

Politics:  
the next generation

democratic  
dialogue

Democratic Dialogue  
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# Preface

**T**his is the sixth report from Democratic Dialogue, the Belfast-based think tank. DD gratefully acknowledges the generous support of its funders, including the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

It also acknowledges the generosity of the authors of this report, writing in a personal capacity, who gave enthusiastically of their time, experience and expertise. Their views do not necessarily reflect those of other contributors, or the management committee of DD.

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DD aims to publish several reports per year. Readers may wish to return the enclosed subscription slip, to avail of reduced-rate payment for reports, free copies of DD's newsletter and notification of all DD events.

We are open to requests to organise

debates or discussion groups around any of the themes or ideas raised in this, or indeed other, reports. Again, the contact number is on the inside cover, where details of our web site can also be found.

Our next report will cover a key theme at the heart of securing an accommodation in Northern Ireland—the challenge of embedding pluralism and parity of esteem. **DD**

# Introduction

## Kate Fearon

In the open question session at the end of the conference to launch Democratic Dialogue in June 1995, a challenge was thrown out: “I am a 23-year-old woman who is very, very interested in politics, but currently there is no political party in this state that I could vote for. That means I have no stake in my future. There is a group of people in Northern Ireland that have been largely excluded from politics or anything else that has happened in the last 25 years: young people. I want to know what you are going to do for the young people in Northern Ireland. Are you going to consult them?”

This report represents, in part, a response to that challenge. It is based on a research project which ran from February to April 1996. In the first phase 3000 questionnaires were distributed, at over 90 sampling points throughout Northern

Ireland, to young people between 14 and 24. Student unions, the probation service, the Training and Employment Agency, schools, youth clubs and workers, education and library boards, community projects and youth wings of political parties all co-operated enthusiastically in their dissemination and return. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of all those who helped with this project. They all thought the project of value, and this was reflected in the responses to this and later phases.

After a primary analysis of the data, focus groups—one single-identity urban, one mixed-identity urban and one mixed-identity rural—were established to explore further the main themes emerging. Perhaps what was most striking was not only that each group readily engaged in sensitive discussion, but, independently, thanked the researchers for the opportunity actually to talk about politics in their own environment. This sentiment

was further supported by the survey informants, best reflected in the expressed desire to ‘learn about politics’ in the core curriculum.

The questionnaire had two sections. The first comprised closed questions, while the second, non-obligatory, section invited open comment on each of four topics: the survey itself, the past, the future and the issues respondents deemed important. Roughly a third completed the latter part.

Tony Gallagher highlights the main quantitative findings, upon which Barbara Lomas elaborates, setting the debate within international practice on the teaching of politics in schools. Blanche Thompson and Clare Harvey outline policy and practice in informal education, arguing that, while models of best practice do exist, it is very much hit and miss.

Paul Donnelly evaluates the focus group discussions, drawing out the main themes in the context of the current political situation. He notes that the members of the discussion groups were politically sophisticated, and frustrated at their lack of power in the wider society.

From an adult perspective, Fergus Comiskey reflects on the challenges to ‘grown-ups’ which these findings present. Change must come from within, but is it too late to teach old dogs new tricks?

Interspersed with this analysis and comment run two long ‘poems’, each in two parts. Another, shorter, piece of condensed text sits in the centre of the report—a list of words which most frequently appeared to constitute important issues for respondents. The two longer ‘poems’ comprise the short comments of the 500 or so who opted to give an opinion under the headings ‘the past’ and ‘the future’—which become their titles. The individual narratives have been grafted together only in terms of presentation: punctuation, spelling and idiom have not been altered.

These represent as authentic a voice as it is possible to hear of young people in Northern Ireland today. We hope you enjoy, and heed, what they say. **DD**

# So what do you think?

**Tony Gallagher**

**Y**oung people in Northern Ireland are alienated from political parties and politicians, but not from politics. Young people feel they are excluded from the political process and that their concerns are not addressed. This is not by choice, as young people clearly say they would like to know more about, and have a greater influence on, political decisions. These are the key messages emerging from the survey.

The survey questionnaires, produced in full colour, were distributed to young people through a variety of agencies and organisations. Each contained a total of 15 items. In addition, the young people were invited to add their own comments on their views of the past, their hopes for the future and what they felt were the most important political issues. This chapter describes the responses to the questions on the survey.

**They're not happy just to be spectators**

A total of 1,300 young people, 653 women and 647 men, completed questionnaires. Most respondents were aged between 16 and 20. A little under a third of our sample were in government training schemes and about the same proportion were at school. Of those at school a

little over half said they were in secondary schools and about a third in grammar schools. About a quarter of the sample were in further or higher education; fewer than one in ten were employed.

We began by asking the young people a number of questions on aspects of their identity, including religion, class, national and political identifications. Of the total sample, 48 per cent said they were Catholic and 42 per cent members of Protestant denominations. This latter group comprised 20 per cent who were Presbyterian, 12 per cent members of the Church of Ireland and a further 10 per cent from smaller Protestant denominations. One in ten of the young people said they had no religion.

When we asked about their social class identity, 49 per cent said they were middle-class and 46 per cent said they were working-class. A little under a quarter said that the head of their household was unemployed. Catholics in our sample were a little more likely than the others to describe themselves as working-class, and to report that the head of their household was unemployed.

Our sample was asked to choose between a list of national identities. Thirty-nine per cent described themselves as Irish, 23 per cent as British and 22 per cent as Northern Irish. Not surprisingly,

national identities were linked to religion. Thus, 70 per cent of the Catholics described themselves as Irish, while 43 per cent of the Presbyterians and 57 per cent of those in the Church of Ireland said they were British. The Northern Irish identity was always chosen by a minority, but tended to be chosen a little more frequently by Protestants than by Catholics.

When we asked about political identities we found that 35 per cent described themselves as nationalist and 28 per cent described themselves as unionist. A little over a quarter of the entire sample said they were neither nationalist or unionist. Again a link with religion was evident and unsurprising. Eighty-eight per cent of the young Catholics in the survey said they were nationalist, while 60 per cent of Presbyterians and 65 per cent of those in the Church of Ireland said they were unionist. Among the minority who said they had no religion, 44 per cent also said they were neither nationalist nor unionist.

**Percentage saying they were involved in ...**

a political party	3
a trade union	3
a campaigning group	12

Our main interest in the survey lay in the young people's views on political

issues. We asked questions in three areas. First, we were interested in the extent to which young people were politically active, particularly in social movements of one kind or another. Secondly, we were interested in their assessment of how far politicians and political parties addressed the needs and concerns of young people. The final area concerned young people's sense of empowerment: did they think they could, or should, have more involvement in political activity?

**O**ur survey suggests that very few young people are actively involved in political organisations. Of the entire sample of 1,300, fewer than 40 said they were members of a political party or a trade union. To the limited extent that young people were involved in political groups, clearly they preferred campaigns to the older-style organisations: we found four times as many young people involved with campaigning groups as with political parties or unions.

Clearly other factors influence this pattern. Most of the sample, for example, were too young to have had the opportunity to join a trade union. Yet, when we looked at the relatively small number who were in employment, only 12 per cent said they were a member of a union. This compares with an average of about 30 per cent union membership found

regularly in the Northern Ireland social attitudes survey. The limited extent of union membership, even among the small number in the labour market, may be a reflection of the type of jobs that are now on offer to young people.

A link emerged between gender and political involvement. While only 3 per cent of our sample were in a political party, this applied to 5 per cent of young men, but only 1 per cent of young women. By contrast, 13 per cent of young women, as against 11 per cent of young men, said they were involved with a campaigning group.

The very low involvement of young women in political parties was perhaps not that surprising, especially when we remember the male-dominated line-ups of practically all the parties in Northern Ireland. The greater involvement by young women in campaigning groups is important, however. It would appear to refute the notion that women are not involved in political parties because they do not want to be involved.

**Do you think politicians in Northern Ireland are ...? (%)**

doing a very good job	2
doing a reasonable job	46
not doing a good job	51

**How well do the political parties in Northern Ireland address the concerns of the young ...? (%)**

very well	1
reasonably well	20
not at all well	78

Our sample did not give top marks to politicians or parties for their performance. Over half thought politicians in Northern Ireland did not do a good job; fewer than one in 50 thought they did a very good one. On how far the political parties addressed the concerns of young people, the picture was even more negative. Only one in five thought they made a reasonable job of this, while almost four out of five thought they did not address the needs of the young.

The younger respondents appeared to take a more sanguine view of politicians: while 47 per cent of those aged 16 or under thought politicians did not do a good job, this applied for 56 per cent of those aged 20 or older. Catholics were somewhat more likely than Protestants to say that politicians were not doing a good job (56 per cent as against 45 per cent). And in the light of the low female take-up of party membership, it is perhaps unsurprising that while three-quarters of young men in our sample thought that political parties did not address the needs of young people, this was so for 81 per cent of young women.

**How interested are you in what is happening politically in Northern Ireland? (%)**

very interested	38
fairly interested	37
not very interested	16
not at all interested	8

**Would you like to be more involved in the political process? (%)**

yes	51
no	47

While large numbers of young people may not be involved in political organisations, or have a high regard for parties or politicians, this does not stem from lack of interest in politics. Indeed, three quarters of our sample said they were very or fairly interested in what is happening politically in Northern Ireland. And more than half said they would like to be more involved in the political process. Not surprisingly, interest was highest amongst those already involved in parties or campaigning groups.

There was, however, a further dimension to political interest. The proportion who said they were interested in Northern Ireland politics was high among a number of sub-groups, including those at university (91 per cent), the employed (86 per cent), those at school (80 per cent) and those at further education colleges (79 per cent). By contrast, only 62 per cent of those who were on government

training schemes said they were interested in Northern Ireland politics, a view echoed by only 50 per cent of the small number of unemployed in our sample.

In the final section of our survey we asked a number of questions on empowerment. Clearly young people felt ambivalent about the influence they exercise: a little over two in five agreed that their vote did not count for much; only slightly fewer disagreed with this proposition. Our survey shows the effects of other social pressures that constrain political discussion and involvement. Almost three in five agreed that the situation in Northern Ireland made it difficult to be involved in politics. The wider significance of this was to become clear in the focus group discussions we held with young people.

With all the constraints our sample felt under, and the limited recognition they said was given to their concerns by the political establishment, it was hardly surprising that more than three-quarters agreed that young people did not have enough influence over political decisions. Once again, however, the evidence suggests that this sense of alienation from politics is something young people would like to overcome, as almost four in five said they would like to learn more about politics in school.

	Do you agree or disagree that ... ? (%)		
	agree	disagree	neither <sup>1</sup>
young people do not have enough influence on political decisions	76	7	15
my vote won't change anything	42	36	20
the situation in Northern Ireland makes it difficult to be involved in politics	59	19	18
young people should have the opportunity to learn about the political process in schools	79	8	0

We also looked at our survey results with the views of party (3 per cent) and campaign (12 per cent) members distinguished.

Overall 38 per cent said they were very interested in politics, while an additional 37 per cent were fairly interested. Not surprisingly, interest among members of political parties was much higher: 30 out of the 39 party members (77 per cent) said they were very interested in politics; in fact, only four of the party members said they were not interested in politics. The pattern was similar, if less pronounced, for members of single-issue campaigning groups. Here, 54 per cent said they were very interested in politics and an additional 28 per cent were fairly interested.

We described above the poor views of politicians' performance taken by the sample overall. The balance of responses

shifted only slightly among those who said they were members of parties. Of these, 44 per cent said politicians were not doing a good job, while 46 per cent say they were doing a reasonable job. Only 8 per cent said politicians were doing a very good job.

By contrast, the balance of responses shifted slightly in the other direction as regards respondents who said they were members of single-issue groups. Here 59 per cent said politicians did not do a good job, only 39 per cent said they did a reasonable job, and less than 1 per cent (in fact, one person out of 158) said that politicians were doing a very good job.

Respondents grouped by party, campaign and non-affiliation<sup>2</sup> were invited to offer their views on 'issues which are important', 'the past' and 'the future'. These views were assigned to three categories. The first was 'neutral': respondents in this category offered no comment on the Northern Ireland conflict, or were non-judgmental when they did. The second category gave recognisably unionist views, while the third posed recognisably nationalist perspectives. The frequency of the categories is recorded alongside:

Category	Frequency
Political party members	
None/non-judgmental	11
Unionist	6
Nationalist	4
Single-issue campaign members	
None/non-judgmental	68
Unionist	0
Nationalist	4
Non-affiliated	
None/non-judgmental	78
Unionist	8
Nationalist	13

These responses can be characterised as 'pragmatic' regarding the Northern Ireland situation. The words 'accommodation' and 'compromise' were obviously untainted for these young people, and used regularly to describe how progress should be made. While some members of political parties did offer party lines, even in that category the majority took a non-judgmental position.

This survey outlines the views of 1,300 young people in Northern Ireland on politics, politicians and political parties. The main conclusions are unequivocal. Young people feel alienated and let down by politicians and by the parties. They do not feel their interests or concerns are being addressed. To the limited extent that they are active in politics, it is more

likely to be through campaigning groups rather than more traditional social movements. This is particularly true of young women, who are less likely to be involved in political parties and more likely to be involved in campaigning groups than young men.

Young people display ambivalence about the influence they might have, but there is no doubt that many, if not most, are interested in politics in Northern Ireland and would like to be more involved. They would even like to learn more about politics in school. Thus, while young people feel marginalised from the political establishment, this is not because they are marginalised from politics. They feel excluded, but want to be included. **DD**

### **Footnotes**

1. Since not everyone responded, these figures do not add up to 100 per cent.
2. A random sample of 100 non-affiliated respondents were analysed from the 458 who offered opinions in these categories.

# The past (I)

I remember my mum being  
very scared about my dad  
when  
he worked in belfast  
when  
there were bombs. I don't want that to happen again.  
I know that both sides involved  
in the 'troubles' are to blame,  
along with the rest of us, but we have a short time in  
this life  
and there's no time to waste.  
Killing and fighting  
—it must stop soon.  
They were sad and cost  
many needless lives and  
lets pray we never go back to that  
state of living again.  
Too many bigits and not enough  
information  
being passed from politicians to voters—mandate.  
People should just wise up and live together  
It has shown that we can't live  
In Ireland as long as  
the British and the RUC are here and  
the ruthlessness of the Brits and RUC in  
the past will never be forgotten or forgiven.

It had/has to be done to achieve  
the rights of the Irish people  
I hope that it will never happen again as  
my father and grandfather were both killed  
in the troubles and I would not want  
my child to grow up in a world of violence.  
People died for their country, now they have went  
the peaceful way. But we shall return  
to the gun if Ireland is not  
made free. Those who forget or  
ignore the mistakes  
of the past are doomed to repeat them in the future.  
Let us learn from the disasters of the past

There can be no going back to the days of a  
sectarian 6 county state  
To look back  
to remember  
what happened  
but to get on with what is happening now  
and not to get sidetracked with the past.  
it is ridiculous that terrorism had been allowed  
to carry on for so long. Too many innocent  
people have been killed and  
forgotten both roman catholic and protestant.  
Horriying.

Catholics were treated unfairly.  
Leave it where it belongs and look  
to the future  
Violence should not be tolerated.  
People out of touch  
making decisions  
concerning those in touch.  
Thoughts and decisions of large groups students being  
one of them  
have been ignored due to self interest of politicians  
and their parties—time for change.

It must be taken into account,  
but it must not be allowed to dictate our future  
we need to find the truth about the past,  
before we can proceed to make any kind of future.  
Heartbreak

Everyone has their one sided view depending  
on what side they are on. Everyone  
Can drag up ‘their’  
massacres and betrayals.  
Don’t go back to it.  
Has been a terrible tragedy.  
Unfortunately the british government turned a blind  
eye to it and tried  
to cover it up as it didn’t affect them directly. They  
must own  
up to their mistakes and realise the nationalist  
people of Northern Ireland especially have been  
treated unfairly.  
Both sides fighting for what they believed in, in  
the only manner they saw as being effective in hold  
on to their observed identity. A sad state  
of affairs but had the nationalist community not  
fought  
the way they had they would be nobody, nowhere now

We must remember—teaching in schools is very  
important.  
Southerners should be taught more  
about the troubles  
in secondary schools  
Irrelevant, need to look to the future.  
Thank god thats gone (hopefully).  
Over my head.  
A pity that so many have died and  
suffered at the hands of the  
paramilitaries.  
Past is in the past and should be  
of minimal importance.  
A sad past which should never be  
repeated again—too many people have  
lost relatives and suffered because  
of the violence.  
It was necessary for the nationalists  
to take up arms  
although the time has  
come for change.  
I’ve never known anything but the Troubles. It’s been  
there all my life.  
Violence isn’t a great idea.  
I hope it never happens again.  
People in our country tend to dwell on  
It and marr the future rather than dwell on the future  
and learn  
from the past.  
Ought to learn from past. Good cross  
community relations can be  
established, need to keep trying.  
It is full of mistakes and misunderstanding which we  
must  
learn from or be doomed to repeat cliched but true.  
Awfully sad  
It has been very complicated, bitter.

Should be forgotten and the  
politicians who are pulled up with historical rhetoric  
should be replaced  
by young  
more representative  
politicians.  
It should be forgotten about as quickly as  
possible because Irish men have memories like  
elephants and are too  
busy looking at the past to see the future  
Studying Irish history in the period of 1920  
It is evident that meeting everyone's demands (nats,  
Ulster Union, Brit Gov)  
was difficult due to fear of  
losing out,  
the situation is no different today.  
Too much emphasis placed  
on the past but it has been  
restricting to the lives  
of young people.  
I think the past should be kept in the past.  
I would strongly like the ceasefire back in NI.  
Too much British involvement.  
Past 25 years have proved  
nothing and  
only brought bloodshed and pain.  
It should continue to be history.  
Too much blood spilt too much  
cheap talk,  
not enough positive action  
not enough positive action and  
compromise  
too much blood spilt, not enough positive action.  
Past is past and should be left alone.  
Religion is not politics.  
Pointless.  
We should learn from the past. Acknowledge that

mistakes were made and try to  
make sure they  
don't happen again.  
Not enough  
concessions  
on either side by  
politicians. Past proves  
that it will be difficult to find a  
permanent solution  
to the Northern Ireland problem.  
I feel the politicians have in a way  
failed  
because they did not take any gambles. The conflict  
has proved to be worthless  
many people have been killed  
unnecessarily, the problems should have been  
solved peacefully before  
they became out of hand.

