Youth participation in the democratic process

Institute for Conflict Research

Contents

Executive Summary

The Electoral Commission commissioned this research in October 2004. The research aimed to explore and measure the attitudes and behaviour of young people aged 16-24 towards participation in democratic processes generally including electoral registration and voting in elections. The research had two components, a participatory research component and a public opinion survey. The Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) was responsible for the participatory research and the completion of the report whilst PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) conducted the quantitative survey.

The research had three stages residential weekends, focus group discussions and the quantitative survey. The findings from each stage helped to formulate the next phase. The residentials were conducted over two weekends and involved a group aged 16-17 and another aged 18-24. In total 30 young people took part. The focus groups were held in various locations with a total of 80 16-24 year olds participating. Focus groups were also held with the youth wings of some political parties. The quantitative survey incorporated all 18 constituencies and 26 District Council areas. The methodology comprised of a street survey with 1113 respondents within the specified age category. All interviews were conducted face to face and each interview took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The residentials indicated that many young people were negative about politics and were frustrated as they felt that politicians ignored them. The overriding view was that politics was boring and complicated which did not act as an incentive to become involved. Northern Ireland politics was also viewed as being different in some ways to the rest of the United Kingdom due to the history of violence. Many felt that politics here focussed more on religion and difference than 'real' issues such as health and education.

Throughout the research the influence of family, friends and the community on voting habits became apparent. Many felt that this influence at times restricted choice as they were unlikely to go against the tradition of their family and/or community. There was a certain degree of scepticism among participants throughout the qualitative

research as to the point of voting as some felt that *'it made no difference'*. This led many to recommend the need for more education concerning politics in schools and it was suggested that the Electoral Commission should carry this out.

The themes from the focus groups were very similar to those from the residential sessions. Throughout the discussions no differences were noted in attitudes between various age groups, genders or community backgrounds. Differences were however noted according to the degree of interest in politics:

1. Those who were not interested in politics or related issues and did not want to engage in any discussions. Within these groups the discussions were usually short with the young people having very little or nothing to say.
2. Those who initially were not interested in the subject area but as the discussions continued became more interested. These first two groups included the majority of respondents; and the final group
3. Those who were very interested in politics and related issues including the youth members of the various parties.

In addition many focus group participants said that they were confused by politics and regarded it as highly complex subject. However, it was felt that this could be alleviated with more education about politics and political issues. Many of the young people felt political figures did not encourage young people to become involved in politics as they were either 'old' or 'too removed' from the real issues affecting young people today.

The quantitative survey highlighted that:
- 50% of 16-24 year olds are to some degree interested in politics. This was more positive than the findings from the qualitative phase.
- Only 27% either had no interest or very little interest.
- Age affected level of interest with older respondents expressing more interest.
- Neither religion nor gender affected level of interest.
- The majority (52%) of 16-24 year olds feel that they have an average level of understanding of Northern Ireland politics.
- Level of understanding increases with age.

- Males had a higher level of understanding than females.
- Males were more likely to be strong supporters of a political party than females (20% males compared to 10% females).
- The family was the strongest influence on voting behaviour (49%).
- 60% of 16-24 year olds had their name on the electoral register.
- Only 12% were not registered and 20% said they were too young.
- 49% had voted in the May 5th elections.
- For those who had not voted the main reason was that they were not registered or didn't receive a poll card (32%).
- Factors that would encourage young people to vote in the future included 'politicians focusing on areas of interest to them' and 'feeling that voting could make a difference'.
- Sectarianism, crime, paramilitary activity and drugs were viewed as the biggest issues facing Northern Ireland at the present time.
- Wider issues facing the UK included the Iraq war with issues concerning Northern Ireland not considered to be high.
- 50% associated the peace process with Northern Ireland politics.
- 53% felt politics was relevant to their life.
- 41% of 16-24 year olds felt politicians didn't make an effort to listen to young people.
- 67% felt the voting age should remain at 18.

In the survey 36% of young people felt that they had something to contribute to politics. It is important that these young people are not only encouraged to do so but also given the opportunity. This may in part help to alleviate the perception that politics is just *'boring old white men arguing all the time'*. Politics is relevant to young people and they must begin to feel part of the process. It was perceived that education on politics and political issues would increase awareness and many also felt interest among their peer group thus providing an incentive to become more involved in the future.

1. Youth Participation in the Democratic Process

1.1 Introduction

Involvement in the democratic process among young people in Northern Ireland has been poor and has prompted much discussion as to how young people can be actively encouraged to both register for and vote during elections. A similar apathy has been noted across the United Kingdom. In the 2001 general election the overall turnout of 59% was the lowest recorded figure since 1918 with voting among young people even lower. Estimates suggest that turnout fell to approximately 39% among 18 to 24 year olds[1]. However, Northern Ireland had a higher turnout than the average with 68%[2] with 50% of those under 24 participating[3].

There is also evidence to suggest that young people are unlikely to become more interested in voting with increased age[4]. Jowell and Park[5] state that an interest in politics begins to become more apparent when people become taxpayers, mortgage-holders and 'stakeholders' with something to lose as well as gain. However, Park[6] also discusses that there may be a 'generational' effect with today's teenagers and young adults differing fundamentally from previous generations.

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 change[7]. Research by Democratic Dialogue in 1997 found that 3 out of 5 young people felt that the situation in Northern Ireland made it difficult for people to get involved in politics. However, more than 50% expressed that they would like to be more involved in the political process[8].

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[1] Electoral Commission (2001) Election 2001: The Official Results. London, The Electoral Commission.
[2] Electoral Commission (2005) Vote 2005. A review of social and academic research into voting at UK Parliamentary general elections. London, The Electoral Commission.
[3] BBC Northern Ireland News (2004) Division over lower voting age www.bbc.co.uk/ni 16/04/04.
[4] British Social Attitudes Survey (1999).
[5] Jowell, R and Park, A (1998) Young people, politics and citizenship a disengaged generation? London, CREST.
[6] Park, A (1995) Teenagers and their Politics. British Social Attitudes Survey.
[7] Smyth, M and Scott, M (2000) The Youthquest 2000 Survey: A report on young people's views and experiences in Northern Ireland. Belfast, Community Conflict Impact on Children.
[8] Democratic Dialogue (1997) Politics: the next generation. Belfast, Democratic Dialogue.

1.2 Young people's views of the electoral process

Russell et al.[9] noted that the lack of interest in voting and elections was strongly correlated to a general disinterest in politics. Research conducted by Democratic Dialogue found that young people in Northern Ireland have 'a lukewarm interest in politics'[10]. The report also highlighted that young people have a relatively high knowledge of basic political facts but struggle to understand the actual process. Barriers to engagement were discussed, with young people indicating that they viewed politicians in a negative way and wished for politicians to engage and communicate with them more effectively.

A BMRB/CYPU (British Market Research Bureau / Children's and Young People's Unit) survey in the UK explored how much interest 14-19 year olds had in politics and revealed that 59% had either 'not very much interest' or 'none at all'. This lack of interest and participation has been related to a range of factors including, personal or convenience issues, levels of voter registration, apathy and alienation[11]. Epps[12] surveyed 10,000 young people aged 15-24 and found that 48% felt that they did not have enough opportunity to influence decisions at a community level with this increasing to 52% when influencing decisions at a national level.

Molloy et al.[13] identified a range of possible reasons for young people's apathy including:

- Limited opportunities to participate in the political process;
- Ignorance or lack of knowledge 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.

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[9] Russell, A., Fieldhouse, E., Purdam, K and Kalra, V (2002) Voter engagement and young people. London, The Electoral Commission.
[10] Finlay, E and Irwin, G (2004) We have a voice: young people and political engagement. Belfast, Democratic Dialogue.
[11] Russell, A., Fieldhouse, E., Purdam, K and Kalra, V (2002) Voter engagement and young people. London, The Electoral Commission.
[12] Epps, G (2001) Listening to the unheard – The National Youth Consultation for the European Youth Policy. England, British Youth Council.
[13] Molloy, D (2002) Understanding Youth Participation in Local Government. London, DTLR.

A qualitative study conducted by the National Centre for Social Research[14] in 2000 explored in detail the nature of young people's political interests and behaviour. The study found that young people frequently conceptualised politics in a limited and narrow way, and perceived the subject as boring and irrelevant to their current lives. Due to this perception of politics, many young people had no understanding or knowledge of the political process. Subsequently, young people did not actively seek information relating to political matters. More interestingly, the researchers concluded that because of young people's narrow conception of what politics is, those that were engaging in actions that were political did not always perceive themselves as actively engaging in a political process.

However, recent research findings released to mark the launch of the Hansard Society's Y Vote mock elections 2005 claim that young people are not politically apathetic, and in fact their interest in political issues is growing[15]. In a survey of 1,000 young people, over 80% said that they felt strongly about political issues such as crime and education. Furthermore, when the sample were asked what measures they would take if a political issue arose that affected them personally, 80% said they would sign a petition; 52% would contact a politician; 48% would participate in a rally/demonstration; 42% said they would get involved in a boycott; 39% would campaign for a political party; and 35% would join a political party. This indicates more positive interest and indeed participation in the democratic process than in previous years.

1.3 Young people's perceptions of politicians

A further factor which appears to alienate young people from the political process is politicians themselves. The National Centre for Social Research[16] concluded that young people often view politicians in a negative light, perceiving them as remote, untrustworthy, self-interested and unrepresentative of young people. They were also

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[14] National Centre for Social Research (2000) Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds. England, YPS.
[15] www.citizenshipfoundation.oer.uk 9/2/05. Political apathy amongst young people is 'a myth', says new research. Citizenship Foundation.
[16] National Centre for Social Research (2000) Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds. England, YPS.

seen as white, male and middle-aged, and often portrayed as being affluent and upper class.

The Y Vote/Y Not?[17] research carried out in England highlighted that young people wanted politicians to:

- Talk to them in a language they understood;
- Talk to them directly, regularly and in their own environments;
- Listen and respond to their concerns; and
- Respect their diversity.

Research carried out by Democratic Dialogue in 1997[18] found that over half of the 1300 young people surveyed thought that politicians in Northern Ireland did not do a good job. Fewer than 2% indicated that they did a very good job with only 1 in 5 young people indicating that political parties addressed the concerns of young people. A further study carried out by Democratic Dialogue in 2004[19] involving 73 young people found that the biggest barrier among young people to political engagement was a negative view of politicians with many young people feeling that politicians didn't address issues that mattered to them. In Northern Ireland, it is also felt that these attitudes are accentuated due to the political situation. The research also revealed that 16-18 year olds viewed the behaviour of politicians since the ceasefires and commencement of talks as 'immature'. Smyth et al.[20] found that young people also viewed politicians as sectarian and as negative role models with some blaming them for the Northern Ireland conflict. Work among Protestant young people in North Belfast[21] found that 45% of 16-24 year olds had little to no interest in political matters with 29% of those eligible to vote not having done so. Sixty-one percent did however indicate that they felt it was important to vote but only 54% stated that they intended to do so in the next elections. Of those who did not intend to vote 15% stated that it would not make any difference highlighting the scepticism among some young

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[17] Young people and politics (2002) A report on the Yvote?/Ynot? Project. London, Children and Young People's Unit.
[18] Democratic Dialogue (1997) Politics: the next generation. Belfast, Democratic Dialogue.
[19] Finlay, E and Irwin, G (2004) We have a voice: young people and political engagement. Belfast, Democratic Dialogue.
[20] Smyth, M., Fay, M., Brough, E and Hamilton, J (2004) The Impact of Political Conflict on children in Northern Ireland. Belfast, Institute for Conflict Research.
[21] North Belfast Community Group (2003) Young people and politics in North Belfast. Belfast, Institute for Conflict Research.

people. In addition 10% said that they never saw their politicians indicating the need for more positive engagement and 9% stated that they had no interest. Discussions also indicated that many young people were cynical at the approach taken by politicians in the run-up to elections and that they would appreciate more information and education about political and electoral matters. The research recommended the need for more research on a Northern Ireland wide basis concerning young people's attitudes towards politics.

These negative views do not encourage participation and indeed if young people in Northern Ireland blame politicians for the 'Troubles' attitudes here may be even more negative than the rest of the United Kingdom.

1.4 Engaging young people in the electoral process

A number of programmes and initiatives have been introduced in an attempt to enhance young people's participation in the electoral process. The Hansard Society, The Electoral Commission and the Department for Education and Skills recently launched the Y Vote Mock Elections 2005[22]. This project aimed to actively engage students with the electoral process in the run up to the May 2005 elections. Up to 3,000 schools across the UK participated, offering students the chance to stand as party candidates or work as speechwriters and canvassers in a mock election[23].

It has also been found that young people would welcome ways to increase access to the voting process such as 24-hour polling stations, telephone polling and internet voting[24]. The introduction of citizenship education in secondary schools has been one development which may help encourage young people to become more involved in the democratic process. In Northern Ireland it is planned that all post primary pupils will be involved in citizenship education from 2006[25].

