

Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly The Single Transferable Vote System

At the polling station

Voters in each constituency vote for as many candidates as they wish in order of preference. Each voting paper is checked to see if it has been correctly filled in. Those that are not (spoilt papers) are removed from the count to give the number of valid votes.

At the count

A quota of votes is calculated for each constituency. This is the number of votes needed by a candidate to get elected. The quota is calculated using the formula below:

$$\text{Quota} = \left\{ \frac{\text{Total number of valid votes cast in constituency (V)}}{\text{Number of seats (S) + 1}} \right\} + 1$$

In Northern Ireland all our constituencies are 6-member, i.e. the number of seats (S) is 6, this means the quota is 1/7th of the votes cast plus 1 vote.

Example: In the 2011 Assembly Election, 35,487 valid votes were cast in the constituency of Lagan Valley. The quota of votes required therefore for a member to be elected was 5,975.

$$\left\{ \frac{35487}{6 + 1} \right\} + 1 = 5070$$

NB: The whole number is always used in calculating the quota. Should there be a fraction, the numbers after the decimal point are ignored. For example, in calculation above, 5069.5714 becomes 5069.

Activity 1: Calculating the Quota (number of votes a candidate needs to get elected)

Using the Total Valid Vote figures given below, calculate the quotas for the following constituencies in the 2011 Northern Ireland Assembly Election.

	Valid Vote	Quota
a) Belfast North	33,470	
b) East Antrim	29,023	

	Valid Vote	Quota
c) Foyle	38,847	
d) Upper Bann	42,362	

How are votes counted and preferences transferred?

Voting papers are sorted into bundles according to first preferences and counted. Any candidate reaching or exceeding the quota is elected. If they are elected with more 1st preference votes than the quota, their extra votes are called a surplus.