I think children used to be  
more influenced by their parents  
views but now things  
are changing, and there are more  
politics lessons so that the youth can make up their  
own minds.  
I think that the years of fighting could be used to a  
positive effect.  
The troubles have bred a generation  
of people with a great degree of inner  
strength and also the ability to rise against things  
that they do not agree with or  
believe in.  
The past is over. It is gone and  
should remain there. People in Ireland dwell  
too much on the past and until a conscious  
decision is made to put it behind us then  
peace can never be achieved.

We should hope that  
the future bears no  
resemblance to the past.

Not enough talk  
ignorance  
of both.

Divisions and bad  
management on the governments behalf  
of the political situation allowed gerrymandering  
to pass by unnoted.  
It was a disaster that, in the 1960's could so easily  
have been avoided if not for the  
stubbornness and sheer  
ignorance  
of several unionists.

Many innocent people were killed over  
what is essentially  
a piece of land—  
this shouldn't be allowed to continue.  
Sad that so much violence and so  
many individuals lives have been seriously  
affected due to  
a futile conflict.  
There has been a lot of prejudice from parents and  
other elders and they have been influencing the  
young to think and talk like them, even though they  
didn't  
fully understand what they were saying.  
Because of lack of education, peace  
process hasn't been going as well; deep rooted  
prejudices prevent  
compromise; concessions seen  
as a victory for 'other side', lack  
of trust, fear, anger  
etc directed

at other community.  
That it's time to move  
into the future  
and to try and  
forget all  
the horror of the past.  
If people are prepared to do  
this then the future will hold more  
hope for everyone.  
The past can never be  
repeated, with luck  
the future will provide us with *skilled*  
politicians and leaders  
The union to remain safe.  
Government made a lot of mistakes as  
did political parties. Government seemed  
only slightly  
interested in our situation.  
There never was a ceasefire for  
young people who  
were petty criminals/offenders.  
Its gone and we have  
the future to look forward to even now  
the ceasefire  
has been broke  
None of your business alright, what???  
Bad past because of ira  
Everyone should put it behind them  
terrible things have  
happened. None can  
be justified; now that its all said  
and done, let's get to work.  
The people of Northern Ireland do not get enough  
media about general concerns and  
in the past have been given a bad reputation because  
of violence.  
That the troubles for the last 25

years have led nowhere.  
I think our violent history is horrific and I would like  
to see a permanent end to it before any  
more lives are lost. Paramilitary  
groups should hand  
over their arms and let  
the politicians get on with their jobs.  
Robbie shouldn't have left Take That.  
Troubled and complex.  
Shite.  
Bad times for both  
catholics and protestants in northern ireland.  
To hope that it will never be repeated.  
The past is the past, future is more important.  
I don't want Northern Ireland to go back to the way it  
was.  
It's been tough. I want it to end, but can't  
see how an agreeable settlement can be reached.  
Too much attention paid to murderers.  
Lodsa time and lives wasted.  
A lot of unnecessary killings and not  
enough decisions made  
about it.  
Terrorists, both loyalist and republican have/had no  
right to  
force their views on people and politicians  
trying to work democratically.  
We have been brought up in  
a time of war  
and i don't wish it for  
anymore generations to go through the same heart-  
ache.  
Lots of loss, pain and anguish which I  
see  
as unnecessary.  
The fighting hasn't got anyone  
anywhere, but if the politicians don't learn the

meaning of  
compromise or  
negotiation the peace isn't going  
to get us too far either.  
The past is that exactly, what about the future.  
Too much talk about the past. Lets look to the future.  
Sad!  
The IRA are not considerable at all.  
I think that fighting between the British  
and Irish was totally stupid. If there were  
no politicians there would be no fighting at all.  
History is something to remember, let us not forget.  
The last 18 months have been great but after  
the bomb in london (9/2/96) it leaves things  
up in the air  
My mother used to be involved in women's  
groups campaigning for equal  
rights and facilities— she would be an influence.  
25 years of violence too many!!  
Learn from our mistakes.  
Its been quiet up until last Friday.  
There is no use dwelling on the past—it is time to look  
forward.  
Forget about the past. Bury it. In order to  
make a progressive step forward we must  
hide the hurt, anger and  
bitterness and take  
each day as it comes.  
What is done is done and what's said is said we  
are all able to forgive and forget.  
The past is in the past, both  
communities have suffered enough, its time  
to look to the future.  
Perhaps if politicians had took more  
initiative in the past perhaps  
the troubles would have been  
resolved a long time ago.

The past is in the past, probably no-one in Northern Ireland wants to go back to the ways of the past so just look to the future not to make the same mistakes.  
Do politicians forget they were young once? Do they not remember being frustrated because they couldn't have a say about the future? If they had of stopped and listened to the youth we could have told them years ago what they are only finding out now.

Things shouldn't have got so bad. Peace talks should have been so more in depth sooner. Forgive and forget look to bright future.  
The past 26 years of violence has been very unacceptable. The past has a lot of significance due to the long running civil war and past political approaches which have failed. Should never have resulted in the troubles. We should remember our mistakes and forget and forgive those problems with which we are afflicted. Hopefully eliminating the bigotry.  
Not enough talking

I have not had a good past with police, drugs but i plan to change

that (all of my past i would like to forget, think about the future)

It has already happened, can't be changed.  
25 years of war is long enough.

Never again.  
The past is the past and it is the future that is important. It should be forgotten 'don't look back unless you want to go back!'—look to the future, more peaceful and prosperous than the last 25 years.

We should learn from the mistakes of the past.  
That the past will never be repeated

If there hadn't been a ceasefire i wouldn't have known peace, I had no fear when I was younger because I was used to it,  
but after the ceasefire was heard to be over, I had so much fear,  
for my friends and family, including myself.  
Cannot be allowed to return to it.  
Forget it, it's mostly irrelevant.  
Over and done with.  
Whats gone is gone.  
I live in the present, not the past.  
Its hard to comment, i think everyone who has been brought up in the troubles has been hardened and grown accustomed to it. It seems normal

with the peace process falling through.  
Basically that the era of the 70's and early 90's doesn't return.

Holy mess.

We always have to be aware  
of how we got to this situation to  
understand how to go forward  
we have to learn  
from the past and draw  
on it to create a  
better future.

It is up to the politician not to allow such a tragic and  
bloody  
25 years ever to happen again

Sometimes people, including youth are to  
apathetic.

It was a bloody mess, I don't wish to  
go back, elections in my view the only  
way forward, bar Sinn Fein, unless they renounce  
violence  
and accept  
democracy 100%.

Mistakes, mistakes, mistakes.

John Major is to be blamed directly  
for the future of the peace process. If it takes 1 bomb  
or 10 bombs  
for Mr Major to get off his finger then they are all  
justified.

The old dogmas of unionism have been  
allowed to hold the veto  
in Ireland too long. Time to build  
a real peace with justice. British  
slan abaille.

Forget it.

Sinn Fein/IRA's refusal to discriminate

between the legality of IRA and British  
forces and IRA weapons and British  
forces weapons is  
unreasonable and unhelpful too  
many extremists in politics, not enough ordinary  
people/moderates.  
peace process doesn't  
work and politician in the north have been  
allowed to be dictated to by  
their counterparts in the south on  
an issue which does not concern them.  
America shouldn't get involved in our (no money to SF)  
problems. A stronger  
and tougher line should be taken against the men  
of violence, such as the deployment of the SAS to root  
out this evil from our society. **DD**

# Discussion and dissent

**Paul Donnelly**

**T**his chapter examines the views which emerged through discussion in three focus groups, held after the questionnaires had been distributed and subjected to primary analysis. Varying in geographic, social and religious composition, the groups provide a complex but valuable insight into the political perceptions of young people in Northern Ireland.

It would be dishonest to claim the participants attempted to provide solutions to political questions or even clearly demarcated a distinctive area that could be called a 'youth approach'. But we can see different political priorities, a more candid directness and a definite tinge of scepticism, paradoxically combined with a refreshing and energetic enthusiasm to tackle issues. One of the most appealing aspects of dealing with the group discussion as compared to the survey analysis

**Paramilitaries exercise a punishing presence**

is the qualitative emphasis on the emotions and temperament which emerged in the sessions and the messages they provided.

In each group the opening salvo was directed at the political parties, their pre-occupation with the constitutional/border issue and its seemingly monolithic domination of the political agenda. As a sub-plot to this, sectarianism and politico-religious identity, as the main factor dictating voting behaviour, was criticised in each group. This is not to suggest, however, that at other points these same features did not manifest themselves amongst participants.

When pressed to identify other political issues to be addressed, the urban groups emphasised employment, health, the environment and housing. While the rural group also suggested all of the above, it did tend to become focused on local issues, for example, of leisure provision. Naturally the thrust of each group was that jobs should be created, the environment improved and homelessness alleviated; but when faced with how, as young people, they would render these concerns priorities on the political agenda, there did not appear to be any clear response. Whether this reflects a reality that there is no practical way young people can shape the political agenda, or it indicates that young people

have inadequate intellectual tools to foresee and develop that agenda, is not immediately apparent but it is certainly one area to which all involved in projects such as this should give further attention.

While public cynicism is often viewed as a 'weariness' about those who represent us, and the apparent deadlocks and futility of initiatives, the cynicism displayed in the groups was vibrant, energetic and raw. Perhaps the natural negativity manifested in other areas of youth culture and psychology transmits itself to youth attitudes towards politics, and this is enhanced in the already negativist world of Northern Ireland politics. At each session, disdain was directed not just at parties and personalities but towards the system. In effect, district councils, statutory bodies, boards and the body politic in general were beyond the realm of experience of the participants.

The sense of frustration this created was captured in one group when a person declared that what young people needed, wanted and did not have was "social inclusion, social empowerment!" Pressed, they explained that social inclusion meant you could "take part in your community". Thus not only were the participants politically disempowered and alienated from the mechanics of the political system, but they felt excluded within their own communities.

When directly asked about voting as a means to exercise political power, scepticism was rife. One person dismissed the practice of one vote every year or two as not “participating” in politics, while another drily added that they spoil their vote habitually not as a protest but so “nobody else will use it”. (Thus even if your franchise is worthless you still must protect it from others!) The one solid and coherent idea that emerged as a way forward was the suggestion that, just as the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition had provided a vehicle for previously unheard voices, a Youth Coalition based on the same broad principles of representation could allow potential for youth influence.

**T**he mechanics of the ‘peace process’ and particular events within it drew quite similar responses from all three groups. Again, there was frustration combined with humour but strongly underlined was a desire that the process bring about a balanced resolution of the conflict. High on the list of episodes that each group seized upon was the debate over George Mitchell’s appointment as chair of the inter-party talks. What was portrayed as farcical in the media and beyond was universally so perceived in all three groups, across the spread of religious, social and political opinion. The attack on Senator Mitchell’s position due

to his perceived background was ridiculed with equal vigour by all.

One of the areas of disagreement between groups, however, was the international element of the process. While Mr Mitchell was welcomed as chair, the role of the United States was questioned by some. Not from the view that the US enhanced the nationalist perspective and weight, but simply that the equation was complex enough without the addition of other factors. Between the two non-Belfast groups in particular, however, there was concurrence that the two governments played pivotal roles. A suggestion by one of the facilitators from Democratic Dialogue that perhaps the regional politicians could resolve the issues between them met much derision.

One of the most striking manifestations, in all three groups, was the feeling that Sinn Féin should be included in the talks process. While in an all-Protestant group there was genuine reticence about this (“there will be a rumble!”), overall it was felt that due to both SF’s electoral mandate and the sheer necessity of political inclusion it would have to happen. Beyond this, there arose an extremely interesting viewpoint expressed from a mixed-identity group concerning the probability of any constructive outcome from the talks process. Essentially the argument was that the ‘fringe’ loyalist

parties, negotiating with SF, would produce a cohesive and workable solution, and that in reality those who had waged war were more capable of constructing peace.

When pressed about the other 'mainstream' parties it was recognised that obviously they would have to be there, but despite their 'constitutional' natures they were still inherently rigid and non-accommodating because they had not undergone many of the personal and social experiences of loyalists and republicans. Allied to the above sentiments was the notion that to stop two people fighting you encourage them to talk, and this applied to paramilitaries just as in any other area. Perhaps the final word should be left with a 16-18 year-old participant who described the behaviour of politicians since the ceasefires and at the talks as simply "immature".

Obviously in the discussions certain persons and parties tended to become the focus of comment. Sometimes this reflected the status of particular individuals, such as Ian Paisley or Gerry Adams, within the region's political landscape, and in the case of paramilitary organisations it reflected their pervasive influence in everyday community life. This presence was not cohesive but basically it manifested itself in two forms, with the various organisations being perceived

partly as necessary defenders of the community and simultaneously as oppressors and a self-appointed police force. Given the sensitivity of this issue, the remarks cited below are not even vaguely attributed.

On the issue of 'punishment' attacks and beatings, viewpoints diverged sharply. Nobody explicitly reviewed the broader issue of policing in Northern Ireland, but all focused on the morality and practicality of paramilitary policing in their communities. Typical of the comments recorded was the following exchange: "It's the paramilitaries controllin' the situation on the ground ... and all that talkin's wasted ... they're too busy shootin' people in the ankles ... Well they shouldn't be breakin' into houses."

A further opinion was ventured, critical of the paramilitaries, to which the retort came: "If it wasn't for them this place would be in chaos." A particularly interesting viewpoint, whichever way it is examined. Some argued that the paramilitaries were a necessary evil, while others forthrightly attacked them in all their roles: "Sure look at 'Drug Dealers will be Shot' — they're only saying that so they can sell their drugs." Also manifested was a distinct antagonism to the authority of some of their peers already involved in paramilitary activity, producing statements such as: "You have an 18-

year-old dickhead telling you you can't go here at this time of night."

Overall there was an ambivalence about the paramilitaries: some saw the beating of 'hoods' as necessary, whilst others were antagonistic, and there was natural resentment towards them as the local authorities. However, there was no or little direct criticism of the wider paramilitary role in political violence directed against people outside the groups' communities. It is possible, of course, that in the period of the ceasefires the young people involved had quickly pinpointed the paramilitary activity they saw and experienced, in their own areas.

What was also interesting was that the groups, while happy to condemn elected representatives and the system as not catering for them, did not view paramilitary activity as evidence that democracy was not working. Those who accepted the role of paramilitarism in their community only began to re-evaluate earlier statements about politics in the light of a debate on the representativeness of community figures.

In terms of personalities whose profiles were raised, Mr Paisley, not surprisingly, was dominant. In one group this produced two distinct schools of opinion, reflecting the 'Paisley as Saviour' *versus* 'Paisley as the Grand Old Duke of York' debate that their parents' generation had

had. Mr Paisley's supposed populism and his authenticity were closely examined in young laypersons' terms and, as indicated, the results were not unanimous.

One extremely interesting point raised at this point in the discussion concerned one individual who felt that of the republican personnel they tended to believe what Gerry Adams said, although they strongly distrusted Martin McGuinness. Given the then still fresh memories of Mr Adams carrying the coffin of the Shankill bomber Thomas Begley, it was a very brave sentiment to express and one which it would be very interesting to compare with responses from a wider Protestant audience.

**T**o draw a cohesive, all-embracing conclusion from the material is a difficult task. There were certainly areas of general consent: nobody wanted a return to the 'war', and all agreed that compromise as a principle was desirable. But there did not appear to be an obvious road to travel which made compromise achievable and the 'war' avoidable.

Cynicism and doubt about the status quo were evident throughout and there was a tangible desire for improvement in the quality of life, locally and more broadly. Occasionally sectarianism was evident, but it tended to arise in off-the-cuff comments and certainly did not

permeate discussions as a major theme or backdrop. Against this, there were no radical mould-breaking voices challenging old sacred cows or really testing the boundaries of each community. Yet there was a strong thrust amongst each group that the process would have to be inclusive, with all aspirations represented and all voices heard.

What was clear was that we have a strong body of young people who have sharp and defined emotions and perceptions about the politics of the society they live in, yet who do not have any positive avenues through which to contribute to its civic or political life. It is this which frustrates them and which they wish to see addressed. They do not believe naïvely that they can sort it all out, but they do believe they have a right to attempt to contribute, be it through ‘youth coalitions’ on the broader political agenda or political education in a new and practical form that is not simply academic.

The final word rests with one person, expressing their frustration, who said: “I have a wand in here and I can have as many wishes as I want.” If only. DD

# The past (ii)

Let's forget about the past, but at the same time we have to learn from our mistakes. There was a lack of proper dialogue. Not good enough/more politics including fringe loyalist parties and sinn fein everyone wants peace but the IRA won't give in unless it is on their terms. We will not let them win and I think it is obvious they never will. Confused. In the past, Britian has made many mistakes and bloodshed in Ireland has resulted in negative results for the sides concerned. This cannot be allowed to happen anymore. ira should hand in all weapons and people should learn to trust the british government. all the deaths and murders appear to have been for nothing because no government or political party is prepared to recognise them as being anything more. The fear of death should be powerful enough to make

both sides talk. All my life I have never experienced anything but violence except for the months of the ceasefire. I have seen the pain inflicted needlessly on innocent people and the hopefulness felt by many when it stopped. Nobody wants to look to the past, everythings in the future now, everyone lives in hope. Unfortunately in Northern Ireland too many people talk about the past and kill for the memory of the dead. Pointless violence which has achieved nothing but heartache and bitterness.

I believe that during the ceasefire not enough was done to find a solution. The politicians are unable to have meaningful talks and now that the ceasefire is over, I believe it is important that peace talks are continuing and the voice of the ordinary person is heard. If SF want to go on he must be made contribute positively to the process. If there had been a

crackdown  
on pira 25 years ago the country  
would not be facing current problems.  
Crusaders league championship success of 1994/5  
was terrific.  
Learn from it then forget it!!  
The British have committed the  
most horrendous crimes and  
injustices in my country and they have got  
away with this totally. Let's start treating Irish  
people like humans.  
None. Forget about the past  
always look forward with hope.  
Bollox on the politics and loyalist and unionists.  
Load of bullshit.  
Let's not dwell on the past.  
Best forgotten.  
Liked the ceasefire.  
Forget it.  
Depressing.  
The past should be forgotten—the future looked  
upon in  
a positive manner.  
None.  
Glad I was too young to remember.  
The past should be left as it is—the past. What's done  
is  
done and we should be looking  
foward to the future.  
That past was rotten  
in that Northern Ireland  
was preoccupied with its past. Unfortunately  
the past looks set to continue its terrible  
policies into the future—if the UU and DUP  
get their way anyway.  
Caught in a rut for too long.