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[22] www.localdemocracyweek.info 10/2/05 Students invited to participate in mock elections. Local Democracy Week.
[23] Schopen, F (2005) Why would we vote for them? Children Now 4-10 May.
[24] MORI (2001) Survey of attitudes during the 2001. London, General Election Campaign.
[25] Electoral Commission (2003) How old is enough? The minimum age of voting and candidacy in UK elections. Consultation paper. London, The Electoral Commission.

Other initiatives developed within Northern Ireland include the launch of a website which offers young people the opportunity to engage with local politicians. The 'Wimps' website, which stands for 'Where is My Public Servant?', enables young people to email their MP, MEPs, assembly members and councillors. The site also contains interviews that young people have conducted with politicians. 'Wimps' was a result of 10 young people coming together to develop an interactive tool to give people of their age a voice. The consultancy group involved in providing the software for the website stated that, '*young people can offer a unique perspective for politicians and this software is bringing them closer to political figures,*[26].

Recently local authorities in the UK have looked at ways of enhancing young people's involvement in local decision making. A study by Coombe[27] explored the challenges that local authorities face when they seek to involve young people in local governance and potential solutions. The study reported that young people had a genuine enthusiasm for playing a part in certain aspects of decision-making processes, particularly, at a local level. Common issues of concern included crime, personal safety, education, facilities for young people, the environment and housing. Part of the study also included a survey of local councils in England and Wales, which found that 90% had indicated that involving young people was important to their authority and that they had increased the amount of work they had done to involve young people over the past four years. However, less than one in three had evaluated the impact of such initiatives. Some of the solutions councils have adopted to create an environment where young people can become engaged in democracy include:

- Establishing youth forums and councils;
- Consultations with groups of young people, along with youth conferences; and
- Peer based research techniques such as training young people in a range of research skills and using them to conduct research to determine young people's views on their area.

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[26] Belfast Telegraph 14/2/05.
[27] Coombe, V (2002) Up for it: Getting young people involved in local government. England, Institute for Public Policy Research Foundation.

The National Centre for Social Research[28] looked at ways to encourage young people to participate in politics and the electoral process. The research showed that young people consistently referred to the ways in which they felt they were excluded from participation in the political process. Indeed, even when opportunities presented themselves, the young people believed that they were often treated as immature and childish and their views ignored. A number of recommendations were developed which would encourage political interest. The suggestions centred on the factors that were turning young people away from politics. They were therefore concerned about four related areas:

1. Making politics more interesting;
2. Making it easier to understand and more accessible;
3. Making politicians more responsive to the needs and concerns of young people; and
4. Finding new opportunities and routes for young people to enter the political process.

Issues affecting engagement

Voting age

Currently, the age for voting in the United Kingdom is 18, the same as in other EU countries along with Australia, Canada and the USA. However many feel that this should be lowered and much debate has arisen concerning this issue. The British Youth Council (BYC) would like to see the age of majority for all political and social rights, including the right to vote, lowered to 16. The BYC has formed a coalition with other organisations, which maintains that as young people can leave home, leave school, enter work full time, pay taxes, join the armed forces and receive social security benefits at 16, then they should also be able to vote. A report by ICM for the Electoral Commission[29] found that the majority (78%) thought the age for voting should be 18 although younger people were more inclined to think it should be lower with most 18-24 year olds suggesting 17 years of age.

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[28] National Centre for Social Research (2000) Young people's politics: Political interest and engagement amongst 14-24 year olds. England, YPS.
[29] ICM (2003) Age of Electoral Majority. London, Electoral Commission.

In relation to Northern Ireland, Nationalist parties appear to be strongly in favour of lowering the voting age but Unionists seem to be more sceptical. A news report indicated that Sinn Fein felt that young people were mature enough at 16 to make their own decisions. However, the DUP noted that voting at 16 would put the UK in the company of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Iran, countries which a DUP representative did not regard as 'shining lights of democracy'[30].

Compulsory voting

There are at least nineteen countries which have some form of compulsory voting including 5 EU countries (Table 1). One other country is Australia where all citizens, 18 years of age and over, are required by law to both enrol for voting and attend a polling place at election times in all federal, state and territory elections. If an enrolled citizen is unable to give a legitimate reason for not voting a fine or possible prison sentence can be imposed. The arguments for compulsory voting include:

- It is a civic duty;
- It encourages political participation; and
- It increases the legitimacy of those elected.

However, those against compulsory voting feel that it is undemocratic to force people to vote, it forces those with little interest or knowledge in politics to vote, and it increases the number of spoiled ballots.

Table 1 Countries which have some form of compulsory voting

Argentina	Guatemala
Austria	Honduras
Australia	Liechtenstein
Belgium	Luxembourg
Bolivia	Panama
Brazil	Philippines
Cyprus	Singapore
Dominican Republic	Switzerland
Egypt	Uruguay
Greece	Venezuela

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[30] BBC Northern Ireland News (2004) Division over lower voting age www.bbc.co.uk/ni 16/04/04.

1.5 Programmes and initiatives adopted in other countries

Trying to find further ways to encourage young people to participate in the electoral process is not unique to the United Kingdom. In the USA there is a strong view that young people are not participating in civic life in large numbers. Approximately 33% of 18-24 year olds turned out to vote in the USA Presidential election in 2000 similar to the turnout in the UK during the 2001 Westminster elections (39%). This was a record low turnout for an American election and part of a twenty-five year trend of decline.   The National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) conducted a national non partisan study in 1998, which revealed that young people aged 18-24 were dropping out of the electoral process because they lacked interest, trust and knowledge when it came to the American Government [31]. In a review of the various programmes and initiatives that individual States in the USA have developed to encourage youth participation in the electoral process, it emerged that several States:

- Send birthday cards to residents turning 18 encouraging them to vote;
- Provide voter registration cards at high schools and colleges;
- Visit schools to demonstrate electronic voting machines and hold registrations;
- Recruit young people as poll workers;
- Hold mock elections in colleges and youth centres; and
- Provide outreach materials and support to schools on the electoral process[32].

In Denmark there is a view that young people of today tend to be less active in nearly all areas of public decision-making which affects the representative democracy as well as a whole range of other public institutions[33]. Young people have the opportunity to vote at the age of 18 however education for democratic citizenship and participation begins long before this. Student Councils from fifth grade up (aged 11+) are mandatory in Danish schools. The basis of the councils are that students develop and set the agendas with school elections being held at the beginning of each year for suitable representatives thus getting students familiar with the election process.

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[31] Moffett, C.J and Albowicz, K (2003) New Millennium Best Practices Survey. America, National Association of Secretaries of State.

[32] ibid

[33] Lehn, S (2001) Denmark: Ways of promoting youth participation. Education to participation and youth municiparties. England, Carnegie Young People Initiative.

1.6 Summary

There is a general consensus from past research that young people often feel excluded from participation in electoral processes. Young people aged 16 and younger in particular, appear to be disengaged in politics and democratic processes. However, as young people develop towards adulthood and their responsibilities increase and social and family ties change there appears to be both an awareness and acceptance of their participation in the electoral process. Indeed more recent research findings indicate more positive attitudes towards politics with interest increasing[34].

Young people's attitudes towards politicians appear to hinder engagement with many viewing them as remote, untrustworthy, self interested and unrepresentative of young people. Many young people in Northern Ireland reported in previous research that politicians did not address issues that mattered to them. This led to the perception that politicians did not care.

Engaging young people is the challenge and initiatives have been developed to try and do so. Recently in Northern Ireland the Wimps website was launched to increase communication between young people and politicians, a vital first step in the process.

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[34] www.citizenshipfoundation.oer.uk 9/2/05. Political apathy amongst young people is 'a myth', says new research. Citizenship Foundation.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The research aimed to explore and measure the attitudes and behaviour of young people in Northern Ireland towards participation in democratic processes generally, including electoral registration and voting in elections. The Electoral Commission commissioned the research and the fieldwork was carried out between January and June 2005.

The research had two components, a participatory research component, involving consultative workshops and focus groups, and a public opinion survey. The Institute for Conflict Research (ICR) was responsible for the participatory research and the completion of the report whilst PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) conducted the quantitative survey.

2.2 Age Range

The participants in both the qualitative and quantitative research were aged between 16 and 24. In Northern Ireland young people are allowed to vote at 18, however, they are allowed to register to vote in their seventeenth year. Therefore, it was felt that it was important to consider the views of those under 18 who are due to register for voting in the next year or so.

2.3 Methods

The research involved three stages. The first stage was the residential weekends, the findings of which were used to design the focus group discussions. The second stage was the focus groups with the final stage being the quantitative survey. The qualitative findings were used to help design the survey.

Stage 1 - Residentials

The research involved two residential weekends, one for 16-17 year olds and the other for those aged 18-24. The residentials were based on the methods employed in Y vote/ Y not although they were adapted to suit this specific research project. Both of the residentials were co-ordinated by the Electoral Commission with ICR and Thinkbucket (an arts based project) facilitating some of the sessions. The Electoral

Commission ensured that youth workers with the appropriate qualifications were present for supervisory purposes. Each participant under 18 had to complete a consent form and have it signed by a parent/guardian.

Initially it had been intended to hold four residentials, one for young members of political parties, one for youth council members, one for 16-17 year olds and one for 18-24 year olds. However, in spite of numerous invitations and follow up telephone calls to young people, youth groups, youth councils and political parties throughout Northern Ireland, few participants came forward. Therefore it was decided to hold only two residentials, one for each of the age groups. It was agreed with the Electoral Commission that the other constituents would be invited to take part in focus group discussions.

The residentials were held on two consecutive weekends, the 18th – 19th February and the 25th – 26th February. Participants arrived on the Friday evening and stayed at the residential centre until the Saturday evening. In total 30 young people took part, seventeen 16-17 year olds and thirteen 18-24 year olds (Table 2).

Table 2 Details of residential participants

Residential	Gender	Age
16-17	11 x Male 6 x Female	13 x 16 4 x 17
18-24	6 x Male 7 x Female	1 x 18 1 x 19 1 x 20 2 x 21 2 x 22 1 x 23 3 x 24 2 missing
Total	**17 x Male** **13 x Female**	**30**

Although the number of participants was lower than desired both groups were committed to discussing the topics, however it was noted that the younger age group were less interested and more difficult to motivate. This observation was also made in the focus group discussions.

A topic list for the discussions that would form the substance of the residentials was designed by ICR in conjunction with the Electoral Commission (Appendix 1). However, the young people were allowed freedom to discuss the range of topics and the list was used as a guide only. The residential involved three 1.5 to 2 hour work sessions. A series of games and 'icebreakers were' built into the programme. It was felt that these activities were important especially for the younger age group to build confidence and encourage more open discussions within the groups. The Friday night involved the group developing a contract for the weekend as to what was acceptable behaviour and what was not whilst in the groups. Each member then signed the contact which was adhered to throughout the discussions. In addition their expectations for the weekend were discussed and these issues were noted by the researchers to ensure that all participants were comfortable with the format.

The group was split into two with a maximum of nine members in each group. ICR led the discussion groups whilst Thinkbucket, who use creative approaches to explore and open up issues related to community relations work, carried out a creative session. Further details on Thinkbucket's approach are included in Appendix 2 The discussions were tape-recorded with participant consent although at times taping was not appropriate as the groups were split into smaller discussions groups and there was too much background noise. Notes were made throughout the discussions on flip charts. The findings from the sessions are included in section 3.

The Outcome

Stage 2 - Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were held with young people in a number of locations throughout Northern Ireland during March and April 2005 (Table 3). The focus groups assessed young people's views on politics, elections, voting and democracy and also contributed to the overall design of the survey. In total 16 groups, five of which were political parties, were conducted with 80 participants. Locations in the west of Northern Ireland appear to be under represented in the study despite contacts being made with some groups in this area none were able to facilitate a discussion group. However, these locations were widely represented on the residentials. The groups were mainly composed of mixed gender but were mainly single identity in terms of community background.

The age group for participation was again 16-24 years with youth groups, schools, training courses, further education colleges, universities and political parties being targeted. The researchers aimed to ensure that all ages, genders and both main community backgrounds in Northern Ireland were represented. The Electoral Commission had expressed desire that marginalized young people would be involved and this was achieved by contacting groups which have been set up to work with young people who have offended or are at risk of doing so. At times it was difficult to get groups to engage either due to lack of interest or lack of time on the part of youth leaders to co-ordinate a group together. Accessing some of the political parties also proved to be difficult with an under-representation from the Unionist parties. The Ulster Unionists Party did not facilitate a group, however, one of their young members agreed to an individual interview. The Democratic Unionist Party was also unable to facilitate a group and no representation was made. The Progressive Unionist Party stated that they had very few young members therefore a group was not possible, however, one member provided an individual interview.

