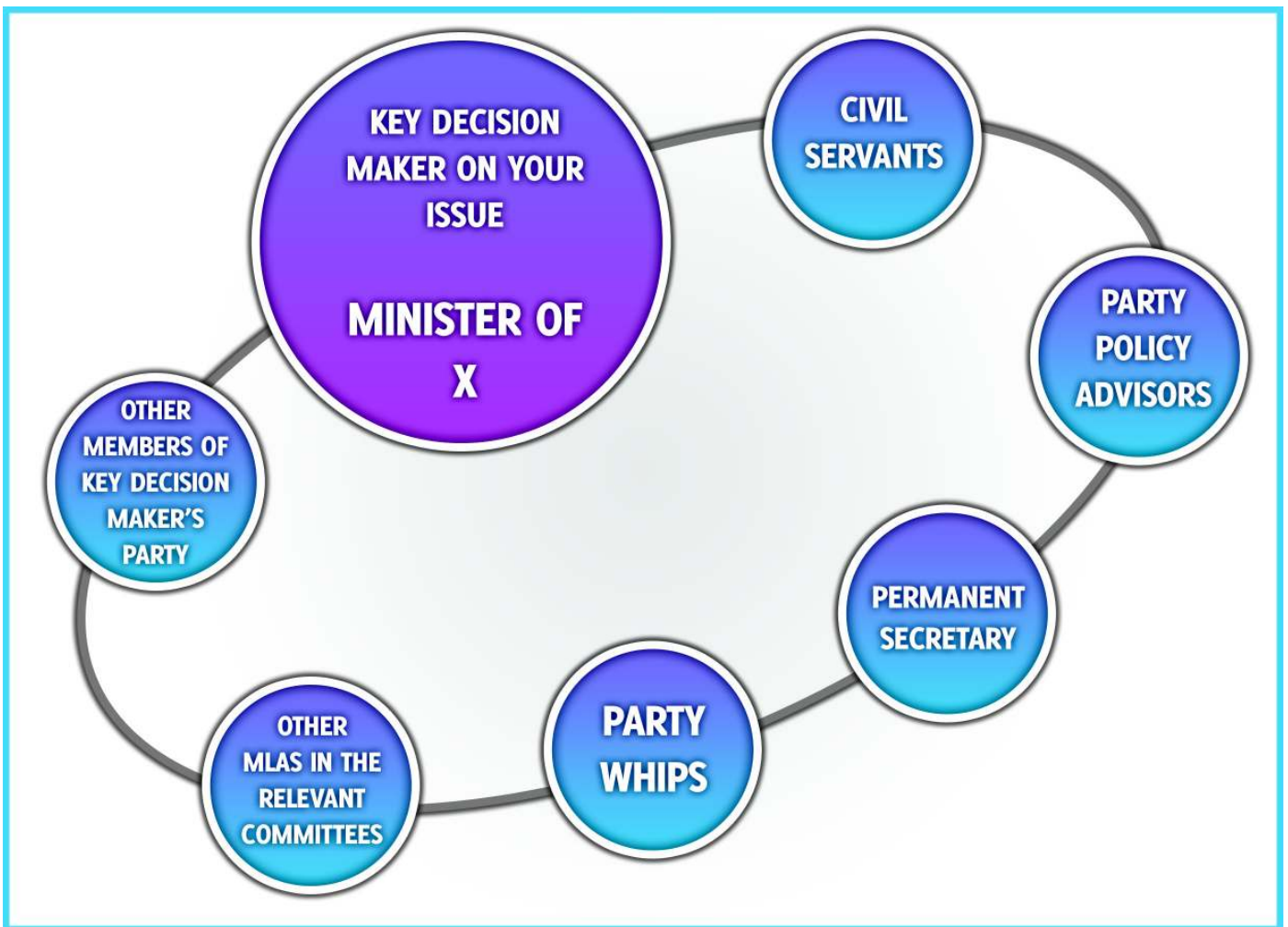
In most issues there will be a Key Decision Maker – this is the person who ultimately makes the recommendations or decisions that influence policy and law or say whether something can happen or not.

However, they rarely arrive at a decision on their own. They are influenced, advised and persuaded by others. Therefore, when lobbying it is also important to get these people who influence and advise on your side by lobbying them too.

In the case of elected representatives there are a wide range of people it is important to have aware of and in support of your case. These include civil servants, political advisors, policy makers, opposition, other members of the decision maker's party etc.



The diagram below shows some examples of the people who may be circling and having contact with the key decision maker. The example below uses the case of a Minister in the NI Assembly



Draw your own diagram for an issue important to you – find out the key decision maker and all those that circle the decision maker.

Exercise 3: Campaign Plan

Aim:

To support participants to plan their campaign in detail.

Resources:

British Libraries Campaign Plan Booklet (student handbook) – www.bl.uk/campaign

Time:

60 mins – however may take much longer depending on the nature of your campaign.

Activity.

Print the Student Handbook and complete all the relevant sections.



Youth Participation

Learning Outcome:

To find out opportunities for youth participation in Northern Ireland

Did you know?

In 2007 there were nearly 70 youth participative structures such as youth forums and youth councils in Northern Ireland.

Useful Tips

- Find out if there are any youth councils/youth forums in your area by contacting your local council, education and library board or the Northern Ireland Youth Forum
- If you want to set up a Youth Council or Forum then have a look at the Big Deal's Making Your Youth Council Work for You resource.

Belfast City Council Youth Forum

Young people make up a third of the population of Belfast, making our city one of the youngest in Europe. That's why they have set up a Youth Forum:

- to give young people a voice
- to allow young people to have your say on things which affect them
- to give young people a chance to get involved in decision-making within the council.

The Youth Forum is made up of young people from across Belfast. There are 36 young people on the Forum. All members are aged between 13 and 18 (21 if they are disabled or have just left care) and serve for two years.

The Youth Forum has achieved a number of successes to date. These include:

- helping to develop a new urban sports park for Belfast
- working with other local, national and international youth councils
- organising our annual Young People's Awards scheme
- completing more than 4,000 hours of volunteer work since October 2008

The forum is also recognised as a model of good practice by other youth councils and organisations.

Additional Information

- Democracy Cookbook
- Big Deal 'Making Your Youth Council Work for You'