That the failure of unionist leaders to  
acknowledge and accomodate the feelings  
hopes and rights of  
the nationalist community was the cause  
of the political strife here over  
the past  
70 years.  
Lets not go back to the violence of  
the past.  
Something to forget.

I believe we have grown  
used to a violence and regard abnormality as  
normal because we haven't had the  
chance to experience  
real peace.  
Too much religious and class  
divide.  
The politicians have  
been very  
stubborn, I think.  
The reason you should be in politics is that  
if you are diplomatic and have time to talk  
over politicians/parties.  
For the politicians it is time to get off  
your backsides and  
sort it out.  
The British Army treated the catholic  
community apallingly bad and their unionist  
bias was extremely unsettling.  
The past should be  
forgotten and more concentrated on  
the present and  
future.  
I was brought up in a non-bitter  
background so  
religion never bothered to a

big extreme, but in some relationships religion was quite a big issue.

To many grudges are being held against each other for what has taken place. People are not being asked to forget about the past just accept it and work toward the future

It has been so stupid, petty fighting.  
The past should not be allowed to dominate the present in politics. People should put away events of the past and look to a better and brighter future.  
Is over, it is now the present and the future is ahead. Look to the future and we can reach our goals.  
Too many people with old views influence today's politics.  
I think that the past should be put behind us and that there should not be a repeat occurrence of problems of the past such as political status and religious demoninations in which you belong.  
It should not have happened and it could have been stopped.  
Bad times. It all needs to change.  
Wrong—forgive and forget.  
Learn from it.  
Troubles were uncalled for.  
Past violence has caused people to inherit bigoted views about the other community.

Too much has happened for it ever to be forgotten but this does not mean that we should lie back and let the things of yesterday repeat themselves today.

I bear no grudge against English. No-one else should, the worst people to resent are your own ie Northern Irish protestants and catholics should work together—it's everyone's Ireland (except the English).  
Forget it and lets get on with the future.  
We should only look to the past to learn the past is the past. Nobody needs another 25 years of violence.  
forget the past, think of the future.  
I think the ira are a disgrace to the catholic community.  
The political parties are not doing much about trying to stop the ceasefire in Northern Ireland.  
Don't look back in anger.  
25 years of sadness and death.  
I have known nothing but war, people I know have been killed 'friends' I hope my son will not have to live through this hell also.  
The younger generations were not involved enough in political happenings.  
25 wasted years.  
Awful.  
I moved back to Northern Ireland from Scotland during

the ceasefire mostly because of my experiences in the past. I hoped life would be improved. I am very disappointed in the failure of the peace process and I hope for an improvement in the situation

In my opinion I think that the people of Northern Ireland should look to the future and not the past. The past for me have been very mentally challenging as the troubles have brought distress to my and most other households in Northern Ireland. Forget the past, I have to look to the future.

Unfair for most nationalist areas the politicians dwell too much on the past and just keep firing up things that has happened. They need to try to put their differences aside, what's be done is done and you can't change it but they can stop it from happening again, I don't think anyone wants to go through another 25 years of this. I feel that all the shooting and violence in the past was very horrific. They should all sort out political matters and let there be peace in Ireland. Well all it has been is people fighting against each other, but hopefully we

will get somewhere now. No coment. I'm originally from Glasgow so being a catholic or protestant wasn't an issue. During the peace it wasn't an issue either—it should never be or have been an issue. We are all human, we should all act for the good of one another. Pathetic. Futile violence. We should never forget the past but we need to put things behind us before we can progress. No piece of land is worth dying for. Dialogue between all political parties should have happened at the outset of the troubles. We should be looking to the future. The time the army raided my home went up into the garret ... fell through on top of my sister and wrecked our home. It all sounded terrible. We only saw it on tv really but my granny won't go to belfast because she is scared of the bombs. She was in a terrible bomb when they had just started in belfast. She made my granda come to work in Bangor and not in Belfast after that. I wish it wouldn't happen again. I think it was a terrible time. My dad lost

his friend who  
was a policeman and  
he says it should never happen  
again.

I think it was sad. Why do people want  
to hurt so many innocent  
people they didn't even know?  
Awful.

Events in the past should  
never be repeated.

I grew up with the troubles and class  
myself as Irish and always will even  
though we are under British rule.

The troubles over the past 25 years  
happened and nothing can be done about it but the  
people who  
live in Northern Ireland and Ireland should  
ensure  
that violence does not  
continue for another 25 years.

When we wanted to go to Belfast we could  
not because we were  
scared  
of bombs.

To try and put  
it behind where  
it belongs.

I feel that it took too long to talk  
about the ceasefire and by the time they did  
the ceasefire was over.

No comment.

The British government has been too soft with  
the troubles in the past from both  
sides of religion.

I believe that the killings

in Northern Ireland were  
useless but we need  
to show how we feel about  
the Irish and the British government doesn't listen.

There was too much fighting for the last  
25 years between the UVF and the IRA.

The past should be  
forgotten, that was then.

We should be  
thinking about our future and  
leaving the past behind us, and stop opening  
old wounds.

There has been far  
too much troubles and no-one wants  
to give in before more innocent  
people lose  
their lives for no reason.

It is awful the amount  
of people that have died because  
of these shootings, most  
of these people are innocent.

It is awful the way  
the family got  
treated in the past.

25 years of  
hell which could and should  
have been avoided, *all*  
politicians to blame.

Leave it behind where  
it belongs, learn from it but don't  
let it restrict progress towards a  
more understanding and tolerant  
society.

We keep looking  
back to  
the past that's the problem—look to  
the future.

There has been a lot of conflict both  
with paramilitaries but  
also with politicians and it has been  
difficult to find a way forward for the people  
of Ireland in peaceful terms.  
The British gov was  
at fault for the breaking down  
of the IRA ceasefire.  
I don't really know much  
about the past but I  
would like to.  
I think the ceasefire should  
never have broke.  
It's a disgrace thank you.  
People should remember  
about the past.  
The past has been bad and I  
hope for the future.  
The past was  
terrible all people were interested in  
was: who got killed, what religion they were/what  
organisation done it.  
What a way to live!  
I hope that the past  
can be forgotten but  
traditions still kept. I  
also hope the mistakes of the  
past will not be repeated, but  
learned from.  
I am fed up seeing  
people getting  
hurt in violence and as a  
result seeing Northern Ireland will be classed as  
a bad place to live.  
I think that all the fighting in Northern Ireland in  
the past 25 years has  
been stupid and should be

stopped as soon as possible.  
Let there be peace.  
Last 25 years has  
been great, but it won't get us anywhere.  
Peace was great, violence  
and politics are pointless.  
Far too much emphasis has been  
placed on blaming the other  
side instead of focusing on  
the future of our island.  
I never really got on well  
at school so left and got  
a job labouring on the building  
site for a few months.  
That the nationalists and  
unionists have made no  
progress it's going round circles.  
I think the situation is stupid—people  
dying from all sides because of  
something that happened long  
before we were even born (the nineties generation).  
History shows the past shapes  
the future so if that is  
anything to go by,  
god help us all.  
We have seen 25 years  
of killing uncompromise and political mismanagement.  
Now is the time  
to talk, let the people be heard.  
My dad grew up  
in troubles as I did, I  
know only troubles.  
The police force have  
proven and shown that they racial towards  
Catholics and don't do their job right.  
The past was violent  
whats in the past should

remain in the past.  
It's the past but I would not  
like it to happen again  
it appears that  
politicians have no  
consideration or respect for either of the cultural  
traditions in Northern Ireland.  
The past is something we have  
to try and put behind us in  
order for us to  
develop ourselves for a new  
and brighter future.  
Unionists want to catch  
themselves on to  
the realism of the political situation in NI and  
start  
talking.

I think Bloody  
Sunday was a bloody  
deceit and an out  
rage against all Catholics and I  
don't agree about the British army still  
being here after what happened.  
You cannot forget it but we  
should learn to forgive and start again.  
Senseless waste of lives and suffering  
more importance given to  
the future, NI problems stemming  
from the past  
it's a waste of time worrying  
about it cos you'll never  
get anywhere that way.  
I'm so used to it so I  
feel that any change in the drive  
toward peace would be definitely  
positive.

I think that looking at the past is  
useful in so far as we can  
learn from it, but I do feel  
that holding onto the seeming 'tribalism'  
of 1690 etc only  
serves  
to narrow people's visions. I  
think we all need to look for peace in  
areas of reconciliation and cross  
community action.  
People feel too bitterly  
about the past. We can't  
live with the same attitude. Just  
as life goes on, attitudes should  
change and the best made out  
of every situation.  
For too long the God-fearing  
unionist people have been  
deceived by the British government and  
intimidated and  
murdered by nationalist/republicans  
encouraged by  
the Irish Republic.  
Sad.  
Proceeding with all party talks without  
wrangling over  
decommissioning prior  
to them may have given better hope to  
maintenance of the ceasefire.  
I don't think it's right to say that Northern Ireland  
has  
had peace ... it was merely  
just a ceasefire that we had!!  
Political prisoners should stay where they  
are—prison. They committed  
a crime and should receive  
punishment in exchange.

The past must be  
the past and we must endeavour as  
much as we can to live in spite  
of the past.

It sucked—hit everywhere  
else in the world—but why be  
slaves to it? look  
to the future.

Forget it.

Politicians have not represented  
the desires of the people, they  
are entrenched in the past.

I don't have any preference whether  
or not we join with  
the south.

We had nothing we should have had more fun. **DD**

**It wasn't much fun**

# The long game

**Barbara Lomas**

**W**hat difference would my idea make? This cry from the open-comment section of the questionnaire encapsulates the powerlessness and alienation that so many young people feel in Northern Ireland today.

Of the 1,300 14-24 year-olds who returned their questionnaires, 465 took time to fill in all or some of this section, asking for their thoughts on the past and the future of Northern Ireland. Well over a third (168) had virtually the same message, in virtually the same language, as in these examples:

The past is gone. It is over. People in Northern Ireland dwell too much on the past.

Sadly in Northern Ireland too many people talk about the past and kill for the memory of the dead.

The past is the past. I don't want it to happen again.

The past should not be allowed to dominate the present in politics.

There were different messages about the past. Many, however, with the impatience of youth, wanted to move on quickly:

The past is the past. Today is the present and tomorrow is the future.

Irrelevant. We need to look at the future. There is no point in dwelling on the past. We must look to the future.

Its history. Time to move on.

Then there were those who felt we had much to learn from the past:

Leave it behind. Learn from it but don't let it restrict progress towards a more understanding and tolerant society.

I hope we can learn from it, never forget it, because in forgetting, the problems could rise up again.

Learn from it, then forget it.

Forget about the past. Bury it. In order to make progress we must hide the hurt, anger and bitterness and take each

day as it comes.

Young people were quite harsh in their judgments on politicians:

Politicians want to catch themselves on to the realism of the political situation in Northern Ireland and start talking.

I wish that politicians would wise up and catch themselves on.

I think it's a shame that politicians don't listen to anyone but themselves.

The politicians dwell too much on the past and just keep firing up things that have happened. They need to put their differences aside; what's done is done and you can't change it but they can stop it from happening again.

There were many clear ideas as to what politicians should do:

I'd like to see politicians stepping outside constitutional politics and addressing more important social and economic matters that affect young people.

I think politicians should be unemployed for six months as part of their training.

There's the obvious issue of the talks but I think that'll take a long time to sort out. So, who will look after the other problems like unemployment and drugs.

Why don't the politicians stop fighting over silly things and sort out the real problems like unemployment and drugs and things? I would like a job when I leave school; not many of my friends have a job.

Young people did have some ideas for their political future:

Get young people to register their vote and then politicians might listen to them.

Young people must have a voice. Very few teenagers associate themselves with the antiquated political factions that currently exist. A political party to act as a conduit for the perspective of youth in Northern Ireland must be established.

Youth to have more say in political decisions; a youth parliament might be set up as our generation have no political say. It would also be educational and beneficial for the future; after all we are the future of this country.

There were also disturbing signs of political apathy, alienation and frustration:

Do politicians forget they were young once? Do they not remember being frustrated because they couldn't have a say about the future?

Anyone with any sense can see that the political system in this country is dull, boring and no one is given a fair choice; human life is reduced to a number on a page.

Young people don't really know too much about the political system in Northern Ireland because there is nothing in it for us or to interest us.

It sucks. Too many people with old views run this place. They don't listen to the youth, they think we're thick and they don't need to bother with us.

The 1,300 replies to the set questions illustrate well this sense of alienation, as Tony Gallagher's chapter indicated, yet at the same time they demonstrate a desire to participate more, without having access to the channels to do so.

**Y**oung people were asked to rank on a five point scale—from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'—some statements, one of which was concerned with the opportunity to learn about politics in schools. Only 8 per cent disagreed or disagreed strongly, while 79 per cent agreed or agreed strongly. Irrespective of age, gender, religion, school type attended, or national identity, there was overwhelming support for some form of teaching about politics and political issues.

This was also illustrated by comments in the focus groups. In two groups in particular, the pattern was similar. The initial reaction to a question on political education in schools was mostly negative, but by the time the discussions were in full flow, the need for some sort of political education was apparent and the participants began to formulate ideas.

One group, mixed by religion and gender and aged 17-19, thought:

Young people don't have an interest in the political system or political structure; they're interested in things like the environment, youth unemployment etc.

It'll not work if a teacher just walks into a class and says 'right we're gonna talk about politics'. You have to bring it in more slowly, and make it count like things that matter, jobs and drugs and things.

It should be compulsory like religion. The idea behind religion is to teach faith and morality. No one teaches about social inclusion (That's being able to take part in your community. Equally. To participate.)

Another, single religious identity group of 14-16 year-olds of both genders thought:

You should learn what you're voting for; what parties are gonna do and what they stand for. Like at the moment there's all them posters on lampposts and its like saying 'who's the nicest, vote for me'

You'd need to be subjected to it from an early age, 'cos like you get to 16 and you don't know anything, so when it comes on TV you automatically turn over.

You know what I think? You know the country we're living in an all, and all the fighting and stuff, the subject of politics should be made compulsory in schools.

Sure RE's compulsory even if you're not interested and its more important to learn about politics.

This is not a message that is restricted to Northern Ireland in the late 1990s. In a report published by Demos<sup>1</sup> a similar sense of frustration was found. Over one third of the 18-24 year-olds surveyed took

pride in being outside the system, but they were concerned about many issues: the environment, AIDS, jobs and animal welfare/rights.

In a study conducted by the Speakers' Commission on Citizenship,<sup>2</sup> Richardson commented:

It is unusual to find wide consensus on any issue. In this study there was one issue which united virtually everyone across the political spectrum. From those who had left school with few qualifications to those in university or beyond, there was a strong call for more issues surrounding citizenship in schools.

The British Youth Council Report *Never Had It So Good?*<sup>3</sup> focused on 16-25 year-olds in a compilation of opinion polls and interviews. The report clearly shows young people under pressure from society and alienated by a political system that seems stacked against them. The report concluded: "Young people are not looking for sympathy or special treatment, just equal treatment. We must ensure that they are given an equal chance to participate fully in the society they will one day lead."

These patterns of disenchantment aren't peculiar to Britain either, but can be found in most industrialised countries. In 1988, the then French president, François Mitterand, responding to diminishing political participation by young

people, commissioned a nationwide survey of youth attitudes. In Australia, an official report on young people's attitudes to voting concluded that the single most important reason why they failed to register was because they did not see any direct link between government, government institutions and their own lives. There has been concern in the US about youth apathy since 18-year-olds got the vote in 1972; similar concerns have expressed in Canada and Sweden.

Nor does this disenchantment appear to be a temporary generational problem, which will rectify itself with time. Figures in most European countries show a consistent drop in youth voting. Thus in America there has been a 15 per cent drop amongst the under-25s since 1972. In Britain, the most marked manifestation of disenchantment has been in the membership of political parties. Not only have the figures dropped dramatically overall since the 50s, but the parties themselves have been ageing. The average age of the Conservative party member is 61, and the median 65; only 5 per cent are under 35. In the Labour party, although the average age is 48, three times as many members are over 66 than are under 25.

Other countries have reacted positively to these findings about youth apathy and alienation. In the US the

traditional Civics was meant to translate the ‘melting pot’ theory *e pluribus unum* into reality, but it has come under attack from multi-culturalists, and new directions for all students are being explored in programmes such as CIVITAS and America 2000. In Australia, the official report on young people’s attitudes was swiftly followed by a national curriculum framework for Studies of Society and the Environment.

In France, the traditional *instruction civique et morale* gave way to a new syllabus which supported education for democracy, since further revised. After a national survey in 1992, the Swedish national curriculum now reads: “The school has the responsibility for communicating values, knowledge and skills and for preparing pupils for living and working in society.” This is largely done through Social and Civic Studies. In Canada, most of the school boards have taken up the new Political Education Project; it provides a vehicle through which to meet the statutory requirements set for schools in 1988 by the Canadian Multicultural Act.

Across eastern Europe and in Russia, moves are afoot to set up civic education that looks at human rights, freedoms, obligations and responsibilities to society. Emphasis is placed on creating legal awareness, both at the personal level and

for society as a whole.

Everywhere progress is being made—everywhere it seems, except the UK. This is not for lack of lobbying by groups such as the Citizenship Foundation (an independent educational charity), the work of the Politics Association, or the output of academic writers and a host of official reports: Spens (1938), Norwood (1943), the Education Act (1944) and the 11-16 curriculum review (Department of Education and Science, 1977). All referred to the need to prepare pupils for the responsibilities of citizenship, but none explained how this was to be done, beyond a passing reference to history and geography.

Political education had not been an issue in Britain because the system quietly socialised the classes into their respective roles. The imperative of mass education associated with the growth of parliamentary democracy in the late 19th century saw the hierarchical social structure translated into three kinds of school. The ruling class would continue to have the ‘liberal education’ that so ideally fitted it for governance, the middle classes were to be educated in loyal service and commercially useful subjects and the masses would be taught the skills required of an obedient workforce. The traditional role of the state in providing

moral or political education within this system was largely ignored in favour of church-based activities.