Tables 3 and 4 show the number of participants from each group along with location, age, gender and community background.

Table 3 Details of focus group participants

Location	Gender	Age	Community background
Armagh	5 x Male 6 x Female	5 x 16 6 x 17	4 x Catholic 7 x Protestant
Limavady Group 1	4 x Male 4 x Female	4 x 16 4 x 17	8 x Catholic
Limavady Group 2	1 x Male 4 x Female	2 x 16 3 x 17	5 x Protestant
Larne	4 x Male 1 x Female	1 x 16 1 x 17 1 x 22 2 x 24	5 x Protestant
Monkstown	4 x Male 2 x Female	2 x 16 4 x 17	6 x Protestant
Ballymena	2 x Male 4 x Female	2 x 16 2 x 17 1 x 18 1 x 19	1 x Catholic 5 x Protestant
Coleraine	2 x Female	2 x 21	2 x Protestant

Belfast (BIFE)	3 x Male 6 x Female	2 x 17 3 x 19 3 x 20 1 x 21	5 x Catholic 3 x Protestant 1 x Other
Belfast (Queens)	1 x Male	1 x 18	1 x Other
Belfast (New Lodge)	2 x Male 3 x Female	2 x 22 3 x 24	5 x Catholic
Carrickfergus	5 x Male	2 x 16 2 x 17 1 x 24	5 x Protestant
Total	**31 x Male** **32 x Female** **63**	**18 x 16** **24 x 17** **2 x 18** **4 x 19** **3 x 20** **3 x 21** **3 x 22** **0 x 23** **6 x 24**	**23 x Catholic** **38 x Protestant** **2 x Other**

Table 4 Details of political parties

Party	Gender	Age	Community Background
Sinn Fein	3 x Male 2 x Female	2 x 19 3 x 20	4 x Catholic 1 x Other
SDLP	5 x Male 3 x Female	1 x 17 1 x 18 1 x 20 3 x 21 2 x 24	7 x Catholic 1 x Protestant
Alliance	2 x Male	2 x 24	2 x Other
UUP	1 x Male	1 x 19	1 x Protestant
PUP	1 x Male	1 x 24	1 x Protestant
Total	**12 x Male** **5 x Female**	**0 x 16** **1 x 17** **1 x 18** **3 x 19** **4 x 20** **3 x 21** **0 x 22** **0 x 23** **5 x 24**	**11 x Catholic** **3 x Protestant** **3 x Other**

The discussions were either taped or flip chart notes taken depending on the setting of the group and thus the degree of background noise[35]. The research was explained to all the members and any questions were addressed. The discussions lasted between 1 and 2 hours and the participants chose the venue. The topic list from the residentials with the changes made by the participants was used to guide the discussions.

Stage 3 – Quantitative Survey

PricewaterhouseCoopers Research Strategy and Policy Group undertook the quantitative element of the research programme to investigate youth participation in the democratic process in Northern Ireland. The methodology comprised of a street survey with 1113 respondents between the age of 16 and 24 years old. All interviews were conducted face to face and each interview took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The sample size of 1113 interviews provides a margin of error of +/- 2.95%.

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[35] Quotes from both the focus groups and residential weekends are included in the following sections. The age and gender of respondents are included after the quotes in the residential section as these groups were split according to age. However, it is not possible to complete these details for focus group participants as these groups were composed of a wide range of ages.

Questionnaire content

The survey content incorporated the findings from both the desk research and qualitative research (see Appendix 3). A pilot study of the survey was conducted with approximately 20 respondents in advance of full-scale rollout. This process confirmed that the questions addressed the research objectives and the wording and format of the survey was clear and unambiguous to both the interviewer and young respondents. There were no changes made to the survey subsequent to the pilot findings.

Sample frame

The survey was a good representation of electorate in Northern Ireland by all key demographics. The sample design incorporated all 18 constituencies and 26 District Council Areas. Fifty sample points were selected throughout Northern Ireland and quotas were set as per the District Council level Census data. One sampling point was chosen in each of the 26 District Councils in order to fully reflect regional diversity. Table 5 explains the sample frame used for this survey.

Table 5 Sample frame used in the survey

Group		% Interviews	Total interviews
Total (16-24)			1113
Gender	Male	48.3%	538
	Female	51.7%	575
Age 16 – 24	16-17	27.2%	302
	18-19	22.8%	254
	20-24	50.0%	557
Religion	Catholic	45.7%	509
	Protestant	47.6%	530
	Other	0.4%	4
	None	6.3%	70

Fieldwork

The fieldwork for the street survey took place between 26th May and 24th June 2005. Prior to commencement of fieldwork all interviewers were briefed to ensure they were fully confident with the questionnaire and understood the aims and objectives of the study.

The street survey was carried out by the PwC in-house fieldwork team. All interviewers work within the guidelines of the Market Research Society Code of Conduct and have accreditation under the Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS), which sets the industry standards for quality fieldwork.

Analysis

All completed questionnaires were edited and coded before being entered on to computer for analysis. The results of the survey were analysed using SPSS and in-depth analysis was provided in the following areas: gender; religion; age; level of interest in politics; voter / non-voter; constituency; and political party.

3. Residential Findings

3.1 Introduction

The discussions throughout the residentials revealed the views of young people concerning the democratic process. A number of themes emerged under the three main topics discussed: Politics, Elections and Voting and the Democratic Process. Overall, the two age groups had similar opinions, although it must be noted that the older group were more engaged with the issues and in the discussions expressed more interest in the subject area. Many of the 16-17 year olds felt that politics was not relevant to them as they were not old enough to vote, an opinion which was also evident throughout the focus groups. However, others disagreed and felt that as they were the next generation to vote it was important that they took an interest.

3.2 General views on politics and politicians

Many of the views expressed by the young people concerning politics in general were negative. There was an attitude that politicians did not listen to them or regard the issues they were concerned with as being important. This feeling of being ignored frustrated some of the young people who felt that they did have something to contribute to politics. However, the overriding view among the vast majority of participants was that politics was boring and complicated. The groups felt that this would be the view of many 16-24 year olds, which led to them *'switching off'* whenever politics was discussed. The fact that many young people viewed politics as too complicated meant that they were not encouraged to become involved or to seek more information.

Other negative views expressed by the young people included a belief that politics was *'a joke'* and indeed *'a farce'* and that it was just *'boring old white men arguing all the time'*. Similar views were also reported in England in Y Vote/Y Not?[36]. Some young people also said that they found politics and the topics discussed depressing with an emphasis on *'doom and gloom'* issues. Many also referred to a degree of deceit and injustice around politics with it being difficult to trust what was being said.

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[36] Young people and politics (2002) A report on the Yvote?/Ynot? Project. London, Children and Young People's Unit.

There was a perception that politics was all about arguments and debates, with politicians being stubborn and considering themselves to be always right.

However, some young people did express a keen interest in politics and were frustrated that it was generally assumed that they were apathetic. One person helping to facilitate one of the groups stated that her experience working with young people indicated that,

Young people are not apathetic about issues and indeed can even be angry about issues. However it is the linkage between politics and the issues which causes the problem, as young people do not think it will make any difference.

These general discussions led the young people to focus on Northern Ireland politics which many perceived to be very different from the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

3.3 Politics in Northern Ireland

When the young people were asked to focus on Northern Ireland politics there was a degree of frustration especially at the difference between politics here and elsewhere. One participant bluntly stated,

*I am f***** off listening to the same s**** day in and day out. It is the same thing over and over again. No wonder young people do not want to vote. We are fed up (male 18+).*

Others within the group agreed with his views but also felt that the degree of interest in politics in Northern Ireland was based upon *'where you came from and what your community had faced'*. When this was further explored the participant felt that communities, which had been badly affected by the Troubles, were more *'politicised'*, although others within the group disagreed with his opinions.

When asked what types of issues they associated with Northern Ireland politics the young people discussed:

- paramilitary activity;
- hatred;
- sectarianism; and

- guns and bombs.

Some also referred to criminality and a gang type culture which they felt dominated some communities in Northern Ireland. This may have been brought to their attention due to recent events and media reports at the time of the research with incidents such as the Northern Bank robbery in December 2004 and the murder of Robert McCartney in January 2005.

Many of the young people associated politics in Northern Ireland with religion, sectarianism and fighting which they wished was not the case,

People in Northern Ireland always relate religion to politics – it would be nice if it wasn't (male 16-17).

Others also felt that the situation in Northern Ireland was now different in that *'less young people now have direct contact with violence'*. In light of this they felt that young people's *'political'* priorities had now changed and they wanted more emphasis to be placed on issues such as education and health rather than on division,

We are more interested in issues such as water charges and education (male 16-17).

The young people perceived that in other areas of the United Kingdom politics did focus more on such issues and these were not given any priority in Northern Ireland because the politicians were too focussed on fighting and arguing with each other over their sectarian differences,

Many of the political parties still have old ideals…they still look at sectarian issues and young people now are less concerned about these (female 16-17).

The participants described the fighting and arguing as a *'blame game'* which was frustrating as they just wanted *'issues of importance to be tackled'* and not what they perceived to be *'petty gripes'*. However, one young person did highlight that the differences which did exist between the two main communities in Northern Ireland was a real issue and could not be *'swept under the carpet'*. They all recognised the legacy of the Troubles but also expressed a desire to move on.

3.4 Politicians

The groups also discussed their views of politicians. Many complained that politicians did not talk to young people or indeed listen to their views. The participants felt that this was evidence that politicians did not know how to relate to them. Both age groups referred to politicians *'dodging'* questions and not really listening to concerns that they raised. Many perceived politicians as being *'old'*, *'male'* and *'stubborn'* while some described them as *'childish'*. Some young people also stated that *'politicians put them off voting'*. When this was further explored it was revealed that some felt that their actions did not encourage young people or indeed set much of an example,

The way they shout at each other…there is not much hope for Northern Ireland when you see that.

The participants on the residential were asked to create their ideal politician, the various characteristics they identified as being important were:

- Young or at least a youthful approach;
- Genuine, showing that they really do care;
- Good communication skills, talking to the people in a way they can relate to and understand;
- A good listener;
- A good speaker;
- Looks good on camera;
- Answers questions directly and to the point;
- Doesn't dodge questions they don't want to answer;
- Builds up relationships with the people in the community, not only during an election; and
- A visible presence with people feeling at ease to approach them.

Some of the females within the groups also said that they would like to see more females entering politics but that,

It was so male dominated that it didn't seem to speak to women in the same way.

They also said that it would help if there were more 'good looking men'!

All of the young people also expressed a desire for politicians to be more approachable and to be visible, not just during elections. Some parties and indeed individuals were felt to be better at this than others and '*were seen to integrate with the community'*.

3.5 Elections and Voting

Many 16-17 year olds stated that they were not really interested in elections and voting, as they did not see these issues as being relevant to them at this stage in their lives. Consequently, many 16-17 year olds had little knowledge on the various types of elections that take place and no knowledge of how votes were counted. However the 18-24 year olds displayed more knowledge on the various elections, but they were also clearly unsure about how their votes were counted and expressed a desire for information on the various counting procedures that were used.

Many of the young people discussed the various influences on their voting habits. Both age groups felt that their community had a strong influence on who they voted for. This influence was so strong that many felt that they would be unlikely to vote for a party that their community would not approve of,

There is a strong family and community tradition when it comes to voting in Northern Ireland which restricts choice (male 18+).

The younger age groups also felt that their families influenced their decision whereas the older group felt that their peers had more influence than their families. Many of the young people stated that they would be unlikely to change '*allegiance'* to their party even over '*important'* issues such as health and education. Some older participants also highlighted that knowledge about the various parties in Northern Ireland was limited,

Parties not campaigning in some areas like the Ulster Unionists do not go to Ardoyne or Sinn Fein do not campaign in Tigers Bay – why would they?

It was felt that this limited informed choice and knowledge about opposing parties who drew support from the other community.

All of the participants were asked if they were either registered to vote or intended to register. Some of the older participants were not registered and some of those who were registered had never actually voted. At the end of the session the young people were asked if they would now consider voting due to their participation in the residential. Some indicated that they would but 2 of the 13 were still adamant that they wouldn't vote as they still perceived *'it made no difference anyway'* and/or *'there was no-one worth voting for'*. All of the 18-24 year olds were aware of the need to register and the process of doing so. However, some of those aged under 18 were not aware of this procedure suggesting either that they are not interested or that there is a lack of awareness around electoral registration.

The age at which a person should become eligible to vote produced a range of opinions within the group. Some felt that the age for voting should be reduced to 16 instead of 18, as at 16 you can leave school, leave home, start to work and pay taxes. One young 16 year-old female stated that *'it was her future'* therefore she felt that at 16 she had a right to vote. However, others felt that the age limit should remain at 18 as it was only at this age they perceived that young people were mature enough to participate in the electoral process,

Everyone seems to think at 18 you are more mature and an adult so I think it should stay at 18…at 16 I don't think you have any real idea (male 16-17).