Political education made its first tentative steps into the English and Welsh curriculum in 1988 when the Education Reform Act set up the (now defunct) National Curriculum Council to look at cross-curricular themes, one of which was to be citizenship. The Speaker's Commission on Citizenship, which reported in 1990, recommended to the NCC that the study and experience of citizenship should be a part of every young person's education, from the earliest years to further and higher education. The NCC's 'Guidance no 8' was the result, its detailed 'key stage' progression plan warmly welcomed by those working in the field.

The cross-curricular theme of citizenship has, however, manifestly failed to deliver on the expectations expressed in official documents. Many reasons have been cited, but the real failure lies at the door of government, which has not built upon it. For some commentators this is unsurprising, because of the track record of political education in Britain. Caught in the vortex of post-imperial, multi-cultural changes, foisted on a sometimes unwilling host, sections of the population, particularly Conservatives, find the concept of the citizen—not subject—an

uncomfortable one. This has been reflected in ambivalence towards political education in schools: teaching about duties and responsibilities is acceptable, teaching about rights and controversial issues is not.

In the Republic of Ireland, the transformation of the traditional Civics to a new Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) course was made much easier by the fact that all three main political parties had a hand in its preparation, during different spells of coalition government. The pilot project was launched in 1993 and the new subject has been progressively introduced to schools over the past two years. The idea is that it should be taught over the three-year junior cycle and examined at the Junior Certificate. Assessment has been felt essential on the grounds that the subject would not otherwise have status, teachers would be reluctant to teach it, and students and their parents would not value it. In its guidelines to the schools (1996), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment says:

The new course in CSPE is designed to help students in accordance with their abilities and aptitudes to achieve an understanding and appreciation of the central concepts of citizenship. It aims to prepare students for active, participatory citizenship.

The guidelines set out four units of study, to be completed in about 70 hours teaching over three years:

1. The individual and citizenship
2. The community
3. The state: Ireland
4. Ireland and the world.

**S**o where does Northern Ireland stand in relation to all these movements in political education? The region has an education system in many ways similar to that in Britain—except, of course, for comprehensive schooling. A vociferous, cross-sectarian, middle-class lobby has effectively sustained schooling segregated by both class and religion.

A state system exists, predominantly Protestant, alongside a maintained system which is totally Catholic. Official recognition of integrated schools only came in 1989, with the creation of ‘grant maintained integrated’ status. The vast majority of the population have grown up through the segregated system.

Educational policies in Northern Ireland since the days of Stormont have followed the ‘step-by-step’ principle, mirroring most British legislation a year or so after it became law. Thus Northern Ireland followed the British tradition of socialisation through the hierarchical school structure—overlying the socialising effect of segregation—and civics or

political education never took root.

With the advent of the ‘troubles’, however, and research showing a clear lack of understanding and contact between children in the different school systems, debate began about the proper role of education in society: could it alleviate, or at least not exacerbate, the problems of Northern Ireland? The debate tended to follow one of two hypotheses: segregation is simply a matter of curriculum and cultural differences, which can be tackled by curriculum change; or segregation, of itself, enforces social differences, ignorance and hostility.

Various strategies have been tried to tackle this, ranging from integrated schooling to the Cross Community Contact Scheme (set up by the Department of Education in 1987). Curricular initiatives have been exemplified by ‘education for mutual understanding’ and ‘cultural heritage’. The Educational Reform Order 1989 set out the common curriculum and cross-curricular themes for schools. EMU and CH are two of the six themes, which represent important strands of learning within the Northern Ireland curriculum. They are compulsory components of the curriculum of all grant-aided schools. Since 1992 the objectives of the two themes have been conjoined, reflecting the view that they are entirely complementary. They are meant to be taught

mainly through the constituent subjects of the curriculum.

This has major implications for political education in Northern Ireland. The concept of education for citizenship in the more ‘normal’ national context—as we have seen in the republic, France, Sweden, Canada and the nation-building eastern European democracies—is clearly not appropriate to a region where the existence and nature of the state itself are contested. A more general human rights education, along the lines of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, is perhaps more appropriate. According to this convention, the education of the child should have the following goals:

- development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- development of respect for child’s own parents, for his/her cultural identity, languages and values and for those different from his/her own; and
- preparation of children for a responsible life in a free society, in a spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship amongst peoples.

The Department of Education last year defined EMU and CH as follows:

EMU is to help pupils to develop positive and mutually respectful relationships and to appreciate human difference of all kinds, including culture, disability,

gender, ethnicity, politics and religion, in a spirit of acceptance and respect. It is also about preparing students to deal constructively with conflict. CH involves helping pupils to develop an understanding of their own way of life and that of others by providing opportunities to consider the many influences on culture and to appreciate the shared and distinctive cultural traditions within Northern Ireland and other societies while encouraging a sense of belonging to one’s own cultural background. It also involves helping pupils to respect and value other cultures and to reflect on how aspects of their own culture may be perceived differently by others.

In the progression from key stage 1 to key stage 4 (primary 1 to GCSE), children should cover everything from finding a vocabulary for feelings, understanding conflict (understanding its causes, how to avoid, lessen or resolve it), looking at divisions within Northern Ireland, to becoming familiar with some of the principles of democracy and how one can participate in, and influence, the political process.

As cross-curricular themes they are not directly examinable but are to be found in subjects such as history, geography, English and religion. For example, in history at key stage 2 (upper primary) one of the historical areas to be examined should be in the region. At key stage 3 (lower end of post-primary school)

there is specific study of the Normans in Ireland, Ireland 1600-1700, and Union to Partition. By key stage 4, students may choose to study Northern Ireland 1939-65 or 1960-90. These history syllabuses are a world away from the parade of British monarchs traditionally taught in state schools or the parallel nationalistic history of the maintained sector.

Since September 1996 a new modular GCSE—Social and Environmental Studies—has been available for study. Amongst the modules on offer (from which a student has to study four) are cultural heritage, information and the media, and law and society. In the revised modular GCSE syllabus for Personal and Social Education, students can study rights and responsibilities in the community. All modules offer the student the chance to make a personal study of an area of work that has been of interest.

There is also an 'A' level examination called Government and Politics. This follows an academic study of political ideas, behaviour and institutions in Britain, Northern Ireland and either the Republic of Ireland or the USA. Although it is a large and growing subject by 'A' level standards, it is still only available to the minority who stay on in schools after 16+—even then, not all schools offer it as a subject choice.

It is not only in schools that we find

the department advancing<sup>4</sup> political education in the last decade. Youth workers were working in this area long before it became a statutory obligation to include it in the youth programme. Many youth groups are involved in small-group discussion or some of the political education projects that have sprung up over the past few years. Training for youth leaders tries to take all these aspects on board.

One of our focus group discussions generated this testimony:

You should start at community level. See youth and community workers, they're brilliant. They cover issues such as cultural identity, policing, unemployment and drugs and stuff.

Talking in small groups is best but in lots of youth clubs there's too many kids and not enough youth workers to get into small discussion groups. They're the best.

It has been recognised in Britain that youth work can have a role to play in political education. In 1978 the Department of Education and Science gave substantial grants to short-term political education projects sponsored by the National Association of Youth Clubs and the British Youth Council. The DES statement on political education in youth work read:

What is required is experience of such a kind that the young people learn to claim

their rights to influence the society in which they live, and to have a say in how it is run. It is active participation in some form of political activity which really counts.

A warning note, though, is sounded from some research carried out for the survey *Teenage Religion and Values*.<sup>5</sup> Youth clubs are run mostly by volunteer workers, who have little formal training or preparation for dealing with moral or spiritual (political) controversies. Where there are full-time workers, or a good number of volunteers, it is possible to do participative or experiential work, but most youth clubs do not have that luxury. Youth work is marginalised; it usually represents a very small, single-figure percentage of any local education authority budget.

It isn't possible, or desirable, to translate the classroom into youth work or youth work into the classroom—not the least because of the very different power structures involved, a point which is taken up in the next chapter. Nonetheless, especially in political education, they should work in a complementary fashion. Each has strengths which the other lacks in securing the attention of young people. An interesting test of this will be *Speak Your Piece*, an EU-funded project, run from the University of Ulster at Coleraine, linked to the Channel 4

schools series.

There is an impressive array of public and independently sponsored initiatives which deal with political issues in formal and informal education. Other projects in the informal sector include, for example, *Off the Walls*, aimed at 14-17 year-olds, which explored the impact of identity, culture, religion and politics on the lives of young people in Northern Ireland.

The project was founded on the principle that educators have a positive contribution to make in helping young people engage with controversial social, cultural, religious and political issues, by:

- enabling dialogue which is forthright and inclusive;
- providing alternatives to violence and avoidance as a means of resolving conflict; and
- facilitating participatory decision-making which encourages the democratic process.

The project, still running, will disseminate its work and evaluate the effectiveness of various strategies for handling controversial issues.

Church-based youth work is carried out through Youth Link, established by the four main churches to co-ordinate youth work in the late 80s. Its strategy is to target youth leaders, enabling them to acquire the skills of cross-community

work and peer education. The methods include group work, role play, simulation games, videos and so on. It offers up to 27 modules for training courses, from which youth groups can pick a 'menu'. These address the central issues of religion, politics, history, cultural traditions and the dynamics of cross-community encounter.

Youth Link has just begun a three year KAIROS project, 'Empowering Young People to Shape the Future', and is hoping to target 200 youth workers each year. The project consists of six sessions, covering two topics equally: 'understanding the past' (1921-96) and 'shaping the future'.

Much good work in political education is done by the Council for Education in World Citizenship, which organises conferences amongst sixth years on international and local political issues, and the famous MUNGAS (Model United Nations General Assemblies). The feedback from these conferences is always positive, not least because they encourage pupils to look beyond the parochial politics of Northern Ireland.

The Ulster People's College also runs political education programmes, but at community level, and not specifically aimed at youth. It offers a 'menu' of modules for groups to choose from where possible. It has also produced political

training programmes for political parties, tailoring them to suit each party's requests.

**H**ow effective are these initiatives likely to be? What did the young people in the focus groups want from political education? There seemed to be two clear messages. They wanted information to empower them to participate more effectively in the community, to be 'socially included'; this involves learning certain skills, as well as acquiring facts. They also wanted to know more about the other community and other societies, so that they wouldn't stay stuck in the same traditions and mould as their parents. What research we have suggests the most effective way to acquire understanding is gradually, sustained over time and in a variety of ways.

The cross-curricular themes of EMU and CH, if properly implemented, would more than adequately meet most of the requirements of young people and of human rights educators in general. But recent research into EMU suggests that while the statutory requirements are met in many schools, it is to the letter of the law and not its spirit. Many dedicated and enthusiastic teachers and senior managers promote the EMU/CH ethos, but they are very much in the minority. The cross-curricular aspects of EMU and CH

seem in danger of being sidelined. Unless more schools, and particularly their senior managers, take up the challenge in a much more wholehearted way, EMU/CH will not succeed in its aims, except for the smallest minority. Government could intervene to make more aspects mandatory, or to rework the core curriculum at various key stages to allow cross-curricular aspects of EMU/CH to be examined in the constituent subjects.

The experience of the republic with the low-status Civics is that external assessment towards some certificate of importance is the only guaranteed way to give the subject, and its teachers, the status deserved. There is much diffidence in Northern Ireland about following that

path for EMU/CH in key stages 2 and 3. But the GCSE modules provide ample opportunity for students to acquire more of the factual information they want—if they ever get the chance to study them.

One of the major drawbacks to developing a subject like Social and Environmental Studies at GCSE is that it comes into the already overcrowded marketplace of key stage 4. Grammar schools will find it difficult to find a timetable slot, against the existing history and geography options at this level; these established academic subjects will only reluctantly give way. Even at secondary school, where there might be less pressure from the academic disciplines of history and geography, there will still be a possible clash with Personal and Social Education at GCSE level. The take-up of the latter, covering as it does most of the social, cultural, legal and political skills necessary for young people in our society, may in fact therefore be quite small, and not in the power of the young person to choose in the first place. It seems a great pity that space is not found for it on the timetable for every pupil in the middle school. That would require government intervention.

A further difficulty is the culture of avoidance in Northern Ireland. The polite way to avert conflict has been simply to avoid controversial issues, or

**Whatever you say, say nothing ...**

conversations or situations which might prove controversial. Most adults have never been required, or even tried, to have a rational and controlled debate over issues about which they feel strongly with someone who feels quite strongly in the other direction. Yet this is what they expect teachers to do with their children, and their children to practise on other children.

Young people want the chance to air their views, they handle quite heated debates fairly well, and above all they enjoy the opportunities to debate and discuss with other young people. This was the overwhelming message from the young people who participated in the schools assemblies, as part of the Opsahl commission, in 1992. These assemblies were groundbreakers in this approach to political education, and *Speak Your Piece* has some parallels in the open and frank dialogue it wants to promote.

The problem of raising controversial issues lies not with young people but with adults, and in many cases with teachers or youth workers and the senior management of both. Lack of training in dealing with controversy, lack of confidence in one's own ability to be able to face up to the issues and the constant worry, particularly in schools, about what the parents will say produce a terribly stunted atmosphere for most young people.

Instead of being able to discuss issues in class, all too often the teacher sidelines the debate when it gets in any way controversial.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that many history departments opt for Northern Ireland 1939-1965 as their choice for key stage 4 history, because it is the less contentious of the two choices. There is also anecdotal evidence, backed up by inspectorate observations about the teaching of 'union to partition' in key stage 3, that in many schools and classes understanding is sacrificed to a welter of factual information; in this way the subject has academic status, and can't be seen as contentious.

Even at 'A' level, where the subject is recognised as an academic study, there are teachers who will not offer the Northern Ireland section of paper 1 because it entails a study of the 'isms' of Northern Ireland's political parties—loyalism, republicanism, nationalism and unionism—and a detailed study of alternatives to direct rule, which requires looking at all the options and considering the arguments for and against. I know of two colleagues in different schools who will not offer this topic, because it is 'unnecessarily contentious'.

The solution to this problem is not simple. In-service training for EMU has been consistently offered and the same

faithful, converted souls turn up each time. There needs to be a statutory requirement for staff to attend certain courses or many will not go. A start could be made in the pre-teaching courses and in statutory youth work training, where a compulsory module on handling controversial issues/political awareness or similar could be introduced. Both of these require government intervention, which has been sadly absent in this sphere. More government support could be given to youth work, especially in its efforts to deal with political education.

There are also movements which could be made by the 'workers on the ground' in political education. There are a number of academics working in separate but related areas of research, there are practitioners in many non-governmental organisations, there are teachers and youth workers and there are those responsible for curriculum development and teacher training. And if any advances are to be made to provide better access to political education for young people, it must start at home and not wait for the magic wand of government initiatives/funding/recognition, much needed as they might be.

A much more active partnership is needed amongst all the players in this field. Education, particularly political education, is the long game, and, if it is

to be played properly, it makes much more sense to be part of a team. ■■

#### Footnotes

1. Helen Wilkinson, *Freedom's Children*, Demos, London, 1995
2. *Encouraging Citizenship: Report of the Speaker's Commission on Citizenship*, HMSO, London, 1990
3. *Never Had It So Good?*, British Youth Council, London, 1996
4. See *Policy for Youth Service*, Department of Education Northern Ireland, Belfast, 1987.
5. Francis and Kay, *Teenage Religion and Values*, Gracewing, 1995

# The issues

**P**ace, safety, police reform, **equality**, drugs, **Irish neutrality in EU**, exclusion of working class, travellers, youth unemployment, **unemployment**, young people not involved in politics, **gun laws should be more strict**, housing, health, education, **access**, discrimination, **political prisoners**, decommissioning, abortion clinics, family, **student poverty**, poverty, **leisure opportunities**, any issues on personal freedom, environmental issues, micro-economics, **bill of rights**, recycling politics for paper, glass, plastic etc, **sustainable transport policies less emphasis on cars and subsidies for cyclists, trains and buses**, demilitarisation, increased grants, equal rights for gingers, **the treatment of women in our society—still**, integrated education, **economic, trade, job security, proper training schemes**, drugs counselling in the schools, everything, youth to have more say in political decisions, **further introduction of integration from nursery schools upward**, corruption within politicians and political groups, **more free places for the youth to go especially 16/17 years**, for young people to be able to know more about politics, racism, cultural identity, what difference would my idea make? cross-community work, **civil rights**, third world, **relationship with other members of the EU**, how

to get rid of a sleazy immoral, discredited deeply incompetent Tory government as soon as possible, the need to smash communism, the need to smash liberals, nuclear disarmament, **deforestation**, NHS welfare, **taxes**, regeneration and rural development, better public sector pay deals, play areas for children, **testing things on animals**, longer school holidays, **drink**, water privatisation, politicians too old, real jobs not schemes, **fuel**, community action groups, **churches**, moral issues, international relations. **DD**

**Homing in on housing**

# Conversations in clubland

**Clare Harvey**  
**Blanche Thompson**

**T**he ‘youth service’ is a portmanteau term encompassing a wide variety of youth groups: part-time clubs, church fellowships, uniformed groups, purpose-built clubs, specialist projects and so on. While around 200 clubs in Northern Ireland employ full-time professional youth workers, most are part-time and rely heavily on the goodwill and commitment of some 15,000 volunteers. Altogether there are 2,500 youth service groups registered with the Department of Education.

It is commonly said that the strength of the service lies in its diversity—that different clubs suit the differing needs and interests of different young people. There are, of course, common bonds between all youth groups—regionwide objectives were set by the department in its 1987 document *Policy for the Youth*

*Service in Northern Ireland*, and in theory all youth work aspires to these.

The youth service emphasises curriculum delivery, buttressed by the principles of education, participation and empowerment. The purpose is to enable young people to acquire skills and knowledge and to learn through equal participation in decision-making processes. Participation, therefore, enhancing responsibility and decision-taking amongst young people, is a fundamental youth work principle, as is personal development and its potential for autonomy. Most of this takes place within youth clubs but it may extend to wider groups like youth forums.

The 1987 policy document describes participation as a core requirement of all programmes. The aim is to encourage the involvement, on an equal basis, of young women and men in the organisation of activities in the club or unit (including fund-raising, programme management, financial management or whatever),

decision-making in the local youth council, and participation in regional, national and international youth organisations.

Organisational disparity and heavy reliance on volunteers, however, make it unrealistic to impose uniform policies, still less programme definition. It is naïve to expect detailed policies from a primarily voluntary service. And politics is not its main objective. But ‘political’ concepts, skills and so on can be, and are, incorporated into a range of youth work programmes. So while ‘party’ politics is uncommon, the youth service provides political learning in a wider context. It should also be remembered that policy is not static and further developments in political education are likely (see below).

The 1987 document not only delineates the objectives of youth work but also sets out a curriculum of activities designed to achieve them. Nine curricular activities, or ‘core requirements’, are listed. Three have immediate potential for the introduction of political elements into youth work:

- cross-community, national and international dimensions;
- encouragement of, and preparation for, equal participation in organisation of activities in the club or unit; and
- development of social and political awareness.

A range of political concepts and skills

are covered: how a committee system works, democratic decision-making, negotiation and listening, understanding the importance of the collective, power-sharing and so on. These participation exercises equip young people with the confidence, skills and motivation to become actively involved in society. Indeed many would argue that such skills are a prerequisite of political understanding or involvement.

But participation differs between and within youth club settings. It depends on the young persons’ degrees of ability and the beliefs that the workers bring to the challenge—the latter will influence working practices. In *A Revised Framework? The Youth Service Curriculum*,<sup>1</sup> participation is held to incorporate:

- development of services which actively involve young people in all aspects of youth provision;
- encouragement of voluntary partnerships between young people and adults which create real opportunities for decision-making and taking responsibility;
- stimulating participation through the development of participative skills in young people; and
- encouraging young people to develop the confidence to take optimum advantage of opportunities, including in personal and career development.

The Northern Ireland Youth Council

(the government agency charged with implementing policy) has, however, distinguished<sup>2</sup> a spectrum of models of participation: **led**, where the authority of the youth worker is unchallenged and absolute; **tokenist**, where a few young people are consulted, with workers setting the agenda and taking decisions; **consultative**, where consultation is more formal but parameters are still set by the workers; **representative**, which is more structured (a number of young people are put forward as representing their peers, usually via a committee system); **participative**, where young people set the agenda, deciding which issues and activities they want to embark upon and having joint accountability with the workers; and **self-managing**, an almost wholly autonomous arrangement, with little or no adult guidance.

This framework recognises that participation should be graduated, with different practices appropriate for different developmental stages amongst young people. Some workers may be reluctant, due to apathy, fear or lack of the necessary skills. Personal development may need to take precedence over more overt participatory exercises in the initial stages. It is essential that this moves on, however, to where participation is incorporated into working practices. Best practice would allow young people to 'practise

democracy' in a safe environment provided by the youth service, with the aim of furnishing them with skills which can be transferred beyond it. Some workers, though, view participation in a tokenistic light or restrict involvement to senior members and/or part-time volunteers or workers. Tokenistic exercises can result in the disempowerment of young people, as they fail to develop in the young person the necessary knowledge and skills.

**T**he third activity highlighted, 'development of political awareness', is ostensibly encouraging. It has been defined<sup>3</sup> as:

Awareness and understanding through discussion, experience and personal involvement by young people of their environment and communities on local and national levels which influence all aspects of their lives and how they can affect these through their attitudes and actions, both individually and in their various groupings.

While its inclusion in the curriculum does indicate that policy-makers see political matters as relevant to youth work, the definition has been diversely interpreted by practitioners.

According to the department,<sup>4</sup> social and political awareness should:

- increase opportunities for the greater

exploration and understanding of the social and political forces which shape our lives;

- encourage the development of skills in young people which facilitate negotiation and consensus rather than conflict;
- assist young people as active citizens by creating opportunities to experience change and development in positive ways which allow them to take control and risks in a safe environment; and
- encourage young people to participate actively in their own community life.

Again, however, practice is variable and activity relatively low, with quality work offered in only a minority of groups. Her Majesty's Inspectorate<sup>5</sup> reports note that structured, pre-planned work has more impact on young people—in terms of their understanding of political issues and involvement in running the clubs—than where learning is coincidental. Studies of practice in development of political awareness indicate that the department's interpretation is based on notions of civics and citizenship, rather than anything more radical.

The inspectors find that between a third and a half of youth groups are offering programmes in this curricular area. Examples are courses looking at power structures, invitations to district councillors to talk, study of electoral rights and responsibilities, visiting dis-

trict council offices and investigating local social issues. Badge work offered by the uniformed organisations is also held to be relevant—such as the citizenship badge of the Scouts and the mission badge of the Girls Brigade.

But how much work is going on is a matter of interpretation. On the narrow definition of 'political'—as party politics, constitutional issues, electoral systems and so on—there is no doubt practice is scant. But on a wider view of 'political'—as in power-sharing, involvement in representative structures, or exploring the causes and effects of social issues—much more work on the ground is evident.

To create a safe environment, the worker needs to establish trust with the young people, exploring the relevant issues gradually. Developmental political education requires small groups and time—two crucial factors not available to many youth workers. Most are under pressure to keep membership as high as possible, and are overburdened with other duties such as administration. Yet failure to undertake this groundwork can leave the young people alienated.

Further, political education can be contentious. Political education programmes may be offered but, with scope to interpret 'political' differently, difficulties in developing and incorporating political education programmes can arise.

Different levels of commitment, motivation, background and experience of full-time workers, part-time workers, volunteers and management committees all affect how political education is understood and offered in any club.

Anecdotal evidence suggests some radical political work is carried out, although those who do it tend to seek less publicity. Restrictions on many full-time workers' capacity for risk-taking may come from management committees, especially church-based committees, supervisors and funders. Indeed, community-based groups vitally depend on community acceptance, and many full-time groups remain quiet about their political work, as experience has shown that some residents will frown on 'controversial' activity. This reluctance to document or highlight the work means that how much political education is actually going on may be underestimated.

As noted earlier, policy in this area is not static. A curriculum review of the past 10 years took place in 1996. The revised curriculum, due this year, will herald a new youth service policy. Complementing this has been a recent partnership between the Southern and Belfast Education Boards and the Youth Council Northern Ireland in preparing a discussion document, *Towards a Strategy for Political Education*, which signifies a

commitment to developing political youth work.

**T**hese developments notwithstanding, questions remain. For instance, while the aim of the youth service is to equip young people with the knowledge, confidence and skills to assist them in the transition to 'responsible adulthood', it is unclear how the service defines a 'responsible adult': does she/he accept the *status quo*, or challenge it? This is a major ideological question with implications both for the style of youth work and the desired outcome.

As regards the latter, is it that young people are able to name their MP, that they intend to vote, that they understand how their local council works? Is a young person's decision to reject politics a sign that political education has failed? If so, then one's definition of a 'responsible adult' is fairly limited and conservative. On the other hand, does political education seek to encourage activism, or even subversion? Is success gauged by young people joining pressure groups, entering politics, becoming local activists?

It has been argued that the youth service is a more appropriate setting for development of political skills than formal education. Research has found that simply learning, even engaging in simulated exercises, does not have a last-

ing effect on young people, in terms of their proclivity to engage in political activities in adult life. 'Hands on' experience of addressing real issues, and having experience of real and collective action, has greater impact on young people.

The youth service has more capacity for action and risk-taking than the formal sector. It requires only voluntary attendance, is oriented to personal development and operates a flexible curriculum—delivered, potentially, in partnership between workers and youth. The formal sector, on the other hand, demands compulsory attendance on an academic, goal-based programme, delivering a fixed curriculum, generally within a disciplinarian ethos.

And this is what we find. Organisations and initiatives at the forefront of innovative political education tend to be outside the formal sector. Most are large voluntary organisations, with the autonomy and staff to establish developmental programmes. And very often these are financed by sources outside of traditional youth service funding. They include continuing projects by the YMCA, Youth Link, Voluntary Service Belfast and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, as well as time bounded initiatives such as *Speak your Peace*.

Impediments such as lack of time, pressure to have larger groups, workers'

perceptions of political education, fear of getting into politics or appearing to indoctrinate young people combine, forming barriers to political education and political youth work. Very often it is said that better training would instantly improve matters. But it would hardly break through these barriers on its own. Different workers and organisations within the youth service with inevitably contrasting views on ideology confound the practicalities—such as the production of standard guidance materials, development of training packages and evaluation of practice.

Generalisations can not readily be made about the youth service, as practice depends upon workers and the development of the young people concerned. And the review of the youth service curriculum may have implications for political education. It can be said with greater certainty that this review will not be of service to young people if it does not have something to say about the points this chapter raises. **DD**

#### Footnotes

1. *A Revised Framework? The Youth Service Curriculum*, Department of Education Northern Ireland, 1994, p4
2. *Participation: Youth Work Guidelines*, Northern Ireland Youth Council, Belfast, 1993, p20
3. Youth Department Core Curriculum Conference, DENI, November 1989, pp 9-10
4. *A Revised Framework ...*, p5

# The future (i)

I think there's more  
that unites us all than  
divides us.

I hope that we can all live  
in peace, for at  
this minute in time i don't  
want to bring  
my children into this  
world with all the murder and violence.

That the problems of the north of  
ireland are solved and peace  
becomes part of everyday life.  
Politicians on both sides will  
at least  
move some degree so a  
compromise  
can be met.

My hopes for the future are that  
the British pull out of Northern  
Ireland and that  
Ireland will be united and free so we  
can all live in peace. RUC disbanded.  
A united Ireland.  
That the UK land and Ireland can

come to an agreement so we can  
put the past behind us and  
move on to a brighter future.

To see Ireland free from the  
evil and corrupt hand of the  
typical British scum. To see our friends  
and relative who are inside  
prisons releases our 'Prisoners of War'.

An equalitarian and peaceful  
society inclusive of everything good/natural/human  
in us all. A society which embodies  
*positive* and negative freedom: a 32  
county socialist totality, in Ireland.

Peace! have loads of cash.

Good job and peace.

I hope that there will be peace  
in Ireland

The establishment of a 32  
county Irish republic.

I hope the peace  
lasts for a lasting settlement.

That we can start to work  
together on the issues that  
affect us.

I hope to see peace in Northern Ireland in

any shape or  
form  
and therefore young people will  
be able to bring up their  
children in a peaceful  
mixed  
country.  
Job, stuff like that.  
Peace.  
Peace.  
As the majority of Northern  
Ireland also hope, I would like peace  
which was without threat  
of a return to violence where  
discrimination of classification was abolished.  
Peace.  
Peace.  
Permanent peace, ideally with  
a consenting  
pop. living in accordance with peace. Also a reversal  
of the trends sweeping  
higher  
education.  
Increased representation of protestant  
working class.  
To see politicians stepping  
outside constitutional politics and  
addressing more important economic  
and social issues that affect  
young people.  
Peace in Northern Ireland, increase in student  
grants.  
Peace—a return to proper  
left/right politics  
Bleak.  
An enlightenment among young  
people to how they are being

manipulated and desire among  
them to change that.

Return to ceasefire. Proper substantive dialogue  
between all Northern Ireland parties and  
governments greater tolerance and  
accommodation of all communities.  
Since the ceasefire has been called  
off I am now determined to  
leave the country and  
emigrate  
with my son  
so he doesn't have to be brought  
up in all the hate and prejudices  
surrounding us.  
That Northern Ireland will become a safe  
and happy place to live in. The bigotry, hatred and  
prejudices which  
have existed in our society will be quashed. Everyone,  
regardless  
of creed or political motivation will be treated  
fairly and justly.  
The future is looking more  
promising, whether formally or informally both  
catholics and protestant  
are meeting etc but long way to go and to  
implement.  
Peace.  
Peace in Ireland.  
Lasting peace.  
Peace and everyone getting along, not  
caring what religion you are.  
Peace no matter what the  
decision made about who has government  
in Northern Ireland. Let the people of Northern  
Ireland decide  
for themselves.

Peace

A better understanding, tolerance.

Peace.

Lasting peace continued  
unity with mainland Britain

A complete peace process. More integrated Northern  
Ireland.

A lasting peace.

Hard to say as sometimes

appears

very bleak

but my hope is an Ireland of peace, where people  
can respect differences without  
resorting to violence.

That problems can be resolved without a resumption  
of violence.

There will not be a return  
to violence and people will  
forget about their difference by  
looking instead at their similarities. I wish for a  
permanent  
peace in which both communities are  
content.

A lasting peace in Northern Ireland where people  
of different religions and cultures who  
have different beliefs may be treated  
equally and live in  
harmony together.

More public debate on 'normal'

political issues like

housing

employment

health etc.

I don't want to pay for water. My mum thinks food  
and bread is  
getting very dear now. I don't want united Ireland.

My mum doesn't want a  
water meter. We were talking about

floridation in the  
training centre and I  
don't want it  
in the water.

Unionist to engage  
constructively with all the people  
on the island.

There is some sort of  
settlement to allow  
us to get on with  
normal living.

No violence.

I hope eventually that our two cultures  
and identities can be  
reconciled and that peace can  
eventually be reached. I hope that the  
younger generation becomes good MP's, not shackled  
by old,  
outdated rigid beliefs  
and that compromise can become a key word for the  
future.

Peace.

That people in our  
country will be more interested in  
personal and human  
issues rather than  
impersonal ideologies.

That people will get  
involved in politics and the present  
apathy among young people  
will be addressed.

Peace.

Integrated education offers hope  
for future, tolerance of the other

community  
and understanding would hopefully appease  
situation. Want to see labour and conservative politics  
in Northern Ireland.

Peace.

A good job  
with prospects; that needs proper peace  
settlement, can't deal with normal  
politics if they are fighting over the system  
of government.

A peaceful tranquil land where  
everyone is happy. Further US intervention  
i would like ulster to maintain a link with britain, for  
others, outside the political arena to fully understand  
the situation. Most importantly for peace to last  
to live in peace

Fuller cross community integration.

A form of government allowing  
much greater involvement in their own affairs for  
Northern Ireland  
peoples. A solution by persuasion rather than  
imposition.

No united ireland.

Peaceful end to current  
and past disagreements.

Politicians should strive to  
be more pragmatic through talks and  
discussion across the political  
divides in Northern Ireland. I'd like to see  
over the issue of Northern Ireland that the British govt  
could

remain as influential in the province but  
share this responsibility with  
Dublin especially in the light of the  
increased relations between the two  
in recent years.

That the sectarian issue would

somehow fade—i don't care  
how it's resolved, and issues  
of improving peoples lives  
would come to the forefront.

Long lasting peace, with  
reasonable amount of satisfaction  
between the two communities.

Lasting peace is established in Northern Ireland.

I think catholic and protestants should  
join together. They should also talk  
to the youth about

drugs,  
alcohol,  
sex  
etc.

Proper politics.

Avoid at all  
cost

a return to violence.

United Ireland.

That everyone will live  
together in peace and  
harmony. No religious divides between  
communities. Total decommissioning of  
arms before talks can take place.

That we still stay part of the UK and  
that the IRA will give in all their weapons.  
The ceasefire is still in action.

i hope that we will be able to look  
forward into the future  
without concentrating  
on past differences, into a  
society where peace exists on a  
permanent basis.

Continued peace, compromise must be reached,  
respect opposing views.

Continued peace with compromise to make

the situation more stable.  
Peace, Ulster to remain  
part of UK.  
How about a referendum/questionnaire  
with questions for  
the people of Northern Ireland to decide  
about. As it seems the people of Northern Ireland  
have  
been bypassed on their future. I also wish to see  
attention on us of Europe or perhaps over the world  
Peace.  
A lasting peace, more  
integrated schols. Religion not  
automatically controlling  
your political views. A  
compromise  
between governments.  
Independent Ulster with joint  
representation.  
Compromise  
Both communities will be willing to  
compromise  
and not just go out  
and out to win.

Peace, continue to be part  
of the UK.  
A peaceful (permanent) solution to the Northern  
Ireland  
situation at present.  
That the Northern Ireland situation may  
be resolved peacefully. Also that the younger  
generation may get a bigger  
say in Northern Ireland politics.  
That the situation in Northern Ireland may be  
reached  
peacefully

and be maintained.  
That normality will return to Northern Ireland  
and that violence is a thing  
of the past so that politics is secular.  
I hope that the youth of  
today can ignore the bigotted  
views of their parents and learn to  
unite and that this is the only way forward for North-  
ern Ireland.  
For a united Ireland to be  
achieved without  
excessive bloodshed  
and for protestants and catholics to gain a respect  
for one another and an understanding.  
A positive move  
forward in the peace process in Ireland. It is  
time the politicians *all*  
started to  
talk.  
Naturally,  
peace, but I feel largely  
disillusioned with the operation of the peace  
process. This stems from the indisputable  
fact that too many vested  
interests exist on all sides and  
unaccomodating politicians and the  
absence of good  
will on any side pervades. We  
should hope that the future will be a longlasting  
peace  
and in a situation where  
we possess strong links with the Irish free state  
a better  
understanding of each other and our  
cultures/religion.  
United democratic republican Ireland, continuation  
of peace.

A united Ireland  
United Ireland, federal government  
of Ireland divided into 4 provinces with a  
9 county Ulster avoiding  
total discrimination 5 nationalists could be elected  
and 4  
unionists or vice versa 1 or 2 representatives  
of each province could sit in the  
federal government overseeing  
the problems of the whole land, achieving  
stability  
enabling people to work together economically.  
Northern Ireland should become  
peaceful. I hope that trust will be  
built up between the 2 communities and  
there will not be so many differences over  
petty issues which partys  
seem to be dwelling on. religion should be separated  
from politics.  
A peaceful Ireland, only achieved  
by equal  
compromise on both sides of the  
political divide. More access for young people to  
become politically involved  
and have their voice adhered to.  
Less prejudice and spite  
toward each other. A better understanding  
of other people's views. Peace and  
harmony and an end to the violence, but which  
seems highly unlikely due to prejudice and bigotted  
opinions  
of some political leaders eg Paisley and Adams.  
Peace and harmony, end to  
the violence—punishment beatings  
etc. Unlikely. All party talks idealistic,  
such fundamental differences  
between parties make these

discussions futile—no  
compromise can possibly be reached  
between present political representatives eg Paisley  
and Adams.

That there is peace  
in Northern Ireland, but not a  
peace that means one side is  
going to win and the other side  
lose—it should be made via  
compromise.

i think more women should be  
involved in politics, they have some sense.  
That Northern Ireland politicians will  
concentrate on the real issues.  
Peace to last, no matter what option is chosen.

Lasting peace and a  
government that takes more  
heed of the people under it.

Continuation of Northern Ireland as part of UK, end  
of paramilitary activities, maintenance of civil  
and religious liberty available in Northern Ireland  
as part of UK.