Some young people also felt that although the age for voting should remain at 18 there was a need for more education to make young people more aware of political issues. Many felt that this should be delivered through schools and youth groups. A few participants felt that even 18 was too young and the voting age should be 21, however many disputed this view. There appeared to be no difference in these views expressed based on gender, age or community background. However this will be further explored in the focus group discussions and the quantitative survey.

There was extensive discussion on the fact that voting at an election was restricted to one day. Many felt that this was unfair as events can arise which make it difficult for people to attend such as sickness. It was suggested that there should be at least two days made available for people to cast their vote. Few of the young people agreed that the methods of voting should be increased to include more postal votes or voting on-line as they felt that this increased the risk of fraud. It was the view of some,

especially those who had already voted, that it was important that the individual appeared in person to cast their vote unless there were special circumstances,

There should be no postal voting – people should be there in person (male 16-17).

The issue of compulsory voting and the imposition of fines for not voting were discussed, however the majority of participants disagreed that these measures would increase turnout at elections. They also disputed the belief that it would encourage young people to become more engaged with many feeling that it may have the opposite effect. It was also considered that these measures would actually defeat the purpose of a democratic procedure with comments such as,

It is your own personal right to vote…you shouldn't be forced (male 16-17).

It is your own choice (female 16-17).

3.6 Engagement

The young people were asked what would encourage them to become more engaged in the electoral process with many stating that there was a need for more education and information on voting and politics in schools. None of the participants had been involved in any form of citizenship education and felt that this would have been beneficial to them. However, when asked if any of them read election literature from the political parties or other sources the majority of participants said that they did not because they were not interested in what was being said and that *'it went straight to the bin'*. Thus even when material was supplied they were not inclined to read it and learn from it. It was felt that little of the election material was designed to appeal to young people. One young person stated that to become interested in the electoral process and politics they felt that,

You had to believe in their (political parties) values to join and most of them have something you don't agree with – none of them are perfect (male 16-17).

This highlighted how for many young people current political parties do not reflect their needs or tackle the issues which are of importance to them. It was also widely viewed that politicians have to *'start to engage with young people and go where they are'* if they want to encourage more interest and participation among young people.

3.7 Participation in the Democratic Process

The last session in the residential focused on youth participation in the wider democratic process. The young people were asked to focus on ways that they could communicate their views other than through voting. Many of the young people, especially the 16-17 year olds, struggled with this session and found it difficult to grasp the meaning of democratic processes viewing it only as voting and politics. It was explained to the groups that democratic processes referred to ways in which people could have their voice heard other than through an elected representative. Once this was explained the groups suggested many ways in which this could be done including:

- Petitions
- Strikes
- Letters
- Badges
- Internet
- Involvement with a Trade Union
- Pressure Groups such as Greenpeace

- Conferences
- Boycotts
- Protests/marches
- Leaflets/flyers
- Community Groups
- Youth Councils
- Plays, songs or films to make a point.

Many young people referred to the protests and marches surrounding the Iraq war although some felt that these methods had not achieved anything. However, others disputed this and stated that clear messages were sent about public opinion and that this in itself was an achievement. Some of the young people on the residential had taken part in some of the activities that were identified. Two of them had previously sat on Shadow Youth Councils but they were slightly dismayed as to their purpose and usefulness, feeling that the young people were still not listened to.

3.8 Evaluation and Recommendations

At the end of these two sessions the young people evaluated what they would like to see happen in order to encourage them to become more engaged in politics and voting. The older age group were insistent that there was a need for more education concerning politics and they felt that this should take place in schools. It was also

suggested that it would be beneficial for the Electoral Commission to visit schools and explain the process of registering and voting including the counting of votes. At the residential the groups were given a brief explanation of how votes were counted, which they all said was interesting and beneficial. It was evident to the researchers that when the young people were involved in the discussions and felt at ease asking questions their interest in the subject area increased.

The young people also felt that holding workshop sessions with politicians should be considered. These sessions would give young people an opportunity to ask politicians a variety of questions and also to get to know them better. The young people also suggested that information on politics and voting should be placed in establishments that young people would frequent such as clubs, pubs, universities and schools. Again it was emphasised that this information should be presented in a *'youth friendly way'.*

In conclusion some of the 18-24 year olds felt that it was now up to them to get out and vote as they felt that,

You can't sit back and complain if you don't get up and do something to make it better.

Clearly the residential had encouraged some of these young people to become more involved and indeed to think about using their vote. For the younger participants there was less evidence of a change in attitude as they still felt that it was not important to them at this moment in time.

Recommendations:
1. More education for young people on politics, elections and voting through various mediums such as schools and youth groups.
2. The Electoral Commission to engage in a programme for schools providing information workshops.

3.9 Lessons learnt

At the end of the residential the young people were asked what they had learnt from the experience. Below are the responses from the two groups:

- What politics involves;

- How the voting process works;

- What the views are of young people from the other community;

- How we can communicate our views;

- That politics doesn't have to be boring;

- We all have rights and what we think does matter; and

- The responsibility to engage is a two way process between politicians and young people.

4. Focus Group Findings

4.1 Introduction

Sixteen focus groups were also held throughout Northern Ireland with 80 young people taking part. Five of the groups were with youth members of various political parties. The Unionist parties are under-represented with two of the parties, UUP and PUP, only having one young person present. The DUP were unable to provide anyone, in spite of several requests being made to different party representatives. The questions/themes from the residentials were adapted and used to guide the discussions with similar themes emerging.

Throughout the discussions no differences were noted in attitudes between various age groups, genders or community backgrounds. Differences were however noted according to the degree of interest in politics:

- Those who were not interested in politics or related issues and did not want to engage in any discussions. Within these groups the discussions were usually short, with the young people having very little or nothing to say.
- Those who initially were not interested in the subject area but as the discussions continued became more interested. These first two groups included the majority of respondents; and the final group
- Those who were very interested in politics and related issues including the youth members of the various parties.

This will be further explored in the quantitative survey.

4.2 General views on politics and politicians

For many of the young people their initial reaction when asked about politics was that it was '*boring*' and those who expressed an interest in politics stated that many of their friends also held this view. The young people from the various political parties also said that they recognised that many young people were not interested in political issues and that many perceived the subject as '*boring*'. It was felt that the boredom was associated with the complexity of the subject, which brought about a great deal of confusion, '*it is all so confusing, we just don't understand politics*'. However, many felt that there was a lack of education and consequently a lack of understanding about

politics and political issues and that this did not encourage young people to become involved. One young female stated,

I don't know enough about it (politics) to be interested. I need more information.

In addition some of the young people felt that politics made '*no difference to their lifestyle*' thus there was no need to become involved,

What is the point in voting, as it doesn't seem to make any difference anyway?

Some also felt that they would not be interested in political issues until they became eligible to vote. However, others disagreed with this and said that even at 16 young people should be interested as there were issues which affected them,

It (politics) will affect us in the future. Take for example when we go to university – university fees will impact upon us and we need to have a say and take an interest now.

Some of the representatives from the various political parties also felt that there was a need to educate young people that '*politics is in everyone's life and affects everyone*', but that this did not become a reality to young people until '*they reached a position of responsibility*'. Many participants felt that these attitudes were not solely related to Northern Ireland, but were evident across the United Kingdom and Ireland and indeed throughout Europe.

It was felt by many that politics was surrounded by debates and arguments that never seemed to benefit young people. Many voiced opinions such as,

Politicians are not interested in young people…just their pay cheque.

It is all about lining their own pockets…driving about in their big flashy cars. They are all doing well out of it but we aren't.

There was a sense of frustration among the young people that issues which were of importance to their age group were rarely on the political agenda. This was further discussed when the attention was focused on Northern Ireland politics. There was also a degree of frustration that politics never seemed to bring about '*change for the better*',

Even when people are elected you never see a big difference, and

I have never seen anything change for the better.

These perceptions were a further factor in discouraging engagement.

For many of those who were interested in the subject area, their interest arose from a family involvement and/or interest in politics. This had encouraged them to keep abreast of the issues including party policies and manifestoes and their impact on young people. For the young people who were members of political parties this interest and indeed family involvement had been major incentives in encouraging them to join their particular party. Many of the young members of the various political parties were also studying politics at university and one interviewee commented that he wanted to make a career in politics. The four main parties (Sinn Fein, SDLP, UUP and DUP) were reported to have representation in the universities and this also acted as a catalyst for some to get more actively involved, especially if there were various issues that they felt passionate about.

Some young people commented that although they were interested they never really discussed politics outside the home environment either because none of their friends were interested and didn't want to engage in discussions or they did not feel comfortable revealing their political views,

It's difficult to discuss politics here as there are too many divisions and you feel too uncomfortable.

Many of the young people felt that political figures did not encourage young people to become involved in politics – either because they were *'old'* or *'too removed'* from issues which affect many young people in today's society,

Politicians are boring and they don't have a clue what is happening. All they do is argue with one another.

One interviewee said that he was frustrated that many politicians demanded *'harsher penalties'* for crimes that young people committed yet *'they do not take time to find out why young people get involved in such activities'*. Many of the young people also commented that politics was male dominated and this was seen to be the case throughout the United Kingdom. The young people from the political parties also recognised that politics was perceived as being male dominated, although some party representatives said that their female membership was increasing.

These discussions led the young people into issues surrounding the differences between politics here and in Great Britain and Ireland.

4.3 Politics in Northern Ireland

As in the residentials, the main complaint made by the young people was that politics in Northern Ireland focused on religion and division and not on issues such as university fees, water charges and transport,

Northern Ireland is different in that it is based on religion and conflict – it makes it more personal.

If you look at UK politics in general they talk about health and education and stuff people worry about but here they talk about stuff people don't care about after a load of months. You worry about things for the future not the past.

It is a different world over there (England), they would think more about issues such as housing…we think religion.

However, some participants felt that this was not the case and parties did look at issues but that people either did not hear what was being said or associate the various parties for their stand on such issues. Some participants who were interested in politics said,

As it is approaching an election you can read each parties' election material and their stand on various issues is stated.

The representatives from the political parties also clearly stated that their parties were concerned with issues but one party representative commented that, *'the media pick up more on the struggle and the divide'*, thus this is seen as being the focus of media attention.

Some young people felt that politics in Northern Ireland was *'harder to control'* due to the perceived focus on religion and division and also people were more reluctant to discuss politics because of the past. The legacy of the conflict frustrated some participants and they felt that the continued sectarianism meant that the same issues were discussed time and time again. However it was felt that young people accepted this situation, as it is all they know and because they do not question politicians' actions or attitudes,

You just accept it, as it is all you know – it has always been like that.

4.4 Politicians

Most young people had negative opinions of politics. It was generally felt that politicians were *'old', 'boring'* and *'male'* – views that were also expressed in the residentials. Many also stated that politicians did not relate to young people and were not aware of issues which they were interested in. Many of the participants viewed politicians as *'repetitive', 'they always say the same thing over and over again'* but nothing ever changes. One group felt that politicians were more focused on gaining *'one up on each other'* than they were about meeting the needs of their constituents,

Politicians do not appeal to young people, they just think about themselves and not the people they are meant to represent.

Indeed some young people felt that politicians were guilty of *'hearing but not actually listening'* and that *'an ideal politician would listen'*. This led many to say that they wanted to see politicians communicate more with 'the people' and to become more familiar with issues that were happening within the community,

They should go out themselves and meet the people, not just at election times.

I would like to see someone who actually does something and gets to know the people.

The view was that this would also help young people get to know their politicians as many in fact commented that they had never met their local politician.

Asked to describe their ideal politician, some young people focused on characteristics such as age, gender and looks whilst others wanted to see younger politicians and more females entering the political arena,

An ideal politician would be young and female; we need more prominent female figures.

Others highlighted that they would like to see politicians who were more *'genuine', 'trustworthy', 'honest'* and *'approachable'*,

They should be genuine…a people's person and stand by what they say, trustworthy.

I would like to see someone who was approachable.

It was felt that it was time to see more action and less words, but also that verbal promises were being fulfilled,

I would like to see someone who actually does something and gets to know the people.

One young male emphasised the importance of this when he stated,

If you have a politician who is willing to help and do a turn for the community then you are encouraged to vote for them.

The young representatives from the political parties also felt it was important to build relations with the community but most admitted that young people were never specifically targeted.

4.5 Elections and voting

Discussions took place around various issues relating to elections and voting. Many young people stated that who they voted for was strongly influenced by their community and family,

I will vote for who my family vote for, I don't know myself who to vote for.

I'll just ask my mum and dad who I should vote for.

Some of the young representatives from the political parties felt that there was a culture now among young people not to vote and that in many ways it was something that they were proud of,

There is a habit today among young people not to vote and they seem proud of it…they don't see how it applies to them.

A group of young people aged 19-24 who were involved in youth work within their community also stated that,

More and more young people have stopped voting they are just too apathetic.