Peace.  
A United Ireland more money.  
Peace.  
For all the fighting to stop and  
to let us young  
ordinary  
people to get on with their lives.  
Peace and tolerance. Parity  
of esteem between the two communities.  
To leave Rathgael.  
United Ireland

Can Mr Adams not see  
that a United Ireland is economically unviable?  
Peace in Northern Ireland where individuals  
can accept and  
recognise each other's traditions.  
The politicians must not let this opportunity for peace  
slip away.  
I would like to get  
involved in politics as I believe I  
am very liberal in my ideas and  
would make a  
good politician.  
Peace in Northern Ireland.  
I don't want a united Ireland, but that is  
not because of my religion, but rather for  
political reasons. I honestly don't believe a  
united Ireland would be in the best  
interests of Ulster.

That rave music will eventually  
die off and  
good old fashioned rock  
will rule the world.  
Peace harmony and love between  
all people along with  
justice for all.  
Peace.  
That someday people will  
be able to accept each  
others different views and  
opinions on various matters.  
Peace in Northern Ireland.  
Peace and a laying down  
of arms for good.  
That both sides lay down  
arms  
no more

bombs and  
shooting.  
That my children will grow  
up in a peaceful community.  
Some sort of peace.  
That a democracy may be  
brought into Northern Ireland so once again a  
majority  
may rule.  
Peace.  
A peaceful one.  
That a peaceful settlement can be  
found in Northern Ireland that will hopefully reflect  
the views of most  
people and not leave a section  
of the community totally  
isolated.  
By some means Northern Ireland will  
find some way of being a peaceful  
province without  
all the fighting and hatred  
that there is  
at the minute.  
A lasting peace and somewhere religion and politics  
make  
little difference in the community. Hopefully someday  
we will move away  
from a divided community.  
Peace.  
Peace and  
understanding of peoples views. Respect  
for each other no matter what.  
I strongly hope for peace in Northern Ireland.  
Like it to be peaceful stop the  
bombing and shooting.  
That the killing stops and that  
the ceasefire is renewed.

I hope that it will stay British and not  
Irish as there is so much trouble.  
United Ireland.  
I would like the ceasefire  
to be brought back in and more  
peace; to complete my schooling and go  
to university and be a lawyer.  
I would like to do all my  
GCSE and then go to the TEC and do  
a course there and then go  
to university.  
Ceasefire to be brought back again.  
I hope that the ceasefire will be  
come in order again.  
That paramilitaries from both  
sides realise that we're fed up  
to the back teeth of their  
messing about.  
If the political  
situation doesn't change  
there won't  
be a future.  
To see the peace  
process continue and peace  
throughout Northern Ireland.  
I would like to get more  
involved in politics, especially  
as a woman.  
Peace and happiness for everyone.  
Career, marriage, family—best  
possible opportunities for my family.  
I'll probably leave  
the country! peace!  
No threat  
of bombs  
anywhere  
and plenty of inward investment

and no fear of anywhere  
anymore.  
Peace.  
A decent government  
who had the sense  
to realise that it's  
their fault Northern Ireland is in the situation it is.  
Or at  
least a govt that can govern.  
Peace in Northern Ireland no united Ireland but  
stay part of  
Great Britain.  
To see a united Ireland with both Catholics and  
Protestants.  
That our island is  
free of violence and that it is  
able to flourish and develop to its  
full potential eg tourism industry. That I  
will be proud to remain in Northern Ireland and make  
my future within it.  
That the peace process returns  
sooner rather than later.  
My hopes for  
the future are very clear, Northern Ireland is a  
beautiful country with  
an abundance of potential for  
its future and for  
the young people of this land which  
should not be put to the side.  
One of the most important issues  
Send the IRA packing back  
to where they belong in Ireland. Send in the SAS  
because  
the only language the men of violence  
understand is violence.  
That all religions can live  
together peacefully. And peace

from bombs on mainland England and Ulster.  
The youth is to be more involved in  
everything. It is our future  
so why can we have a say.  
Youth will be listened to more  
Peace.  
A peaceful end.  
Peace on acceptable terms  
to both sides of the sectarian  
divide.  
Peace.  
Full solution.  
Peace in Northern Ireland, the world. Understanding  
and  
respect for one another.  
Peace in Northern Ireland.  
Young people can  
have a greater say in how the country is run.  
To have a nice house, good  
job, good  
pay respectable family, no problems.  
Peace.  
Peace will last  
and terrorists will wise up.  
Peace in Northern Ireland.

**Will New Labour deliver a greater say?**

Peaces process will continue, grow  
in strength and be very successful.  
Peace.  
I feel that all  
parties should take the issues  
on board of the youth as it is  
they who are the future and is  
them who have to rectify the  
mistakes of the elder generations.  
Peace.  
A stable peace which involves  
compromise  
on both sides of the community—we need  
to be sorry, truly sorry for the  
past before we can more forward.  
Peace.  
Peace freedom  
of religion, not being  
classed as catholic or protestant—just individuals.  
peace wil continue in ni  
Peace.  
Peace—I hope to have  
children and to be able to bring  
them up in peace. I don't want to be known as catho-  
lic/protestant. I want to be known as a christian.  
That peace proces will  
move forward and  
fear removed from the  
community and  
mixed  
communities would have their  
views aired more.  
Permanent peace.  
None because politicians don't know their arse  
from their elbow.  
That the IRA will go  
away and Northern Ireland will be left alone and we

will either still be under British rule or Northern Ireland will become an independent country. Peace, a fair justice and governmental system. Peace! the meat trade will resume to normal. That a compromise situation is reached so that all groups in Northern Ireland can live together amicably. Attitudes in older people need to be changed. No matter what happens one side or other will not be happy and will continue to fight for what they want. A bit of peace for once. A peaceful place to live. Peace it can only be realistically achieved via dialogue and justice. Peace. That people can put social and religious differences into context and learn to live in tolerance of each other. A lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Gov and unionist to wise up and get immediate dialogue involving all party groups going in the event of an IRA ceasefire. Peace. Peace. Remain

part of the union. Disarmament, improvement of the environment, world peace and co-operation. Peace in the northern 6 counties, that people in the south will take an interest in their country and that they won't let us down come voting day 32 county Ireland. British withdrawal, cultural tolerance amongst all diverse groups in Ireland, working class control of national destiny. To see peace last longer than 18 mths. In order to do so all parties have to forget about the past and get around the discussion table—the sooner the better. Democratic peace. To be able to feel at ease in any part of Belfast. Peace, but with reconciliation. That some sort of compromise can be reached. That violence stops. I think there should be peace again. Peace in the world, especially in Northern Ireland so our generation don't have to fight. Northern Ireland will remain a part of Britain. That the 2 communities in Northern Ireland aided by the 2

governments will be able to reach a modus vivendi that includes responsibility sharing, some elements of joint authority, and a realisation that closer EU integration is vitally important for all our futures. **DD**

# Old dogs, new tricks?

## Fergus Comiskey

In the past 10 years I have been training activists facilitating political dialogue and anti-sectarian work. In this chapter I try to bring my experiences to bear on the themes and implications raised by this research.

Although it indicates a very high interest in politics—more than 70 per cent—among young people in Northern Ireland, less than 3 per cent of those surveyed were members of a political party and only 12 per cent were affiliated to a campaigning group. Dozens of workshops on overtly political themes with adult workers suggest most of the latter have no connection with party politics either. Despite this, many young people hunger to be included in the political process and have some sense of influence beyond the limits of the franchise.

Such contradictions reveal a need for self-preservation and anonymity. To be

involved in party politics in Northern Ireland runs the risk of having the assumptions and position statements of the party tagged on to one's identity, with all the resulting dangers such labelling throws up.

Working in the area of dialogue and sectarianism brings up the personal impact of sectarian discrimination, consequent misinformation, competing ideologies and implicit fears of violence. These ever-present themes ensure deep reserves of painful, often unexpressed experiences. During anti-sectarian training workshops, experiences of terror, shame, silence and withdrawal are common; rage, anger and blame are equally evoked. Fears stirred by mere discussion of sectarianism are often met by efforts to constrain opportunities for contact and dialogue. What better trigger could there be than political discussion to unleash the vengeance and rage of generations?

In teaching the skills necessary for

working with such emotive issues, I have discovered that most participants in discussion harbour deep-seated fears, almost uniform in their prevalence. These include the fear of being misunderstood and mistakenly labelled, of risking vulnerability by revealing personal opinions on the history of the state and its influence, or of expressing individual long-term constitutional aspirations. Adults frequently cite their fear that working relationships may be irretrievably soured by the rancour which uninhibited political discussion in the workplace may raise.

Of course, there is always a risk element in any learning experience. The tendency to get stuck in the *'what if?'s* and the *'why should we?'s* hook many learners when initiating a political dialogue workshop. Parallel to such fears, however, are the excitement and optimistic desire for greater skill and understanding and the consequent freedom to change which may accrue. I know few other issues which evoke such well-grounded anxieties, based on previous painful experiences: threats of sectarian intimidation, violence and the destructive power of the 'chill factor' — being ostracised through sectarianism in the workplace.

In their responses to the survey, and in the focus groups which augmented the research, young people echoed many of

these concerns. The data indicate a consensus about the risks they face in breaking ranks within their own community by daring to speak out on political issues. Young people express fear of neighbourhood paramilitary misunderstanding, disagreement, consequent risks of isolation, cold-shouldering and threats or violence. Some mentioned their anger with and fear of the police and dissatisfaction with the absence of access to politicians. This anger was not confined to one section of the community.

Avoidance of the untidy, difficult and uncomfortable work involved in exploring the causes, impact and potential for a just resolution to the political conflict in Ireland is based upon fear and the desire for safety. Fear perpetuates isolation, depression and a sense of disenfranchisement, as prevalent among adults as young people.

The resulting experience of inertia, inactivity and frustration is a springboard for many adults who work with young people into what has been euphemistically termed 'focused community relations work'. The limitation of such titles for the work I do, like 'cultural traditions work' and 'education for mutual understanding', lies in their palliative wooliness — open to an abundance of interpretations and often dismissed in the absence of political analysis. Despite

some criticism of community relations, however, examples of excellent critical analysis and focused experiential learning and practice do exist.

My appetite for dialogue facilitation was whetted when working on cross-border/cross-community exchange programmes with young people and their leaders, parents and teachers while developing Co-operation North's Youth and Education programme in the late 80s. I saw young adults begin to open up and take risks of disclosure and conflict with each other, surviving the work to emerge more self-confident and aware of their own socio-political origins and current frameworks, while developing an appreciation of the dynamics which predispose their peers to opposite political perspectives. The key ingredient was a climate safe enough for this experiential learning to take place.

So, how and when it will be safe enough for teachers and youth workers to lead critical political discussion in the classroom or youth club?

Major policy initiatives have failed. The recent University of Ulster study<sup>1</sup> on EMU shed light upon a frightened and reluctant teaching profession, still reeling from a decade of downgrading by an erratic and blaming government administration. EMU is the Cinderella issue in education, despite significant funding

and rhetoric claiming commitment to change. There has been little qualitative training or support for teachers, with a resulting dearth of good practice or policy.

The youth contact programme, now devolved from the Department of Education to the education and library boards, has fared just as badly. Internal research sponsored by the Youth Council in 1995 revealed that only a tiny proportion of youth organisations had engaged in contentious discussion work. And only a fraction of youth workers had participated in any kind of professional development focused on politics, political education or political discussion.

These results come in the wake of almost a decade of European and Westminster-funded community relations initiatives. Without qualitative action research, development and implementation strategies, this work will remain the preserve of hard-pressed enthusiasts working in isolation, ineffectual in creating strategic support for social change.

**I**f over 70 per cent of young people have an interest in politics, those who provide this service to the population are obviously delivering well below demand. Why? Caution, manifested in our well-renowned politeness and banter behaviours, are designed to maintain the taboos on discussion of the politics of

sectarianism. Sectarianism and our responses to it are embedded in the culture of institutional life in Northern Ireland.

It is therefore no surprise that print and broadcast media, education and youth work institutions are peculiarly devoid of any substantive, targeted programme to address youth politicisation. A handful of courageous teachers and youth workers, and the occasional risk by independent tv, such as Channel Four's *Speak your Peace*, have kept this work alive. The findings presented here imply a demand for urgent redress by these underdeveloped sectors.

Northern Ireland media pundits have been no less affected by the urge to self-preservation and censorship than the youth and education sector. If the survey findings have it right, and 70 per cent of young people are interested in politics, surely the BBC, UTV and independent radio stations must begin to address this market?

A more entrepreneurial and creative approach from Northern Ireland broadcast media controllers could contribute quality, focused opportunities for young people's participation in the political process. But how?

A start might be a regular, prime-time slot for young producers, writers and journalists, working in concert to pursue youth participation in, and control of,

broadcast discussion fora. A young people's equivalent to the excellent Channel Four *After Dark* series would be an interesting prototype.

Scope for experiment should be unlimited. Any change from the predictable, and lamentably stale and superficial, discussions often presented by tv's *Counterpoint* and BBC's *Spotlight* would be welcome. Young people working with young people, supported by seasoned practitioners while developing their own 'product', could be very attractive to younger audiences.

Any policy initiative needs to be seen as safe enough by teachers, youth workers and broadcasters. Those at the top of the decision-making hierarchies in education and the media have their work to do. They must lead by example, and risk making open discussion of political issues an educational priority.

A comprehensive strategy to address this work, including all the educational and broadcast stakeholders, is the fundamental first step to greater participation in politics. Such a plan must incorporate directed funding, expert facilitation, support and training, and be focused by action research and practice initiatives.

Those responsible for facilitating political discussion—whether through youth work, education, youth training,

trade unionism or journalism—require access to personal and professional development opportunities. Highly skilled support and supervision will be necessary to deal with the inevitable dilemmas, personal and professional, which ensue from the work.

At a moment in history when, throughout Europe, adult rights and responsibilities towards young people are so sharply in focus, it is timely that these challenging data are brought into the policy domain and used as a basis for action. **DD**

#### **Footnotes**

1. Alan Smith and Alan Robinson, *Education for Mutual Understanding: The Initial Statutory Years*, Centre for the Study of Conflict, Coleraine, 1996

# The future (ii)

IRA ceasefire and all party talks.  
Peace in our country.  
Clear agreement made  
between parties, stable  
peace, social  
issues addressed, confusion  
between religion and  
politics totally  
removed.  
If the  
majority of people in Northern Ireland vote to stay  
with Britain, then SF etc should  
accept this. When the minority becomes  
the majority and people  
vote to join Eire, then the unionists should  
equally accept the feelings of the majority.  
A referendum should be  
called so the people of Ireland can  
decide what  
they want and not let  
guns and arms divide. How many  
more people have to die?  
Peace.  
All parties will talk and will be able to reach  
a lasting peace  
through which our generation and

generations after us will be  
able to live in harmony.  
Peace and all party talks perhaps leading to  
an election.  
Peace in Ireland.  
Ceasefire holding, paramilitaries  
disarmed.  
I hope that Northern Ireland will  
remain part  
of Britain who hopefully  
will not give up on the people. I cannot see a  
solution that will please  
everyone, but I hope that some  
sort of agreement can be reached  
soon.  
Full integration for all into  
the UK.  
I hope to see a strong  
line being adopted  
against terrorists (particularly republican), I  
believe a 'shoot to kill'  
policy should be introduced  
and appeasement and  
concessions to  
republicans by English politicians  
should cease.

That Crusaders win the 1996 league championship,  
that  
the IRA are defeated in a military sense, having no  
chance to call another phoney and  
strategic ceasefire.  
Destruction of nation states  
and a world  
wide government.  
A federal communist state would  
be ideal but  
peace  
will do for the minute.  
I would like to see  
a settlement that will include the  
wishes of everybody.  
Peace.  
Peace.  
Proper student funding, more college  
places in Ireland, a lasting  
peace, Celtic  
to win the European Cup.  
Peace.  
Peace.  
That there will be peace.  
I would like to see  
peace.  
That there is give  
and take  
between political parties.  
Permanent peace in Northern Ireland full-time  
career in  
accountancy.  
Progress.  
That there will be peace  
again.  
Employment, youth rights and  
concerns.

**Voting for the future with their feet**

Complete peace.  
Permanent cessation of violence people lose  
their biased  
attitudes.  
Lasting peace better cross  
community relations.  
That Northern Ireland can  
become an example of how  
to properly solve and  
that people here are  
recognised for the hard work they'd  
been involved in to help with the  
political situation.  
That peace will be accomplished.  
Peace.  
Northern Ireland to have a  
lasting peace.  
Find a solution.  
Peace.  
Real democracy—not  
that that will ever happen!  
Peace. If Ireland can give better than Britain then  
all Ireland, but until then, no  
thanks.  
That we can finally come to  
an agreement about the

situation in Northern Ireland that will lead to a peaceful settlement.

That the unionist grassroots will force, through private or public pressure, the unionist leadership to enter talks, and to do so with the intention of achieving compromise with nationalists, instead of their never ending intransigence.

The day when everyone in Ireland can integrate and unite, and when this country can have a more trusting relationship with our neighbours across the water.

That everyone talks to everyone and not just a select few. Peace; more money for students, we are the future how are we supposed to run the country properly if we are not educated properly. If we have no money we can't support ourselves in university especially if our parents are working class and struggling.

Peace.

That violence will be abandoned forever; that a fair agreement can be reached through compromise between both standpoints; that both communities will respect the others aspiration.

A satisfactory conclusion to the peace process. Give and take required by all sides.

That all party talks will happen  
Peace in Northern Ireland.

Peace.

Peace.

Peace.

A peace that is lasting and can be felt throughout the country.

People in Northern Ireland will forget about blaming other people and demanding talks—before talks everyone will learn how to listen to each other and learn from what others say not simply have their own opinion that they stick to.

End to violence and segregation, equal opportunities.

That the troubles will be restored and the majority of people will be happy.

That a lasting peace not just a ceasefire is established.

For the politicians to talk together and try to help resolve the problems faced so the future is brighter for not only me but my children.

That we will have peace in our great island.  
A just and lasting settlement.  
Peace, nothing more, nothing less.  
I do hope the process starts up again and works this time for the sake of my future and if I have a family of my own, their future.  
We will get our point across.  
All political parties integrating and talking democratically instead of passing the buck all the time, also to stop dwelling on their disagreements and focus on agreements.  
I would like to see peace between both sides of the community. I would like to see younger politicians becoming involved in the political process and representing more accurately the views of young people.  
That everything will get better.  
I hope that we will have a peace to stay and that people will be free from the threat or use of violence of any kind and that it will come soon.  
That peace can be resolved and we can bring the two communities together.  
To be more involved politically.  
I would hope that Northern Ireland would remain part of

Britian  
as we appear to be better off.  
Troubles will end once and for all.  
Peace.  
Peace love and unity.  
Peace.  
Integration and understanding.  
Peace.  
Ceasefire to be renewed and this time to be permanent.  
Peace.  
Peace for Northern Ireland.  
Peace.  
I hope that in the future peace will be declared.  
Peace, better understanding of others; for the government to wise up and employ politicians who don't use others as scapegoats.  
If left to the politicians — bleak. If 90% or more of the electorate vote on upcoming issues then maybe not so bad.  
I would hope that Ireland would have peace throughout and all terrorists would piss off and leave us alone to get on with our lives as they are not needed to make up our minds for us.  
Ulster will become an independent state  
I hope that young people have a

chance of speaking  
for themselves in  
the future.

That the fighting  
will stop and that  
there will be peace in future.

Peace.

Peace.

I hope Gerry Adams is  
shot and there is peace in Northern Ireland.

Peace.

Decommissioning of all paramilitary  
weapons.

I hope that all  
walks of life can live  
together in peace.

When raising  
my children I hope they don't go the same  
way as I did.

I hope there will be peace  
in the whole of Northern Ireland.

For all the violence to  
stop such as paramilitary  
organisations.

To live in a peaceful  
country and  
to work

in a  
clothing factory.

Peace and to learn  
more about  
politics.

Peace.

I hope we can reach  
some common ground with  
the other side, I

hope that the ceasefire can  
be reinstated without  
compromising our  
system of justice.

Peace.

Peace, Northern Ireland with its own government  
ruling itself.

A better life.

Peace.

I hope that there will be a united  
Ireland in the  
coming future.

That the people in Northern Ireland will  
be able to work and live  
with one another in happiness and  
not be afraid to walk the streets  
where we live.

That both sides  
of the community could  
live as one.

None.

Yes for peace  
and for both communities to  
mix  
in with

each other and I  
believe eventually there will become an all  
Ireland and the unionist are  
going to have to face up to that  
sooner or later.

That one day we'll have a united Ireland, that  
we will have peace  
and not wondering who's going  
to be killed  
next.

I hope in the future that Northern Ireland becomes  
part

of Ireland and not  
Britain and there is peace in both  
parts.  
In the future, I would  
like to see everyone living  
together no matter  
what they are.  
The world becomes  
a better place.  
That there will be peace in people's  
hearts and in this country and  
all over the world.  
Peace.  
Peace—where both  
communities can live  
together. A country where  
all people are treated equally and the  
emphasis is no longer on religion.  
I hope that the ceasefire is re-instated  
on both sides. Fall in  
unemployment.  
Peace in Northern Ireland  
Peace in Ireland and  
jobs  
Peace.  
Peace. I'd like to get good GCSE's and go to art  
college after A  
levels.  
Make it a better country.  
That all or most communities can  
be friends with our having so  
much conflict  
with one another.  
Peace. I don't want the  
politicians to keep  
arguing.  
A vet if I worked hard

enough; peace.  
Peace in Northern Ireland. Why can't they all  
agree to sit down and talk about it? Talking never  
hurt  
anyone.  
Leave school.  
A ceasefire. We can't  
make progress if we don't have sinn  
fein aboard.  
I'd like to  
see a proper end to  
all our problems. I'd like the  
politicians to listen to the  
people more and  
stop fighting all  
the time instead of talking.  
Some  
sort of normal life here. I don't want  
to go away to  
university or get a job. I like it in  
Northern Ireland if only we could  
have peace all  
the time.  
Peace.  
I hope to go to  
university I hope there won't  
be any more trouble in Northern Ireland.  
I would like a job when I  
leave school; not many of my friends  
have a job.  
Peace. I'd like not  
to have all the troubles back.  
To involve young  
people in politics.  
My hopes for the future is  
that there is an end to  
the troubles! for ever.

I hope that people will  
be left to live  
in peace regardless of  
colour, religion, etc, and for people to  
be free to be what they want and not  
be influenced by  
others.

I hope that in  
the future  
Northern Ireland can come to some  
sort of agreement to stop  
the troubles and keep  
the peace.

I hope we do not have another 25  
years of the troubles and that there's no  
more people killed by  
bombs or  
bullets.

I hope that politicians will  
come to some  
sort of agreement for the  
situation as everyone  
wants peace.

I would like a  
car, a house  
and to live in Ireland because I  
like supporting Ireland in  
football.

I think that the training  
allowance is not  
high enough. It would help me  
to work  
harder.

For fighting and killing to  
stop and let us people live  
our lives and let our children live  
their lives.

There is unfortunately very  
little if any hope. The situation will  
continue to  
deteriorate.

Peace and power to  
the people.

A quiet life.

I hope that there would be  
a permanent ceasefire and for the violence to  
stop.

Build some things around Northern Ireland for the  
young  
to do at night instead  
of drugs.

Peace more  
talking. We need to know more  
about this  
stuff at school [politics].

Peace.

Peace total  
peace.

More integrated  
schools.

For Northern Ireland to stay British but to also  
live in peace.

That the troubles clear  
up because if it  
doesn't there will be some  
killing in the next  
25 years at least.

That Northern Ireland will be kept part  
of Britain.

I hope that we will stay being  
run by the British and not  
the Irish.

Peace in Northern Ireland.

Peace and forgiveness for

all, as every one is  
equal.

I want to see peace after all  
the troubles. Try and get  
everyone to work as one for  
a better community to  
live in.

I would like to see peace in  
Ireland for all the shootings and  
bombings to stop. It isn't even safe  
walking to the shop.

I would like to see peace in  
Ireland and for all the fighting  
to stop.

Peace and prosperity with  
opportunities for young  
people in  
employment and  
training.

Peace.

Peace in Northern Ireland.

That the problems can  
be solved and that the  
minority can stop  
dictating to the  
majority.

That the ceasefire will start  
again.

I hope that there will be  
peace in Northern Ireland.

A job.

That the peace  
process will come through and  
another ceasefire by the IRA will  
soon be announced.

I hope that we get a united Ireland and that the  
British

government get out.

My hopes would be that there would be  
peace in the near  
future.

Peace in Northern Ireland

Peace Northern Ireland and everyone lives  
happy.

More jobs.

To see peace.

Peace.

I hope Northern Ireland will be a normal country in  
future with out any  
paramilitaries.

To see peace throughout Northern Ireland.

I hope that there will be  
peace for my  
children growing  
up.

All we want in the end is  
peace and not a united  
Ireland.

That we get a united Ireland and that  
the British government get out.

I hope that there can be  
a lasting peace where  
religion still exists but does  
not cause friction that it does now.

I hope that peace continues and  
unemployment level  
fall, with peace tourist  
levels will rise and ni will be a richer  
and better  
place to live.

Peace in Northern Ireland, better  
employment.

I believe that peace is very important for  
the people of the province, there

is also a need for better  
employment  
opportunities.

Like most people hope peace will come to  
Ulster and that the terrorists  
listen to the vast  
majority of people in the uk and Ireland and lay  
down their  
weapons.

I hope that the so  
called fighters for peace  
ie the politicians stop  
fighting over silly words in documents  
and stop demand  
clarification. Instead they  
should ask the common  
folk what should  
be done for ourselves.

For peace.

No peace talks because  
we want our country back.

That all people could get  
on together and be at  
peace.

Peace

Peace, job.

That people forget what  
has happened and get  
on with talkin', with all parties  
involved committed to a peaceful solution to our  
problems. No  
body has anything to  
lose with talking every  
body has every  
thing to lose by not  
talking.

Health happiness and  
a job.

I

would hope to get my  
nvq level  
2 in joinery and  
become a full time  
employed  
worker.

That all politicians can sit  
down and come  
to agreement on the  
ceasfire because at the  
minute you can not live in peace.

That the IRA and UVF would wise  
up on their cowardly acts, for if  
they were meated out the same  
justice

as they gave, their recruits would soon disappear (do  
like the spanish did to the basque terrorists).

Peace.

Compromise reached  
by both sides of the  
community, peace for Northern Ireland.  
Politics and religions become  
seperate  
entities.

Peace. Stop seeing each  
other as catholic and  
protestant but as people.

I would like to have peace  
back in our country again.

That peace can  
be settled in some  
way, but I still would like a united  
Ireland.

I hope there will be peace.

I hope in the future there will be peace  
for good.  
Political settlement, increase in  
employment.  
No more fighting peace  
in Ireland for us to be united with the Republic  
of Ireland.  
Hope the ceasefire starts  
up again and all  
the trouble in Northern Ireland will stop.  
At the minute I can't see one.  
Good employment conditions research and develop-  
ment  
jobs. Education and welfare system that  
benefits all.  
My hopes for the future would  
be to belong  
to a more peaceful environment where  
people can get on well together.  
Peace  
I would like to see all the  
trouble in Northern Ireland to stop and  
for all military armies to leave and  
to let Ireland  
be on its own.  
I hope that in Northern Ireland people will learn  
to overcome their prejudices, to love  
unconditionally  
and to accept people  
the way they are, knowing  
that we all have a right to our opinion. Through this I  
would hope that the politicians would  
talk, people wouldn't be scared  
to voice  
their opinions  
and we could live in peace.  
Peace no war

Resumption to peace and  
reconciliation.  
Peace.  
Peace.  
That we get rid of all the useless  
politician and annoying bigots who  
piss me off.  
The political parties are absolutely  
useless in representing the  
electorate for socially  
oriented problems. They focus/are obsessed with  
one issue and are always bogged  
down with petty details. They refuse  
to give any ground and there-  
fore will never reach a  
compromise.  
That we may all be open  
to change and the potential  
of something 'different' whether that involves  
compromise  
or not.  
Learn to live  
together. Respecting each  
others cultures and using them to our advantage by  
learning from each other.  
A peaceful Northern Ireland within  
the United Kingdom where  
everyone can respect each  
others identity.  
Integration with all  
members in society, all communities, all able-bodied  
and  
disabled etc. To accept people as  
they are.  
  
That we'll get our act  
together and get things

sorted out.  
It can't get any worse can it?  
I feel  
sorry for all those who have lost  
relatives and friends during the troubles but I  
personally don't  
feel affected living  
in bangor, I feel I am more distant  
to these issues.  
That the politicians wise  
up and catch  
themselves on. And pray that Mr Major grows  
a backbone.  
Peace. British and Irish governments to  
stop being such stubborn headstrong  
bastards, and think about the people and quit  
power  
seeking, neither gov wants to back  
down so we're stuck in the  
middle.  
To create a society where people  
can trust each other and  
have tolerance  
for different views. That has  
to be worked at by all people. It  
needs to be  
taught in schools. It's too late  
when you get older; all the  
prejudices are in  
place. **DD**

# Next generation, next steps

**Kate Fearon**

**T**wo things are clear from our research. There was a great (unmet) desire among the young people surveyed to talk about politics, and a great (also unmet) desire to learn more about politics in school. The opportunity to talk about politics in their own environment was viewed as desirable—many said they didn't get the opportunity to do it enough. Eighty per cent of the survey respondents and a similar proportion of the focus-group participants said they would like to learn more about politics in school. There was an understanding that information and education should precede discussion, and a sense that the more informed one was, the more confident one would be about offering opinions.

But, as Paul Donnelly comments, young people currently lack the intellectual tools to anticipate and develop their own agenda. What is needed is a

curriculum where children are provided with the capacity to think; there is a need to equip pupils with critical faculties.<sup>1</sup> How, then, might these identified needs be provided for? How might any provision be managed? And what are the risks?<sup>2</sup> In this, concluding, chapter we look at opportunities in formal and informal education, before fleshing out some of the ideas suggested by young people for their own representation.

The Northern Ireland education minister, Michael Ancram, has emphasised that education should contribute to management or even resolution of the conflict: "We see our education strategy as central to the long term stability and coherence of Northern Ireland society. [E]ducation can nurture the attitudes which can break down social barriers and promote the inclusion of all individuals and groups in the life and growth of a strong society."<sup>3</sup>

Yet how have EMU and history text-

books conveyed peace messages? How have they contributed to stability? If they have not, then why not, and what should be done?<sup>4</sup> Education for citizenship is important in a democratic society and cannot be left to chance.<sup>5</sup>

The practice of citizenship education is advancing, and Barbara Lomas has highlighted exemplars from around the globe.<sup>6</sup> Below, some of the models<sup>7</sup> which inform this practice are outlined.

Sometimes referred to as quietism, the **patriotic** model encourages a positive concern for one's society and loyalty to it. Saluting the flag and other patriotic devices are frequently used. The **consensus** model acknowledges the importance of citizenship education but tries to avoid contention by concentrating on safe, non-controversial topics. Political education is more abstract—usually a descriptive account of the processes of government as it goes on in the world of the adult; students may only see themselves as distant spectators of such political activity.

Emphasising the role of school organisation and ethos as reflecting a good or just society, the **school ethos** model is experiential. Some structures for consultation may be available, like a school council, but the question of how far a school can or will duplicate democratic practice is very real. Practitioners of this

model readily acknowledge its limits, and its risks: “The school is certainly not a true democracy at present and is unlikely ever to be so.”<sup>8</sup> But adherence to a form of democracy means that “everyone in a school will expect a considerable degree of consultation, a right for individuals to speak their minds whether or not they agree with the official or majority line of the school, and there is also an implication that the rights of the individual will be enshrined while at the same time being balanced with the needs of the community as a whole.”<sup>9</sup>

A **value conflict** model of citizenship education requires students to acknowledge the reality of problems faced by citizens in today's world. It acknowledges the citizen's fundamental right to freedom of belief and conscience and actively assists the resolution of conflict both between and within individuals. This represents a move away from more utopian models which present democratic systems that are idealistic and unrealistic—the possibility that democratic politics can be fraught with frustration and corruption should not be hidden from students.

The **parental** model holds that parents are solely responsible for citizenship education. They are thus free to promote their own values and beliefs. A **religious** model considers religious values to offer the best means of teaching the civic

virtues of service to others and to the community, but teaching ‘good citizenship’ via religious education becomes increasingly problematic in multi-cultural or mainly secular societies. As Patricia White points out, the equation of moral with religious is dangerous, because citizens should understand that the religious may not always be good and the good may not always be religious.<sup>10</sup>

But in a democracy a descriptive civics programme is insufficient. Pupils need more than knowledge. They need to be able to question received knowledge; they need skills, they need values and they need the opportunity to participate in situations which will allow them to practise these.

The UK National Commission on Education, confirming the importance of citizenship, highlights two important developments in modern life:

1. The ever-increasing weight of legislation, and use of the law to regulate many aspects of daily life, has not been matched by corresponding efforts to acquaint citizens with the information they need to exercise their rights and duties with understanding and confidence.
2. Growing cynicism about politics, combined with a decline in voting amongst the youngest electors, suggests commitment to the democratic processes may be eroding. Accountability of government to

the people requires an educated and informed citizenry capable of making reasoned moral judgments concerning issues in the public domain.<sup>11</sup>

Should citizenship be part of the core curriculum? Barbara Lomas referred to the findings of the Speaker’s commission, and in its education policy paper, *Excellence for Everyone*, Labour has called for citizenship lessons to be taught alongside the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools.<sup>12</sup> Northern Ireland, of course, presents the additional challenge of education for citizenship in a deeply divided society.

**T**he Flemish framework,<sup>13</sup> which draws on several of the above models, represents a useful foundation on which to base a four-stranded approach. The main pillars of this system are politico-legal, socio-economic and socio-cultural.

The politico-legal pillar deals, *inter alia*, with aspects of power, negotiation, lobbying, decision-making, institutions and procedures, and international co-operation. The socio-economic area pays attention to labour relations, trade, welfare and the roles of government and media. The socio-cultural deals with aspects of education, leisure, and family life.

To these three strands we would add

a fourth: human rights education. This should incorporate an element of history, which would be distinct from history as a singular academic pursuit.

This history would serve two functions. First, it would be a tool with which to understand why human rights are being taught—the history of the last two or three centuries can be understood at least in part as the struggle to institute human rights.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, an introduction to the course of Northern Ireland’s history would provide a standardising buffer to ‘knowledge’ picked up on the street or in the home. It would at least equip students with the ability critically to assess knowledge handed down from other sources.

Human rights education also implies that pupils should know about human rights and be motivated to act in accordance with them.<sup>15</sup> Protection of human rights, after all, depends on people knowing what their rights are: “Human rights and citizenship education can almost be viewed as education for self-interest; for if we protect and promote human rights, we may succeed in preventing the human rights abuses not just of others but of ourselves.”<sup>16</sup>

While the nomenclature of such a new, age-appropriate, compulsory subject is important, it is also important to remember that the young people we surveyed

were unafraid of naming it ‘political education’. It may be that softer terminology is required to sell the concept to parents, politicians and educationalists, but the content of the subject needs to be robust. The Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment should seek funding to research the name, content, design and delivery of such a subject.

Virtually all these proposals have relevance to the training of teachers. It is clearly vital that we introduce these ideas to the next generation of teachers from the beginning of their careers. Ken Fogelman argues that changing traditional attitudes, and understanding the implications of new political and economic structures, implies a substantial programme of professional development—it’s a major challenge for teachers to develop the confidence and ability to handle such issues in the classroom. But they must be dealt with there. And to do that, teachers must have the trust of parents and politicians.<sup>17</sup>

In sketching a backdrop to the review of the youth service, Mr Ancram asserted that “the present framework is not sufficiently flexible to acknowledge the differing needs of many young people. Youth groups also differ in format and operation and for many the implementation of all of the existing core requirements is an unrealistic and inappropriate goal. In

addition, with the passage of time, new issues such as health and the environment have become important, but are not reflected sufficiently in the curriculum requirement.”<sup>18</sup> Our survey suggests that political education is also important.

Thompson and Harvey have alluded to the controversy associated with some youth work and this is borne out by investigations into high stress among youth workers. One reported investigation found that “those employed in the city’s youth clubs have been enduring intimidation and violence. Some youth workers fear their work—particularly in the areas of drugs and when dealing with the police—could place their lives at risk from paramilitaries.”<sup>19</sup>

Due to lack of resources and training, most youth clubs are unable to provide opportunities for political discussion. Where the will is there, resources should, where possible, be found. Where that is not possible, clubs can adopt the ‘school ethos’ model of management. Youth clubs are more malleable than schools for experiments in democratic participation. They can provide *de facto* opportunities to practise democracy, even where they cannot offer formalised discussion.