The group felt that the situation was not helped by the lack of communication between politicians and young people.

It was also felt by some of the representatives of the political parties that young people perceived that voting made no difference therefore they had no incentive to vote. This was also expressed by some of the young people interviewed,

There is nothing to encourage young people to vote, as they don't see any difference when they do (political party representative).

What is the point of voting sure it makes no difference and nothing ever changes.

There is no benefit to us to vote, we don't gain anything.

Other young people said that they did not vote because *'there was no-one worth voting for'* or *'they did not know who to vote for'*.

The majority of the participants were aware that they had to register to vote although some of the younger participants, those under 18, were not aware of this. The advertisements on television had informed some young people about the registering system with some saying they were good as *'they told you what to do'*. However others felt that they were not an incentive to young people and indeed some felt that they put young people off.

It was interesting to note that some young people were apprehensive about registering. One young male in particular said that he would not be registering, as he didn't want to reveal all his personal details as this meant that he might be traced if anything ever happened,

No, they would get you...I don't want to be on it. If you are on the electoral role they would get you for everything...all your bad debts the lot.

This view was expressed by a few of the participants who took part. Representatives of one political party felt that registering to vote was another barrier in preventing young people from voting,

When they brought in this rolling registration where you had to register every year individually...they were putting up barriers in order to stop participation.

Why make it harder for young people to vote, if young people are becoming more and more apathetic...why put another barrier in their place.

However, other party representatives felt it was essential that registration took place,

You have to otherwise there would be too many problems...it has to be every year as the three year system holds the door open for fraud.

The age for voting was widely discussed with the majority of participants feeling that the age of voting should remain at 18 whilst others disagreed and wanted it to be lowered to 16 or 17,

Eighteen is far too old it should be 16.

I think it should definitely be 16...you're paying taxes at 16.

I'd go for 17, you're in school, or preparing for college, or working...you have a lot of responsibility already.

These participants felt that at 16 and 17 young people were already having to make decisions and in some cases were paying taxes therefore they were entitled to have a political say. Others felt that it would put pressure on political parties to *'address the issues that affect young people'*. However, as with the residentials, a few participants

said that they would like the age limit increased to 21 as they felt that by this stage young people would be more interested in politics and understand its relevance to them,

I think 16 is too young, in fact so is 18, it should be 21, we are still too young and don't know enough at the minute.

You are young to vote at 18, I think it should be 21.

The political parties also had varying views about the appropriate age for voting with some wishing to see it lowered to 16 or 17 whilst others felt it should remain at 18. Even members within some parties had differing personal opinions, although they all recognised their party line on the issue,

I'm happy enough with eighteen.

No, I think it should be sixteen. (two members of the one party, the party line is to lower the age to 16).

The time period for voting was thought by some to be too short and a period of 2-3 days was suggested, *'there should be at least 2 days available for voting'*. However, most young people felt that one-day was sufficient as the polling stations were opened for a lengthy period and this gave people ample opportunity to vote. The representatives from the political parties also felt that one day was sufficient.

Having elections at the weekend was also discussed and although some thought this would be a good idea the majority felt it would not encourage participation,

A weekend wouldn't encourage me to vote, I wouldn't go out to vote on a Sunday...I'd be in bed.

Methods for voting were discussed with some participants feeling that postal voting should be increased and a few suggested internet voting should be used,

Internet voting would appeal to young people and encourage them to get involved. However with these two methods the possibility of fraud was raised and this concerned many participants. One participant felt that *'postal voting is a disaster, what about fraud?'*

Another issue which was raised was that of compulsory voting. All of the groups, including the political parties, felt that this should not be introduced and also felt that

it didn't encourage young people to become more interested in politics and/or political issues,

No, voting shouldn't be compulsory, it is all about democracy and that is free will and choice.

It was felt by the majority that increasing engagement could only be achieved with more education and information aimed specifically at young people in a way that was easy to understand. One young person concluded by stating *'we need more information or should I say interesting information'*. Some of the political parties also felt that their election material was *'too wordy'* and that this did not appeal to young people.

4.6 Participation in the democratic process

As with the residentials many young people, with the exception of those interested or already involved in politics, struggled with this session perceiving the democratic process to involve just voting and elections. However some young people had been involved in petitions and indeed one group had given a powerpoint presentation to their local council requesting a skateboard park in their area. However, these young people felt that at times their requests fell on *'deaf ears'* which caused them great annoyance. One young person stated,

A lot of petitions and campaigns are ignored; we are still seen as a load of children who can't vote anyway so we don't matter. Look at the campaigns around the Iraq war sure nothing happened there.

The feeling of being ignored because of their age did not encourage young people to take an interest in issues or become engaged in political matters. Thus by the time they were entitled to vote they were disinterested in the process and felt that what they thought didn't really matter.

4.7 Summary

The focus groups highlighted that many young people in Northern Ireland are disinterested in politics but not necessarily on issues such as health and education. For the majority this lack of interest was due to the attitude that politics was *'boring'*. Others had become frustrated with the political situation in Northern Ireland and felt

that nothing ever changes so there is little point in becoming engaged. However, some who took part were interested in politics and political issues, excluding those representing political parties. These young people felt that it was important to engage in politics and get their voice heard. The majority of participants felt that there was a need for more education on politics and political issues and would welcome citizenship education within schools.

Young people also voiced the opinion that politicians do not listen to them or indeed interact with them. The lack of interest and engagement from some political parties to take part in this research does not help to alleviate this opinion.

5. Survey Findings

5.1 Demographic breakdown

This section documents the findings from the quantitative survey. In total 1113 young people aged 16-24 were surveyed throughout Northern Ireland with all 26 District Council areas and all 18 Westminster constituencies represented. The sample consisted of 538 males (48%) and 575 females (52%). Table 6 shows the number of people surveyed within each age category.

Table 6 Age and gender split of participants

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Male		Female	
			Frequency	%	Frequency	%
16-17	302	27	167	31	135	23
18-19	254	23	124	23	130	23
20-24	557	50	247	46	310	54
Total	**1113**	**100**	**538**	**100**	**575**	**100**

Ninety-four percent of the participants (1045) regarded themselves to have a religion with 51% (530) considered as Protestant and 49% (509) Catholic with only 4 described as 'other' and 2 not known.

5.2 Voting behaviour

Level of interest in politics

Participants were asked a series of questions concerning voting behaviour. The first question ascertained the level of interest that 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland had in politics. Fifty percent (554 participants) indicated that they were either quite interested (35%) or very interested (15%). This is more positive than the views displayed within the qualitative discussions where many young people echoed negative views towards politics and expressed a lack of interest. Of the sample surveyed only 27% (300 participants) stated that they had either no interest (12%) or very little interest (15%).

It was interesting to note that the level of interest in politics increased with age, a finding which has been reported in previous research[37]. Table 7 highlights that

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[37] Jowell, R and Park, A (1998) Young people, politics and citizenship a disengaged generation? London, CREST.

younger participants (16-17 year olds) are more likely to be less interested whilst older participants (20-24 year olds) express more interest.

Table 7 Interest in Northern Ireland politics according to age

Level of Interest	16-17 (%)	18-19 (%)	20-24 (%)
Not at all interested	17	11	10
Not very interested	22	13	12
Neither/nor	26	19	21
Quite interested	25	43	36
Very interested	9	14	19
Refused / Don't know	1	-	2

Neither religion nor gender affected the level of interest in politics.

Level of understanding about Northern Ireland politics

One quarter of the sample felt that they had a good level of understanding of Northern Ireland politics whilst the majority (52%) felt that their level of understanding was average. Only 21% felt that their understanding was poor. Again level of understanding was found to increase with age (see Table 8) with 20-24 year olds less likely to feel that their understanding was poor and more likely to indicate a good level of understanding compared to the other two age categories.

Table 8 Understanding of Northern Ireland politics according to age

Level of understanding	16-17 (%)	18-19 (%)	20-24 (%)
Poor	34	17	15
Average	50	58	51
Good	14	24	31
Refused / Don't know	2%	1%	3%

The survey also found males claimed to have a higher level of understanding than females with 29% of males compared to 21% of females indicating that they had a good understanding. However religion was not found to have any effect.

Support for political parties

The survey found that 50% of 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland either do not support a political party (19%) or are not strong supporters (31%). However 47% indicated some level of support with 32% highlighting that they were 'fairly strong'

supporters and 15% 'very strong' supporters. The remaining 3% either refused to answer or did not know. Support was found to increase with age as can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9 Support for political parties according to age

Support for a political party	16-17 (%)	18-19 (%)	20-24 (%)
Don't support	27	15	16
Not a very strong supporter	40	27	29
A fairly strong supporter	20	41	36
A very strong supporter	11	15	18
Refused / Don't know	2	2	1

Males were more likely to be strong supporters of a political party than females with 20.3% compared to 10.4% respectively choosing the 'very strong supporter' option. It was also found that Catholics were less likely to not support a party than Protestants (16.9% compared to 19.1%) and more likely to be strong supporters (17.7% compared to 13.2%).

Table 10 shows the political parties which 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland feel closest to. The results reflect the results of recent elections with Sinn Fein and DUP being the two most popular parties with 21% and 19% respectively. The SDLP and UUP were the third and fourth parties that young people felt closest to with 16% and 13% respectively. It was interesting to note that 11% of the sample opted for 'none of the above' and indeed a quarter opted for either the 'refused', 'don't know' or 'none' categories. It was not surprising to note that religion affected the results with more Protestants opting for Unionist Parties and more Catholics choosing Nationalist parties.

Table 10 Political Parties that 16-24 year olds feel closest to

Political Party	Frequency	Percentage
Sinn Fein	229	21
DUP	212	19
SDLP	178	16
UUP	143	13
Green Party	19	2
Alliance Party	18	2
PUP	15	1
Women's Coalition	12	1
Socialist Environmental Alliance	4	0
Vote for Yourself Rainbow Dream Ticket	3	0
Conservative Party	2	0
Workers Party	2	0
Labour Party	1	0
UKUP	1	0
Refused	88	8
Don't Know	67	6
None of the above	119	11

Influences on voting behaviour

The young people were asked what factors influenced their voting behaviour with nearly half (49%) indicating that their family influenced them. Twenty-eight percent said that that their local community influenced their behaviour and 24% stated their friends. These were the main influences on voting behaviour raised within the qualitative research. However the survey also revealed that 30% of 16-24 year olds were influenced by the political parties themselves. Only 8% felt that the media had an influence on their behaviour (see Table 11).

Table 11 Influences on voting behaviour

Influence	Frequency	Percentage
Family	549	49
Political parties	338	30
Local community	314	28
Friends	267	24
Did not vote	176	16
Media	94	8
School/ college/ university	72	7
None of the above	47	4
Don't know	17	2
Refused	16	1
Youth groups	15	1

History of troubles	1	0
Personal opinion	1	0
Church	1	0
Felt need to vote as it was their first time	1	0
Age	1	0
Candidates	1	0
Tactical voting	1	0

Electoral Register

Over half (60%) of the sample had their name placed on the electoral register with only 12% stating that they were not on the register and a further 20% who said that they were too young. It must be noted that some of this 20% were 17 year olds who wrongly assumed that they could not be on the register, however it is not possible to disaggregate the responses between 16 and 17 year olds. Only 1% said that they had never heard of the electoral register and only 5% didn't know if they were registered or not.

Voting

Participants were asked what would best describe what they did during the last election held on May 5th. Nearly half of the 16-24 year olds surveyed (49%) indicated that they had voted in both the Westminster General Election and Local Government Election. Twenty-seven percent (297 participants) stated that they did not vote at all and 23% (256 participants) were too young to vote. Two percent (21 participants) refused to answer the question. Females were found to be more likely not to vote than males with 30% compared to 23% respectively stating this response.

It was interesting to note that when location was crosstabulated with the responses that more respondents from the west of Northern Ireland had voted in the May 5th elections (55% compared to 45% in the East and 46% in Belfast). The majority (90%) cast their vote in person whilst 6% voted by post and 2% by proxy. The remaining either refused to answer or did not know.

A variety of reasons were given by the 574 participants who did not vote in the 2005 election as shown in Table 12. The most popular reason was that the participant was not registered or didn't receive a poll card (32%). Nearly one quarter (24%) said that

they were too young to vote. Ninety-eight percent who stated this were 16-17 year olds and therefore were too young however, 2% were aged 18-19 and are eligible to vote. Twenty-two percent of the 574 participants said that they were not interested in politics and this was why they had decided not to vote, and 10% felt that their vote would not make a difference highlighting how some young people are disillusioned with politics.

Table 12 Reasons for not voting in the elections on May 5th

Reason for not voting	Frequency	Percentage
I wasn't registered to vote/ I didn't receive a poll card	181	32
Too young to vote	140	24
I'm just not interested in politics	126	22
My vote would not make a difference	58	10
I wanted to vote but was too busy on the day	43	8
You can't trust politicians to keep their promises	31	5
There is no point in voting because all parties are the same	29	5
There was no point in voting because it was obvious who would win	28	5
Politicians are not interested in what young people have to say	26	5
I do not feel that NI politics are relevant to me	22	4
There were no politicians or parties that represented my views	17	3
I was unable to vote because I didn't have the correct ID	11	2
The voting system is too confusing	9	2
I do not understand the voting process	9	2
I was not able to organise a postal or proxy vote in time	3	1
I don't like the people hanging about outside the polling station	3	1
I tried to vote, but was refused at the polling station	3	1
The weather and time of year put me off	1	0
Was at University outside NI	1	0
Was too far from where I was registered to vote	1	0
Family death	1	0
Was outside NI	1	0
I don't care enough	1	0
No point in voting as my candidate was always going to win	1	0
Refused	28	5
Don't know	21	4

Respondents who had not voted were also asked to highlight what would encourage them to vote in the future (see Table 13). Thirty-eight percent stated the need for politicians to focus on areas of interest to them, whilst 32% said that they would be encouraged to vote if they felt that it would make a difference. These were also issues raised within the discussion sessions. Thirteen percent of the participants who had not voted felt that if other options, such as internet voting, were available that this would act as an incentive.

Table 13 Factors that would encourage voting in future elections

Factor	Frequency	Percentage
Politicians focusing on areas of interest to me	219	38
Feeling that my vote could make a difference	183	32
Making the voting process easier	106	19
If politicians explained their views to me	96	17
Voting via the internet	74	13
Feeling that the party I support has a good chance of winning	45	8
Postal voting on demand	24	4
If I was old enough to vote	14	2
Reduce voting age	13	2
Age	8	1
More time to register to vote	4	1
Nothing	3	1
Investigating the best candidate for the job	3	1
Belief that my vote might make a difference	2	0
More women in politics	2	0
If I wasn't busy	1	0
Having proper ID	1	0
If voting wasn't based around religion	1	0
If what the party says meant something	1	0
If it was more interesting	1	0
Feeling of trust in the politician	1	0
Peace in NI	1	2
Refused	17	3
Don't know	81	14

5.3 Participation in the democratic process

The democratic process was defined on the survey as 'something like signing a petition, taking part in a boycott or participating in a protest march'. Participants were asked if they had taken part any such activities. Thirty-nine percent indicated that they had not been involved in any of the activities listed. The two most popular activities were petitions (32%) and attending protests or marches (23%) (Table 14).

Table 14 Activities participated in

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
None of the above	437	39
Petitions	359	32
Attending protests/marches	254	23
Distributing leaflets/flyers	113	10
Part of community groups	104	9
Wearing a badge	100	9
Writing a letter to a politician	85	8
Attending conferences (about a political issue)	82	7
Internet opinion polls/voting	81	7
Joining a boycott	71	6
Strikes	64	6
Pressure groups such as Greenpeace	52	5
Joining Youth Councils	48	4
Involvement with a Trade Union	46	4
Through ARTS eg Plays, songs or films to make a point	24	2
Don't know	24	2
Refused	17	2
Member of a political party	2	0
Wearing armbands	2	0
Putting up election posters	1	0
Within educational establishments	1	0
I'm a member of Amnesty International	1	0
Have attended antiracism pop concerts	1	0

Participants were then asked what they thought were the biggest issues facing Northern Ireland at the present time. As indicated in Table 15 the main issues highlighted were sectarianism (47%), crime (44%), paramilitary activity (41%) and drugs (38%).

Table 15 The biggest issues facing Northern Ireland at the present time

Issue	Frequency	Percentage
Sectarianism	517	47
Crime	484	44
Paramilitary activity	461	41
Drugs	422	38
Maintaining the ceasefire/ decommissioning	322	29
Policing	285	26
Unemployment	240	22
Education	227	20
Restoring the assembly at Stormont	205	18
Employment	196	18
University top up fees	179	16
Law and order	177	16
National Health Service	166	15
Water rates	164	15
Keeping NI in the UK	164	15
Housing	149	13
Cost of living	145	13
Health and social care	141	13
Implementing the Agreement	130	12
Taking NI out of the UK	114	10
Renegotiating the Agreement	110	10
Environment	105	9
Justice and human rights	94	8
Farming /rural issues	93	8
Economy	92	8
11- plus	90	8
Replacing/ ending the Agreement	80	7
Public transport	78	7
Taxation	71	6
Elderly care	66	6
Poverty	64	6
Price of petrol/ oil	61	6
Standards of living	58	5
Asylum Seekers	55	5
War in Iraq	48	4
European Union	44	4
Young people provision	40	4
Inflation	18	2
There are no important issues	12	1
Antisocial behaviour	6	1
Underage drinking	2	0
Parades	2	0

Not enough for young people to do	1	0
Racism	1	0
Money wasted by Royal family	1	0
Attitudes to emigration	1	0
Equality	1	0
Keeping Sinn Fein out	1	0
Civil liberties	1	0
Safe driving campaigns	1	0
Underage sex/pregnancies	1	0
Refused	9	1
Don't know	39	4

In addition the respondents were asked if there were any wider issues facing the United Kingdom at the present time. Not surprisingly the biggest issue was felt to be the war in Iraq (47%) followed by crime (39%) and drugs (31%). Issues concerning politics in Northern Ireland such as 'Keeping Northern Ireland in the UK' or 'Taking Northern Ireland out of the UK' were not seen as being wider issues for the UK with 3% and 2% respectively.

5.4 Northern Ireland politics

A section on Northern Ireland politics was included in the survey with respondents being asked what they associated with politics in Northern Ireland. Over half of 16-24 year olds surveyed indicated that they associated politics with the peace process. As in the qualitative research sectarian issues and hatred were associated (32%) as were religion (28%) and arguments and fighting (28%) (Table 16).

Table 16 Association with Northern Ireland politics

Association	Frequency	Percentage
Peace process	559	50
Sectarian/ hatred	353	32
Religion not issues	316	28
Arguments/ fighting	307	28
Always the same things being discussed	299	27
Frustration	196	18
Stalemate	179	16
Pride in your country	130	12
Local democracy	129	12
Getting justice	85	8
Local control of Education and Health	71	6

Gerrymandering	2	0
Unionists unwilling to powershare	2	0
Boring	2	0
Taking sides	1	0
Nothing is ever done	1	0
Question of nationality	1	0
Concessions	1	0
Injustice	1	0
Terrorists being allowed in government	1	0
Moving towards a united Ireland	1	0
Waste of time	1	0
Don't know	41	4
Refused	13	1

Interestingly, in spite of the findings from the residentials and the focus groups only 2 people indicated that they felt that Northern Ireland politics could be associated with the term boring. However in the series of statements where participants had to voice their level of agreement to the question whether politics was boring or not this increased to 382 (34%) with 205 (18%) agreeing and 177 (16%) strongly agreeing, however 44% disagreed that politics was boring. Boredom was more likely to be stated among younger participants with 22% of 16-17 year olds strongly agreeing compared to 14% of 20-24 year olds and 13% of 18–19 year olds.

Over half of the respondents (53%) disagreed that politics was irrelevant to their life with 26% having a neutral opinion. This indicates that young people recognise that politics has an impact on their lives and it was interesting to note that 43% of those too young to vote also disagreed with the statement. When asked if they felt that they had something to contribute to Northern Ireland politics 36% of respondents felt that they had (27% agreeing and 9% strongly agreeing) whilst 31% disagreed (12% strongly disagreeing). These responses indicate that many 16-24 year olds recognise the importance of politics with over a third feeling that they could make a contribution towards politics. However in spite of this 39% were not satisfied with the way democracy works in Northern Ireland.

As for the issues that are dealt with in Northern Irish politics the qualitative discussions indicated a degree of frustration among young people that issues such as

health and education were not tackled. However the survey revealed that views on this are mixed as shown in Table 17 with 31% disagreeing and 30% agreeing.

Table 17 Agreement that politics in Northern Ireland doesn't deal with real issues

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	71	6
Disagree	276	25
Neither	288	26
Agree	254	23
Strongly agree	84	7
Don't know	140	13

The biggest proportion (43%) of respondents agreed to some level that local politicians care about local issues (35% agreeing and 8% strongly agreeing). Only 16% disagreed with this statement (Table 18). However, 35% of 16-24 year olds felt that local politicians did not understand issues that were important to them although 30% disagreed with the statement (Table 19).

Table 18 Agreement that local politicians care about local issues

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	35	3
Disagree	148	13
Neither	362	33
Agree	390	35
Strongly agree	88	8
Don't know	90	8

Table 19 Agreement that local politicians do not understand the issues that are important to me

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	47	4
Disagree	282	25
Neither	316	29
Agree	297	27
Strongly agree	91	8
Don't know	80	7

A lack of communication between politicians and young people was often referred to in the discussion groups. The respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed that

local politicians talked to them in a way that they understood. Responses were mixed with 34% disagreeing and 31% agreeing (Table 20). Again younger respondents were more likely to disagree than older respondents (43% and 27% respectively).

Table 20 Agreement that local politicians talk to me in a language that I understand

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	84	8
Disagree	291	26
Neither	328	29
Agree	288	26
Strongly agree	53	5
Don't know	69	6

A further question ascertained if local politicians don't make the effort to listen to young people's views. Forty-one percent of respondents agreed that they don't with only 27% disagreeing (Table 21).

Table 21 Agreement that local politicians don't make an effort to listen to young people's views

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	39	4
Disagree	258	23
Neither	289	26
Agree	338	30
Strongly agree	122	11
Don't know	67	6

Listening and responding to the concerns of young people were found to be the factors which would encourage a young person to vote for a politician. The majority of respondents (69%) agreed with the statement 'I'd vote for a politician who listens and responds to my concerns' (Table 22).

Table 22 Agreement that I'd vote for a politician who listens and responds to my concerns

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	20	2
Disagree	64	6
Neither	193	17
Agree	426	38
Strongly agree	337	30
Don't know	73	7

Concerning the trustworthiness of politicians, 31% disagreed that they were untrustworthy while 24% agreed. The biggest proportion, 35%, neither agreed nr disagreed (Table 23). As for the type of job politicians in Northern Ireland were doing, 34% felt that they were not doing a good job with only 21% stating that they were (Table 24). Answering questions directly was not viewed as being a characteristic which politicians had. Thirty-six percent of respondents felt politicians never answer questions directly whilst 27% disagreed (Table 25).

Table 23 Agreement that local politicians are untrustworthy

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	70	6
Disagree	277	25
Neither	392	35
Agree	195	17
Strongly agree	73	7
Don't know	106	10

Table 24 Agreement that politicians in Northern Ireland are doing a good job

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	110	10
Disagree	269	24
Neither	395	35
Agree	206	19
Strongly agree	27	2
Don't know	106	10

Table 25 Agreement that politicians can never answer questions directly

Agreement	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	42	4
Disagree	254	23
Neither	315	28
Agree	271	24
Strongly agree	129	12
Don't know	102	9

5.5 Elections in Northern Ireland

Level of understanding for the way elections work in Northern Ireland was ascertained. Nearly half of the participants (49%) felt that they had an average level of understanding whilst 30% indicated a good level and only 19% a poor level. Again older respondents indicated higher levels of understanding as can be seen in Table 26.

Table 26 Level of understanding about the way current elections work according to age

Level of Understanding	16-17 (%)	18-19 (%)	20-24 (%)
Poor	37	15	12
Average	47	51	48
Good	12	32	36
Refused / Don't know	4	2	2

Ways to encourage young people to vote in future elections were asked with the most popular method being 24-hour polling stations with 40%. Text voting (34%) and voting at weekends (31%) were also highlighted as possible ways to encourage young people to vote (Table 27).

Table 27 Ways to encourage young people to vote in future elections

	Frequency	Percentage
24 hour polling stations	449	40
Text voting	382	34
Voting at weekends	344	31
Voting via the internet	256	23
Polling stations in shops/ supermarkets	203	18
Voting by place of choice	202	18
Telephone polling	187	17
Postal voting on demand	135	12
Younger politicians	5	0

People calling at the door to take your vote	3	0
Everything is fine as it is	3	0
Reduce voting age	2	0
More emphasis on youth issues	2	0
Make it easier	2	0
If change was more noticeable	1	0
Better parties to vote for	1	0
More relevant issues	1	0
Less confusing voting system	1	0
Political climate	1	0
Nothing could	1	0
More publicity	1	0
Refused	15	1
Don't know	99	9

It is interesting to note that in spite of the debates concerning voting age only 2 people thought by reducing the voting age would young people be encouraged to vote. When asked directly about the voting age the majority of respondents (67%) felt that the voting age should remain at 18 as it is only at this stage young people are mature enough to vote. Only 22% felt that it should be reduced to 16 years whilst even less (10%) indicated an increase to 21 years (Table 28). Young people who felt closest to Sinn Fein were more likely to want the voting age reduced to 16 than those in any other party (28% compared to 18% DUP, 18% UUP and 15% SDLP. Also age affected opinions with younger participants more likely to request for the voting age to be lowered with nearly half (48%) of 16-17 year olds compared to only 10% of 20-24 year olds (Table 29).