While the school ethos model allows for limited participatory democracy (as via school councils), as many children as possible need to experience politics in

other, more real, contexts for example through community debate, or in promoting their agenda to a district council. But how best to engender these opportunities? Experience from French and English towns may prove germane.

**I**n 1979, International Year of the Child, Schiltigheim, in Alsace, created a structure for young people to express their views on town life and offer suggestions for change. This, first, structure was called the ‘child town council’. There are now more than 700 youth town councils in France, with a national co-ordinating body—the Association National des Conseils d’Enfants et des Jeunes.<sup>20</sup>

The ANACEJ is the resource centre of the councils, “a crossroads of dialogue and experience”, a place for information and research, a lobby in favour of young people in dialogue and in town life. Each council is autonomous, and towns are free to design and develop their own arrangements—though commonly councils are co-ordinated by civil servants, with regular meetings with the mayor and issue experts as required. But all hold as a key objective the creation of places of expression for the young.

Usually a certain number of young people—about 30 for a town of 25,000—are elected for one to three years by their friends at schools, in clubs, associations

and so on. The age of councillors varies from one town to another: from 10 to 13, or 10 to 15, in those towns which encourage early participation in municipal life, or from 15 to 18 in those which think that dialogue with an older age group can be more profitable.

After the elections (often held every two years), the young people meet the mayor in a public plenary session where they present all their criticisms and suggestions. They talk about town planning, road safety, everyday life, integration problems in different areas, schools, worries about future employment, culture. Young and old get to know each other better—adults bringing realism, knowledge and practice of town management; young councillors bringing enthusiasm, ideas and a fresh approach to both problems and solutions. During these discussions between mayor and young councillors, real training in democracy emerges.

Just as *les conseils des jeunes* in France have provided opportunities for young people to be inserted into the system, as opposed to being rejected by it, similar initiatives have developed in the UK. The Scarman inquiry after the 1981 Brixton riots in London led to the establishment of police and community groups. But the PCGs attracted mainly adults, and were not a welcoming place for younger

people. Greater Manchester Police Authority thus initiated a project, in consultation with local schools,<sup>21</sup> which resulted in a term-time youth forum being held in several schools—aimed at improving liaison and consultation between police and young people, and also between young people and other sectors of their community. This structure has enabled young people to express their views to the police in a non-confrontational context, to give a voice to their concerns, through to the police authority, and to address any matters arising, where necessary in partnership with the police.

There are obvious problems with direct application of this initiative to Northern Ireland, but what is of interest is that these fora have developed into a Youth Advisory Board in Manchester, which brings together students, local authority representatives and the community education service, to deal with matters of concern to young people within the local authority's ambit. In turn, the latter has developed its own youth policy.

The key point from both these experiences is that elected local government has provided opportunities for young people to express their opinions in a localised environment where they are listened to—opportunities to practise democracy.

Among the many ideas young people in our research offered, as enhancing

their representation and participation, was a political party for young people or a youth parliament. But the mechanics of these were unspecified. Yet if they were quick to replicate the language and format of existing structures, the issues they prioritised were different.

A mechanism which collects, distils and feeds the views of young people into the policy process is necessary. The successful mechanisms devised in France and England are thus instructive. While not directly applicable, it is possible to conceive of a hybrid arrangement, whereby youth platforms could cluster geographically around district councils, which would lend administrative support; and politically around the relevant agencies dealing with whatever issue was prioritised for the term of office—be it roads, health, education or whatever. District councils could initiate, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, discussions with local schools and clubs, to test the popularity of embarking on such schemes. They do not all have to look the same, or even link up; variable geometry can be the order of the day.

What is clear, however, is that we will not, unilaterally, coerce young people into structures that apparently offer little to them.<sup>22</sup> These Youth District Councils should be taken seriously, and the input from young people should be taken

regularly—to help inform, or establish, council youth policy. The emergence of Community Youth Forums, such as in the Shankill or Poleglass, would not cut across such a proposal. They present valuable opportunities to voice concerns in the community, and could fit (if they so desired) with any youth district council without ceding any autonomy.

There are auxiliary benefits. Talent could be spotted early, and youth representatives steered to programmes run by a Northern Ireland training institute for young politicians. Such an institute could be housed in the political training programme already offered by the Ulster People's College. The syllabus here might include a more advanced level of what young people have been studying in their citizenship education courses at school. In this way, concerns about the conduct and competence of current politicians might be addressed.

**A**nother instrument of government in Northern Ireland is, of course, the quango. Only one out of 1,343 appointees on a public body in the region is aged under 30.<sup>23</sup> Labour has indicated that it would be prepared to address this. Describing the absence of young members as “alarming”, the shadow Northern Ireland secretary, Mo Mowlam, has said Labour would encourage young people to

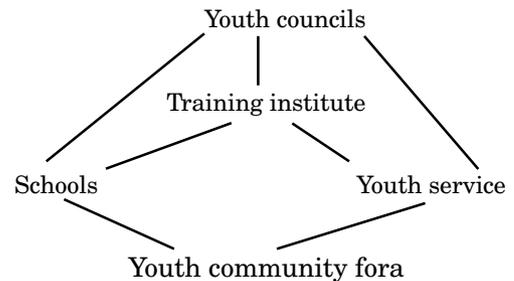
promote themselves, and urged trade unions, businesses, councils and community groups to propose youth representatives themselves.<sup>24</sup> When 27 per cent of all unemployed people are under 25, for instance, it seems sensible to have someone at least close to that age sitting on the Training and Employment Agency.

In France, many consider the youth town councils a new form of civic education, complementing that given at school. Such a symbiotic relationship may not be instantly possible, but, if seeded at an early stage in a young person's development, civic education can bring a harvest of greater stability. After all, if young

people do not receive political education from schools or the youth sector, from whom and in what way do they?<sup>25</sup> And, in a deeply divided society, should the acquisition of such knowledge be left to chance?

Our survey pointed to a change in the attitudes of young people as they grew older and this is corroborated by findings in the UK: "Mercifully too, political knowledge increases as teenagers get closer to voting age, independently of education".<sup>26</sup> The question is: where does this information come from?<sup>27</sup> Sex education in school yards results in unplanned pregnancies; does political education on the streets maintain sectarianism?

The system we envisage thus looks like:



Stitched onto the patchwork of a segregated school system and a retarded local government formula, these measures are limited in scope. But they may contribute to a climate where the expressed

wishes of parents for integration<sup>28</sup> will be lent weight and resources, and where the mystique of the chamber is cast down.

One other salient theme to flag up, in conclusion, was that compromise was not feared by the young people we surveyed. The sense of alienation may have been acute, but there was an ability to see that compromise was necessary if they were to have the things they dreamed of: peace, a fair justice system, a police service they could trust, representation and participation in a society they could call their own: “Children and young people are citizens in their own right. To suggest that they are citizens in waiting is to deny them their rights to participate and a denial of the value of their perspective and experience.”<sup>29</sup>

But their perspectives and experience are all too often denied. As one participant in our study said, “They just don’t care.” Forty-one per cent of the population of Northern Ireland is under 25 years of age, well above the European Union average,<sup>30</sup> yet only 78 per cent of 17 year-olds are in full-time education, compared with 90 per cent in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands; 60 per cent of pupils do not take ‘A’ levels.

There is no doubt that teenage life is tough: teenage pregnancy rates in Northern Ireland are 80 per cent higher than in the republic; incidences of drinking

and smoking among teenagers in the region are some of the worst in the northern hemisphere.<sup>31</sup> Last year, 52,000 young people from Northern Ireland called Childline and one third of children live in poverty. Between 1973 and 1992, out of a total of 1,970 ‘punishment’ attacks, over 80 per cent of victims were 16-25 year-olds.<sup>32</sup>

It’s not just in Northern Ireland, of course, that the young are denied voice and vocation. ‘Testament of Youth’, a MORI poll carried out for the Trade Union Congress in the UK, found young workers “disenchanted with traditional politics”. It called on politicians, employers and trade unions “to listen to their concerns and deliver a new package of rights against exploitation”.<sup>33</sup> Commenting on the results, the TUC general secretary, John Monks, said: “Young workers are too often treated like school kids. Policy makers and employers who ignore young people’s plea for fair treatment are storing up trouble for the future.”<sup>34</sup>

Other recent studies have found themes similar to the ones we have uncovered: alienation and disenchantment from traditional politics, but not total disengagement from society.<sup>35</sup> It surely matters, in representative politics, if large interest groups are excluded (or exclude themselves) from policy discussion: policy thereby becomes the preserve

of a class of policy-makers likely to be uninformed by direct experience.<sup>36</sup> Given the average age of a Northern Ireland MP is 61, it is unsurprising that they do not attract young people to their coterie, and this is reflected in their policies and work, as our respondents confirm.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child advocates that children should become actors in their own development. That development surely includes the right to contribute and be heard in the society of which one is part. This study shows that young people in Northern Ireland want representation and, moreover, they value it. They care; they want to connect. We must offer compelling channels for them to do so. **DD**

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ian Davies, 'Citizenship: a review', *Citizenship*, vol 4, no 2, 1995, pp 33-6

<sup>2</sup> Ekatarina Rachmanova and Vladimir Severukhin, 'Teaching human rights as the main trend in educational reform in Russia', *Citizenship*, vol 4, no 2, 1995. Teaching human rights to pupils and students in Russia has brought conflicts with parents and teachers. Many pupils have come to the conclusion that human rights do not hold any relevance for them because of where they live: Russia works according to its own laws and traditions and international law has little influence over its behaviour.

<sup>3</sup> Northern Ireland Information Service, press release, October 15th 1995

<sup>4</sup> See Ruth Firer's 'Shalom education in Israel during the peace process (1993-4)', *Citizenship*,

vol 4, no 2, 1995, for a fuller discussion of this point in relation to the Israeli system.

<sup>5</sup> Davies, op cit, p36

<sup>6</sup> See her chapter in this volume.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Barr, *Citizenship*, vol 4, no 1, p3; H Entwistle, *Political Education in a Democracy*, Routledge, London, 1972; Don Rowe, 'Education for citizenship: a world concern', *Citizenship*, vol 3, no 2, 1994, pp 3-6

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Trafford, *Sharing Power In Schools: Raising Standards*, Ticknall, Education Now Books, 1993, p3

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p3

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Rowe, op cit. See also Patricia White, 'Citizenship and spiritual and moral development', *Citizenship*, vol 3, no 2, 1994, pp 7-8

<sup>11</sup> *Citizenship*, vol 3, no 2, 1994, p22

<sup>12</sup> 'Parliament's new moral fire', *Guardian* (Education), October 29th 1996

<sup>13</sup> Bart Maes, 'Education for citizenship in the Flemish secondary education curriculum', *Citizenship*, vol 4, no 2, 1995, p10

<sup>14</sup> Glyn Phillips, 'Human rights and education', *Citizenship*, vol 3, no 2, 1994

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Cheryl Law, 'Teaching for freedom: Amnesty International's human rights education programme', *Citizenship*, vol 4, no 1, 1995, pp 13-15

<sup>17</sup> Ken Fogelman, 'Why is citizenship education important?', *Citizenship*, vol 4, no 2, 1995

<sup>18</sup> Northern Ireland Information Service, press release, March 28th 1996

<sup>19</sup> Internal Belfast Education and Library Board report—see 'Terror stalks youth workers', *Irish News*, November 7th 1996

<sup>20</sup> *The Children and Youth Town Councils: an experiment of involvement in the Town's Life*, Association National des Conseils d'Enfants et de Jeunes briefing paper, Paris, 1994

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Orford, 'Giving young people a voice', *Citizenship*, vol 4, no 2, 1995, pp 53-5

<sup>22</sup> Howard Williamson, 'Polarising the young',

*New Times*, November 9th 1996

<sup>23</sup> This figure represents those positions filled and is exclusive of tribunal membership and those who are not government appointees (eg where elected councillors have *de facto* status) as of April 1st 1995; see *Public Bodies 1995*, HMSO, London, 1995, pp 32-44

<sup>24</sup> Mowlam hits out at age profile of north's quangos', *Irish News*, December 7th 1996

<sup>25</sup> David Walker, 'Young people, politics and the media', in Helen Roberts and Darshan Sachdev eds, *Young People's Social Attitudes*, Barnardos, Essex, 1996, p126

<sup>26</sup> Alison Park, 'Teenagers and their politics', in Roger Jowell, John Curtice, Alison Park, Lindsay Brook and Daphne Ahrendt with Katarina Thomson, *British Social Attitudes: The 12th Report*, Social and Community Planning Research, London, 1995, p47

<sup>27</sup> Walker, op cit, p127

<sup>28</sup> Polls consistently show that most young people (and their parents) are in favour of integration in primary schools, but only 2 per cent of children in Northern Ireland are in integrated schools. In 1995 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child told the government to make greater provision for integrated schools. The Department of Education's response was *Framework for Transformation*, which proposed that schools would be able to acquire integrated status even if only 5 per cent of their students came from a minority community. The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education recently forced the department to raise the threshold to 10 per cent.

<sup>29</sup> Owen Keenan (European Child Welfare Forum), speech to 'Can young people break the glass ceiling?' conference, as reported by Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Belfast, December 1996

<sup>30</sup> In 1993 this was 32 per cent—*Eurostat Yearbook '95: A Statistical Eye on Europe 1983-1993*, Office for Official Publications of the European

Communities, Luxembourg, 1995 p80

<sup>31</sup> 'Trauma of teenage lifestyle revealed', *Irish News*, September 5th 1996

<sup>32</sup> 'Can young people ...?' conference report

<sup>33</sup> 'Testament of Youth', MORI poll for the TUC, cited in 'Politicians "lack awareness" of young workers' problems', *Guardian*, August 22nd 1996

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*

<sup>35</sup> Research on the future of the voluntary sector shows young people are more open than other age groups to a political role for the voluntary sector and are happy to give their money to organisations involved in politics. They also show more support than any other age cohort for campaign groups working for human rights, single parents and the unemployed. [Natalie Fenton, Katherine Gasking and Meriel Vlaeminck, *Young People's Attitudes to the Voluntary Sector*, NCVO, London 1996, cited in the *Guardian* (Society), September 4th 1996]. The British Youth Council found that a fifth of 16-25 year-olds were not registered to vote, four times as many as in any other age group. [*Young People: Changing the face of British Politics*, briefing paper, BYC, London, 1993.] And, in another study, only one respondent out of 385 said that politics was important to them. [*Second Front*, Brighton District Council sample survey of 16-19 year olds, *Guardian*, June 19th 1995.]

<sup>36</sup> Walker, op cit, p126

# Executive summary and recommendations

**1.1** Young people are interested in and want to know about politics.

**1.2** We found 75 per cent of those surveyed were interested in what is happening politically in Northern Ireland, with more than half saying they would like to be more involved in the political process. But only 3 per cent said they were involved in a traditional political party compared with 12 per cent involved in a campaigning group.

**1.3** Seventy-nine per cent said young people should have the opportunity to learn about politics in school.

**1.4** There was a link between gender and political involvement. While only 3 per cent of our sample were in a political party, this applied to 5 per cent of young men but only 1 per cent of young women. By contrast, 13 per cent of young women, as against 11 per cent of young men, said

they were involved with a campaigning group.

**1.5** There was a link between education and political interest. Interest was higher in those at university (91 per cent), the employed (86 per cent), those at school (80 per cent) and those at further education colleges (79 per cent). By contrast, only 62 per cent of those who were on government training schemes said they were interested in Northern Ireland politics, a view echoed by only 50 per cent of the small number of unemployed in our sample.

**2.1** We have a strong body of young people with sharp and defined emotions and perceptions about the politics of the society they live in, who do not have any positive avenues through which to contribute to its civic or political life. It is this which frustrates them and which they wish to see addressed. They do not believe that

they can sort it all out, but they do believe they have a right to attempt to contribute, be it through ‘youth coalitions’ on the broader political agendas or political education in a new and practical form that is not wholly academic.

**2.2** But there is an ambivalence about teaching of political education in schools: teaching about duties and responsibilities is accepted, teaching about rights and controversial issues is not. The concept of the citizen, not subject, is an uncomfortable one for large sections of the population. Resistance to political education is more likely to come from parents and politicians. The young people we surveyed and spoke to were unafraid of ‘political education’.

**2.3** Education for citizenship is important in a democratic society and cannot be left to chance. Northern Ireland presents the additional challenge of education for citizenship in a deeply divided society.

**2.4** Pupils need more than knowledge. They need to be able to question received knowledge; they need skills, they need values and they need the opportunity to participate in situations which will allow them to practise these.

**2.5** We suggest the delivery of political

education based on four pillars: politico-legal, socio-economic, socio-cultural, and human rights with history.

**2.6** The Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment should research the name, content, design and delivery of such a subject.

**2.7** At present there needs to be a statutory requirement for staff to attend certain EMU/CH courses.

**2.8** Teacher training should introduce a compulsory module on Handling Controversial Issues/Political Awareness.

**3.1** These changes need to be augmented by other agencies who offer services to young people.

**3.2** Youth clubs can, by involving young people in the running of services, provide *de facto* opportunities to practise democracy, even where resources do not allow for formalised discussion.

**3.3** Northern Ireland’s media could create a regular prime-time slot for young producers, writers and journalists.

**4.1** As many children as possible need to experience politics in other, more real, contexts for example through community

debate, or in promoting their agenda to a district council.

**4.2** Youth platforms could cluster geographically around district councils which would lend administrative support, and politically around the relevant agencies dealing with whatever issue was prioritised for their term of office (1-2 years)—be it roads, health, education or whatever. District councils could initiate, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, discussions with local schools and youth clubs, to test the popularity of embarking on such schemes.

**5.3** These youth district councils should be taken seriously, and the input from young people should be heard regularly—to help inform, or establish, council youth policy.

**5.4** A Northern Ireland training institute for young politicians could be housed in the political training programme already offered by the Ulster People's College.

**6.1** In our survey, there was a tangible desire for improvement in the quality of life locally and more broadly. This was coupled with a strong thrust amongst each focus group that the political process would have to be inclusive, with all aspirations represented and all voices

heard. Compromise as a principle was desirable, and not feared.

**6.2** The study shows that young people in Northern Ireland want representation and, moreover, they value it. They would welcome both the teaching of political education in schools and the creation of platforms upon which to practise this knowledge. They care; they want to connect. We must offer compelling channels for them to do so. 

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