Table 28 Voting age views

View	Frequency	Percentage
The voting age should be reduced to 16 because you can leave school, leave home, start to work and pay taxes at 16	240	22
The voting age should remain at 18 because it is only at this stage that young people are mature enough to vote	746	67
The voting age should be increased to 21 as it is only at this age that you are mature enough to vote	114	10
None of the above	13	1
Total	**1113**	**100**

Table 20 Voting age views according to age

Voting age	16-17 (%)	18-19 (%)	20-24 (%)
The voting age should be reduced to 16	48	15	10
The voting age should remain at 18	47	78	73
The voting age should be increased to 21	3	7	16
None of the above	2	-	1

5.6 Information needs

It was felt by the majority (62%) that they received enough information about political parties and elections. However Table 20 highlights the various ways in which young people would like to receive future information with email alerts (28%), websites (23%) and visits to schools by the electoral commission (22%) the most popular methods. Only 4% indicated that they did not want to receive any more information.

Table 20 Ways to receive future information

Way	Frequency	Percentage
E-mail alerts	312	28
Website	250	23
Electoral commission visiting schools to talk about the electoral process	248	22
Citizenship education in secondary schools	216	19
Tailored pre-election information for young people	208	19
Literature distributed through schools and universities	163	15
Information about individual candidates in your local area	147	13
Text messages from parties	137	12
Literature distributed through clubs and pubs	133	12
Internet - chat room to discuss topical issues	109	9
Youth forum/ councils	81	7
Through post	48	4
Through the media	31	3
Politicians calling at door to promote their party	27	2
Leaflets in town/shops/doctors	17	2
Television	16	1
More party manifestos/party meetings/party publications	8	1
Through educational enterprises	7	1
Public appearances	6	1
More publicity	6	1
Radio	5	0
In person	5	0

Politicians answering questions not avoiding them	5	0
Debates	4	0
Increased exposure for all candidates	3	0
Politicians visiting schools/churches/youth clubs	3	0
Posters	3	0
Literature distributed to home	2	0
Church leaders need to be involved	2	0
I would not	1	0
I think there is enough information	1	0
There is already too much	1	0
Leaflets are too impersonal	1	0
More information directed at youths	1	0
More structure	1	0
Through popular culture	1	0
Stop using billboards as they are never taken down	1	0
Too much generalisation and empty promises	1	0
Get the information from family	1	0
Aim at younger people	1	0
Information on all parties	1	0
Youth conferences	1	0
Younger/trendier politicians	1	0
Don't know	92	8
Refused	15	1
Don't want to receive any more information	41	4

5.7 Summary

The following is a summary of the findings from the survey.

- 50% of 16-24 year olds are to some degree interested in politics.

- Only 27% either had no interest or very little interest.

- Age affected level of interest with older respondents expressing more interest.

- Neither religion nor gender affected level of interest.

- The majority (52%) of 16-24 year olds feel that they have an average level of understanding of Northern Ireland politics.

- Level of understanding increase with age.

- Males claimed a higher level of understanding than females.

- Males were more likely to be strong supporters of a political party than females.

- The family was the strongest influence on voting behaviour.

- 60% of 16-24 year olds had their name on the electoral register.

- Only 12% were not registered and 20% said they were too young.

- 49% had voted in the May 5th 2005 elections.

- For those who had not voted the main reason was that they were not registered or didn't receive a poll card (32%).

- Factors that would encourage young people to vote in the future included 'politicians focusing on areas of interest to them' and 'feeling that voting could make a difference'.

- Sectarianism, crime, paramilitary activity and drugs were viewed as the biggest issues facing Northern Ireland at the present time.

- Wider issues facing the UK included the Iraq war, with issues concerning Northern Ireland not considered to be high.

- 50% associated the peace process with Northern Ireland politics.

- 53% felt politics was relevant to their life.

- 41% of 16-24 year olds felt politicians didn't make an effort to listen to young people.

- 67% felt the voting age should remain at 18.

6. Conclusion

The qualitative research in this study indicated that many young people are not interested in politics and indeed find the subject area boring. However many feel passionate about issues which affect their lives but as stated by one participant *'it is the linkage between politics and issues which causes the problem as young people don't think it (politics) will make any difference'*.

The quantitative survey did however indicate a more positive situation with 50% of 16-24 year olds indicating some degree of interest in politics. Interest increased with age which corresponds with Jowell and Park's [38] theory that interest in politics begins to become more apparent when people become taxpayers, mortgage holders and 'stakeholders' with something to lose as well as gain.

Many young people expressed frustration that politicians did not listen to them and 41% of survey respondents felt that politicians did not make an effort to listen. Listening and responding to the concerns of young people is an issue which politicians will have to deal with especially when 69% of 16-24 year olds state that they would *'vote for a politician who listens and responds to my concerns'*. The qualitative research highlighted that it was also about interacting and communicating with young people. The lack of participation from some political parties whilst conducting this research does not bode well for future communication between political representatives and young people. Until the communication issue is addressed many young people will continue to feel that their views and opinions do not matter and that politicians are not interested in them.

However, the view within the residentials was that this was a two-way process with one participant stating *'you can't sit back and complain if you don't get up and do something to make it better'*. Clearly the residentials encouraged some of these young people to become more involved and indeed to think about using their vote.

The survey found that 49% of 16-24 year olds had voted in the 2005 May 5th elections with 23% of the sample too young to vote. For those who had not voted the main

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[38] Jowell, R and Park, A (1998) Young people, politics and citizenship a disengaged generation? London, CREST.

reason was that they were not registered or didn't receive a poll card. The percentage who had voted is similar to that of the 2001 Westminster election with 50% of those under 24 having voted. A post-election survey undertaken by PwC on behalf of the Commission found that that those aged between 18-24 were the least likely to have voted (44%). This had reduced from 49% at the 2003 Assembly election.[39]

The research clearly suggests that young people want more education concerning politics with requests for the Electoral Commission to visit schools. In addition more engagement is also required with politicians and young people corresponding more together. The clear message is that politicians must start to listen and indeed respond to young people's concerns. This includes corresponding in ways young people understand and relate to such as through e-mails and via websites.

The Wimps website is one way in which this process has been developed in Northern Ireland but many young people in this study indicated that they were not aware of Wimps, thus highlighting the need to publicise this facility more to this age group.

In the survey 36% of young people felt that they had something to contribute to politics. It is important that these young people are not only encouraged to do so but also given the opportunity. This may in part help to alleviate the perception that politics is just *'boring old white men arguing all the time'*. Politics is relevant to young people and they must begin to feel part of the process and as previously highlighted this is a two-way process with both politicians and young people playing their part.

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[39] The Electoral Commission, *Election 2005: Northern Ireland, the combined UK Parliamentary and local government elections*, December 2005

Appendix 1

Programme for the Residential

Topic List for Residentials

Session - Politics in Northern Ireland

How do you feel about politics?

How do you think politics here compares to GB and Ireland?
>   Impact of the Troubles?
>   Sectarian Issues
>   Voting Pacts

How has the Good Friday Agreement / Belfast Agreement affected politics?
>   The Peace Process?
>   Current Situation? – cost implications/work and impact

Are young people involved/interested in politics?
If no why not?
If yes how have they become involved?

Do parties involve/include/consider young people?
>   Generational Patterns – Parents
>   Party shifts –   DUP/Sinn Fein
>   SDLP/UUP
>   Woman's Coalition
>   Alliance
>   Party Manifestos

Politicians
>   Figures / Personalities
>   How do they relate to young people?
>   What makes a good politician?

The Cost of paying politicians
>   Value for money
>   Sinn Fein not taking seats in Westminster?

Session - Electoral Process in Northern Ireland

Do you vote?
>   If yes why?
>   If no, why not?
>   Does it make a difference?

Voting Age 18

The process

Knowledge? - proportional voting?
Other types?

Is it explained well?
How to vote?
Where? Access

Number of elections – Are there too many?
Different rules e.g. 1,2,3, ticks

Registering to vote
How?
Why? (electoral fraud)
When? – changes?

Should voting be compulsory – Australia having fines?

Length of time to vote – One day

Postal votes – how/in what circumstances
Referendum in North England trial postal (John Prescott)

Empowerment/Engagement – Shadow Youth Councils

Influences to the electoral process – media, party political broadcasts, events, security, terrorism

Costs in running elections

Session 4 - The Democratic Process in Northern Ireland

How can young people in Northern Ireland have their voice heard apart from becoming involved in a political party or the electoral process?

Discuss

IDEAS

- Petitions
- Marches/Demonstrations/Campaigns
- Strikes/Boycott
- Letters/Poster Campaigns/Badges
- Youth Councils/Committees
- Community/Resident Groups

Appendix 2

Thinkbucket Workshop

Method

Using creative "right-brain" approaches to explore and open up the subject. Allowing time for group processes to identify issues and themes.

Participants were asked to sign in on a blank canvas, while saying their name. This was partly to get to know each other and also to make a start on one of the 3 canvases to be used. These signatures became part of the background to canvas No.2

Everyone can draw!

Drawing equals communication by making marks on a surface

In groups of 4 to 6 participants were asked to fill a page with as many different types of pencil marks as possible (slow/fast, heavy/light, straight/wobbly etc.)

Emotions exercise

Each person in the group had a piece of A4 paper and a pencil. They were instructed to fold the piece into eight sections. They were each told that they were not allowed to draw anything, use any symbols or write anything and they could only use different types of marks and scribbles. Each of the eight sections had to convey words/emotions as follows:

- Anger;
- Peacefulness;
- Joy;

- Boredom;

- Democracy;

- Chaos; and

- One emotion chosen by the group.

Automatic writing

In the last box participants were asked to do something different. They were asked to start writing anything they wanted and keep on writing over the top of what they had written until the writing became illegible, so that no one else could read it. The group then looked at the drawings together and compared each others pointing out similarities and differences. Some points of common abstract language were also noted.

Gathering words (current reality)

On a flip chart words connected with democracy and voting were sought from the group. Several words were suggested to which reactions were given such as 'involved', 'bored' and 'alienated'.

Reality squares

On the first canvas, which was prepared by dividing it up into small squares with masking tape, each participant picked two words from the list and represented them abstractly in two squares. (No one was asked to explain which word they had picked or why they chose to represent it in that way). When the masking tape was removed the canvas was finished.

Street map

On the second canvas (which already had all our signatures as a background), the young people were asked to add strips of thick and thin masking tape to make it look like a street map.

The spaces between the 'streets' were filled in with writing about young people and democracy. The young people were encouraged to leave one or two words legible for the viewer. The tape was then removed to reveal a map-like structured drawing.

Gathering words (ideal future)

In a similar way as to before the group suggested words about a possible ideal future and about how they would then feel. These words were put on the flip chart.

Group drawing (with cliché stickers)

On the third canvas these words were used as a basis for a group drawing. Extra materials were now available including lifestyle magazines and stickers. The tendency to employ clichés when trying to imagine a perfect world was deflected by providing "cliché stickers" (hearts, flowers, smiley faces etc).

The three canvases were then laid out next to each other, with the map drawing in the centre.

Gathering words (getting from here to there)

Participants were asked to think how we get from our current reality (1st canvas) to our perfect world (3rd canvas), where everyone feels included, empowered etc. These suggestions were written up on a flip chart.

Naming streets

Each participant then picked a word such as 'communication' and added it to the middle map canvas, as a street name for example, 'communication road'.

Appendix 3

PricewaterhouseCoopers
Youth Participation Survey

Serial No.					Interviewer No.				Edit		Data Entry		Back Check	

Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is .... from PricewaterhouseCoopers Market Research Unit. We are carrying out a survey on behalf of the Electoral Commission into opinions about young people participating in politics in Northern Ireland. Can you spare a few moments to answer some questions?

SCREENING QUESTIONS

In order to ensure that this research is representative of all people in Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, religion and ethnic background etc, I need to ask you a few questions about yourself.

QA   Record gender – *check quota*
CODE ONE ONLY.

Male | 1 | Female | 2 |

QB   What is your age – *check quota*
Record and code
CODE ONE ONLY.

Record Actual age   _____

16-17	1
18-19	2
20-24	3

QC   Do you regard yourself as having a religion?
CODE ONE ONLY.

Yes	1	Go to QD
No	2	Go to QE

QD   [Ask if yes at QC] What is your religion? – check quota

SHOWCARD 1
CODE ONE ONLY

Anglican	1
Baptist	2
Brethren	3
Church of Ireland	4
Congregational	5
Evangelical Presbyterian	6
Free Presbyterian	7
Jewish	8
Methodist	9
Pentecostal	10
Presbyterian Church in Ireland	11
Reformed Presbyterian	12
Roman Catholic	13
Muslim	14
Sikh	15
Hindu	16

Other denomination (please specify) _____	17
None	18
REFUSED – estimated Protestant	19
REFUSED – estimated Catholic	20
REFUSED – unable to estimate	21

If RESPONDENT MEETS QUOTA, CONTINUE.
IF RESPONDENT DOES NOT MEET QUOTA, THANK AND CLOSE

QE   Record district council area and ward from Quota Sheet and code below.
CODE ONE ONLY.

Record District Council Area	

Constituency	District Council	Ward	
Belfast North	Belfast	Ballysillan	1
	Belfast	Chichester Park	2
Belfast South	Belfast	Rosetta	3
	Belfast	Malone	4
Belfast West	Belfast	Andersontown	5
	Belfast	Whiterock	6
Belfast East	Belfast	Ballyhackamore	7
	Castlereagh	Lower Braniel	8
South Antrim	Antrim	Fountain Hill	9
	Antrim	Randalstown	10
	Newtownabbey	Carnmoney	11
East Antrim	Carrickfergus	Killycrot	12
	Carrickfergus	Burleigh Hill	13
	Larne	Craigy Hill	14
North Antrim	Ballymena	Broughshane	15
	Ballymena	Castle Demesne	16
	Ballymoney	Fairhill	17
	Moyle	Dalriada	18
North Down	North Down	Bloomfield	19
	North Down	Groomsport	20
	Ards	Donaghadee North	21
South Down	Down	Ballynahinch East	22
	Down	Cathedral	23
	Newry & Mourne	Kilkeel Central	24
East Londonderry	Coleraine	Portstewart	25
	Coleraine	Waterside	26
	Limavady	Greystone	27
Fermanagh/South Tyrone	Fermanagh	Lisnaskea	28
	Fermanagh	Rossorry	29
	Dungannon	Moygashel	30
Foyle	Derry	Altnagelvin	31
	Derry	Creggan Central	32
	Derry	The Diamond	33
Lagan Valley	Lisburn	Hillsborough	34
	Lisburn	Lambeg	35
	Lisburn	Old Warren	36
Mid Ulster	Cookstown	Killymoon	37
	Magherafelt	Bellaghy	38
	Magherafelt	Towns Park West	39
Newry & Armagh	Armagh	Keady	40

	Armagh	The Mall	41
	Newry & Mourne	Ballybot	42
	Newry & Mourne	Daisy Hill	43
Strangford	Ards	Central	44
	Ards	Comber West	45
	Castlereagh	Carryduff West	46
Upper Bann	Craigavon	Mourneview	47
	Craigavon	Parklake	48
	Craigavon	Corcrain	49
	Banbridge	Banbridge West	50
West Tyrone	Omagh	Sixmilecross	51
	Omagh	Lisanelly	52
	Strabane	Finn	53

SECTION 1: VOTING BEHAVIOUR

Firstly, I would like to talk to you about N.I. politics and the recent N.I. election.

Q1 How interested are you in what is going on in Northern Ireland politics?
SHOWCARD 2
CODE ONE ONLY

Very interested	5
Quite interested	4
Neither/Nor	3
Not very interested	2
Not at all interested	1
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q2 Would you say you have a good, average or poor level of understanding about Northern Ireland politics?
CODE ONE ONLY

Good level of understanding	3
Average level of understanding	2
Poor level of understanding	1
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q3 Which of the following statements best describes your support for political parties?
SHOWCARD 3
CODE ONE ONLY

A very strong supporter of a political party	4
A fairly strong supporter of a political party	3
Not a very strong supporter of any political	2
Don't support a particular party at all	1
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

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Q4 Which political party do you feel closest to?

CODE ONE ONLY

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	1
Sinn Fein	2
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)	3
SDLP	4
Alliance Party	5
Conservative Party	6
Progressive Unionist Party (PUP)	7
United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP)	8
Women's Coalition	9
Socialist Environmental Alliance	10
Vote for Yourself Rainbow Dream Ticket	11
Green Party	12
Workers Party	13
None of the above	14
Other (please specify)_____	15
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q5 Which of the following has the greatest influence on your voting behaviour?
Code ALL that apply

Local community	1
Family	2
Friends	3
Media	4
School/college/university	5
Political Parties	6
Youth groups	7
Other (please specify)_____	8
None of the above	9
Did not vote	10
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q6 Is your name on the electoral register (that is, the official list of people entitled to vote)?
CODE ONE ONLY

Yes	1
No	2
I'm too young to be on it	3
Never heard of the electoral register	4
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q7   Can you confirm which of these best describes what you did during the elections on May 5th?
      SHOWCARD 6
      CODE ONE ONLY

I voted in both elections	1	Continue
I voted in the Westminster General Elections only	2	
I voted in the Local Government Elections only	3	
I did not vote at all	4	Go to Q9
I was too young to vote	5	
REFUSED	95	

Q8   There are different ways in which people can cast their votes in elections – in person, by post or by proxy (that is, getting someone else to vote on their behalf). How did you cast your vote in the elections on May 5th? CODE ONE ONLY

In person	1
By post	2
By proxy	3
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Respondents that voted go to Q11 (Section 2)

Q9   [If did not vote on May 5th, ASK] People have different reasons for not voting. Which of the statements on this card comes closest to your reason for not voting in the elections on May 5th?
      SHOWCARD 7

I'm just not interested in politics	1
I wanted to vote but was too busy on the day	2
I was unable to vote because I didn't have the correct ID	3
There is no point in voting because all parties are the same	4
The voting system is too confusing	5
I wasn't registered to vote/I didn't receive a poll card	6
I was not able to organise a postal or proxy vote in time	7
My vote would not make a difference	8
I do not feel that NI politics are relevant to me	9
There was no point in voting in my local council area because it is obvious who would win	10
Politicians are not interested in what young people have to say	11
I do not understand the voting process	12
You can't trust politicians to keep their promises	13
There were no politicians or parties that represented my views	14
I don't like the people hanging about outside the polling station	15
I tried to vote, but was refused at the polling station	16
The weather and time of year put me off	17
Other (please specify) _____	18
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

      CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Q10   What would encourage you to vote in future elections?
DO NOT PROMPT
CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Politicians focusing on areas of interest to me	1
Making the voting process easier	2
Feeling that my vote could make a difference	3
Feeling that the party I support has a good chance of winning	4
Postal voting on demand	5
Voting via the internet	6
If Politicians explained their views to me	7
Other (please specify) _____	8
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

SECTION 2: PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

Now I would like to talk to you about your involvement in the democratic processes. A democratic process could be something like signing a petition, taking part in a boycott or participating in a protest march.

Q11   Which, if any, of the following types of actions have you taken part in?
SHOWCARD 8
CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Petitions	1
Strikes	2
Writing a letter to a politician	3
Wearing a badge	4
Internet opinion polls/voting	5
Involvement with a Trade Union	6
Pressure Groups such as Green Peace	7
Attending conferences (about a political issue)	8
Joining a boycott	9
Attending protests/marches	10
Distributing leaflets/flyers	11
Part of community groups	12
Joining Youth Councils	13
Through ARTS e.g. Plays, songs or films to make a point	14
Other (please specify)_____	15
None of the above	98
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q12a Now, I'd like to ask you a few questions about the issues and problems facing
Northern Ireland today.   As far as you're concerned, what are the **biggest issues**
facing Northern Ireland at the present time?

Q12b And are there any wider issues facing the **UK as a whole** at the present time?

Q12a. **NI** important issues	*Record and code*
Q12b. **UK** important issues	*Record and code*

SHOWCARD 9
CODE ALL THAT APPLY

	Q12a NI	Q12b UK
General Issues: Asylum seekers	1	1
Cost of living	2	2
Crime	3	3
Drugs	4	4
Economy	5	5
Education	6	6
Elderly care	7	7
Employment	8	8
Environment	9	9
European Union	10	10
Farming/rural issues	11	11
Health and social care	12	12
Housing	13	13
Inflation	14	14
Justice and human rights	15	15
Law and order	16	16
National Health Service	17	17
Paramilitary activity	18	18
Policing	19	19
Poverty	20	20
Price of petrol/oil	21	21
Public transport	22	22
Sectarianism	23	23
Standards of living	24	24
Taxation	25	25
Unemployment	26	26
University top up fees	27	27
War in Iraq	28	28
Water rates	29	29
Young people provision	30	30
NI Government Issues: Maintaining the ceasefire/decommissioning	31	31
Restoring the assembly at Stormont	32	32
Implementing the Agreement	33	33
Re-negotiating the Agreement	34	34
Replacing/ending the Agreement	35	35
Keeping NI in the UK	36	36
Taking NI out of the UK	37	37

11- plus	38		38
There are no important issues	39		39
Other (please	40		40
DON'T KNOW	97		97
REFUSED	95		95

SECTION 3: NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICS

Thinking specifically about N.I. politics

Q13   What do you associate Northern Ireland politics with?

SHOWCARD 10
CODE ALL THAT APPLY

Peace Process	1
Religion not issues	2
Frustration	3
Stalemate	4
Getting justice	5
Arguments/fighting	6
Sectarian/hatred	7
Always the same things being discussed	8
Pride in your country	9
Local democracy	10
Local control of Education and Health	11
Other (please specify)_____	12
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q14   I am now going to read out a number of statements about politics and democracy in N.I. As I read out each one, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement using a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 is strongly agree and 1 is strongly disagree.

SHOWCARD 11

	CODE ONE ONLY on each row	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree	Don't know
A	Politics is boring	5	4	3	2	1	97
B	Politics is irrelevant to my life	5	4	3	2	1	97
C	I feel that I have something to contribute towards politics in Northern Ireland	5	4	3	2	1	97
D	I am satisfied with the way that democracy works in Northern Ireland	5	4	3	2	1	97
E	Politics in Northern Ireland doesn't deal with real issues compared to GB politics i.e. Health, Education etc	5	4	3	2	1	97
F	Local politicians care about local issues	5	4	3	2	1	97
G	Local politicians do not understand the issues that are important to me	5	4	3	2	1	97
H	Local politicians talk to me in a language that I understand	5	4	3	2	1	97
I	Local politicians are untrustworthy	5	4	3	2	1	97
J	Local politicians don't make an effort to listen to young people's views	5	4	3	2	1	97

K	I'd vote for a politician who listens and responds to my concerns	5	4	3	2	1	97
L	Politicians in Northern Ireland are doing a good job	5	4	3	2	1	97
M	Politicians can never answer questions directly	5	4	3	2	1	97

SECTION 4: Elections in Northern Ireland

Thinking now about the elections in N.I.

Q15   Would you say you have a good, average or poor level of understanding about the way current elections work?

CODE ONE ONLY

Good level of understanding	3
Average level of understanding	2
Poor level of understanding	1
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q16   How could things be improved to encourage young people to vote in future elections?

SHOWCARD 12
CODE ALL THAT APPLY

24 hour polling stations	1
Telephone polling	2
Text voting	3
Voting via the internet	4
Postal voting on demand	5
Voting by place of choice	6
Voting at weekends	7
Polling stations in shops/supermarkets	8
Other (please specify)_____	9
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

Q17   Which of the following statements best describes your views in relation to the voting age at elections?
SHOWCARD 13
CODE ONE ONLY

A	The voting age should be reduced to 16 because you can leave school, leave home, start to work and pay taxes at 16.	1
B	The voting age should remain at 18 because it is only at this stage that young people are mature enough to vote	2
C	The voting age should be increased to 21 it is only at this age that you are mature enough to vote	3

SECTION 5: INFORMATION NEEDS

Finally, I am going to ask you about the level of information you receive about political parties and elections.

Q18   In general, do you feel that you receive enough information about political parties and elections?
CODE ONE ONLY

Yes	1
No	2

Q19   How would you like to receive future information?
ASK UNPROMPTED FIRST
Record verbatim

INTERVIEWER PLEASE NOTE: IF RESPONDENT CANNOT ANSWER THE QUESTION, PROMPT WITH THE FOLLOWING LIST:

SHOWCARD 14

Citizenship education in secondary schools	1
Electoral commission visiting schools to talk about the electoral process	2
Internet – chat room to discuss topical issues	3
Website	4
Literature distributed through clubs and pubs	5
Literature distributed through schools and universities	6
E-mail alerts	7
Information about individual candidates in your local area	8
Test messages from parties	9
Tailored pre-election information for young people	10
Youth forum/councils	11
Other (please specify)_____	12
DON'T KNOW	97
REFUSED	95

THANK RESPONDENT AND CLOSE

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this important survey. Your responses will be combined with other peoples to get a consensus of opinion on these issues. All responses will be kept confidential.

I declare that this interview was conducted within the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct and according to instruction and that the respondent was unknown to me. I understand that all information given to me must be kept confidential.

Signed: Dated: