Northern Ireland Assembly

How Do We Elect MLAs?

Area of Learning:
Learning for Life and Work: *Local and Global Citizenship*

Learning Intentions
By completing the activities, pupils will have the opportunity to:

- research and create a party manifesto for presentation to the class; and
- participate in a class election to gain an active understanding of the Single Transferable Voting system used in Northern Ireland.

Statutory Requirements
The online and class activities will contribute to the following statutory requirements:

Learning for Life and Work: *Local and Global Citizenship*
Pupils should have opportunities to:

- Investigate the basic characteristics of democracy.

Single Transferable Vote

Cross-Curricular Skills/Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

The online and class activities will provide pupils with the opportunity to develop the following skills and capabilities:

Communication	In the follow-up activity, pupils must work together to create an electoral campaign speech and poster. They will have the opportunity to communicate information and ideas in a clear and organised way. They will also develop, express and present ideas in a variety of forms and formats, using traditional and digital resources.
Working with Others	In the Follow-Up Activity, pupils will help assign team roles and work with others to achieve a goal. They will also come up with reasoned arguments in order to influence others in their class.

Overview

The Single Transferable Vote video in the **Years 8–10** section of the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service website explains and demonstrates a simplified version of the voting system we use in Northern Ireland.

The Starter Activities begin the preparation for the eventual class election by researching the current parties elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly and their manifestos in Activity 1; before dividing the class into parties to create a manifesto and other materials for their election campaign in Activity 2.

The Follow-Up Activity gives pupils an opportunity to present their manifestos and then vote for candidates using the Single Transferable Vote system explained in the online video.

Starter Activities

Activity 1

Using the whiteboard in conjunction with the Inside Parliament Buildings tour in the **Years 8–10** section of the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service website, navigate to the NIA portrait bubble on the right wall of the *S*enate Chamber. Click on the bubble and select the middle photograph to display the portrait of the members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, elected in 1998:

• Can the pupils recognise any of the members?
• Are they able to name which party each member belongs to?
• What parties are still elected to the Assembly? Why?
• Do they know what the party manifestos are?

In pairs, ask pupils to research and list the different political parties represented at the present Northern Ireland Assembly with the help of the following resources:

• The Constituency Map activity under the **Who Are Your MLAs?** link in the **Years 8–10** section of the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service website

• www.niassembly.gov.uk

When the list is complete they should visit the websites of the parties on the list and look at different party manifestos, including the style and policies (views on how to deal with issues). Pairs should be asked to report their findings on different parties. Pupils should discuss the purpose of a manifesto and what makes it effective.

Activity 2

Divide the class into groups that will each represent a political party preparing for an election. Each group can be given one of the party profile cards from Resource 1, or create their own party profile.

Making a Manifesto
As a political party, each group must create a slogan, poster and short campaign speech for the election that will take place at the end of the lesson. Each group should:

• nominate a party leader to deliver the speech;
• assign group roles to create the poster and slogan and help write the speech;
• ensure the speech explains three main policies to the rest of the class and aims to win as many votes as possible; and
• schedule a time to deliver the speech and hold the election using the Single Transferable Vote system.

Online Activity

Voting
The Single Transferable Vote video animation under the **How do we elect MLAs?** link in the **Years 8–10** section of the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service website, describes the voting system used in Northern Ireland: a form of proportional representation (PR).

The video animation plays for 1 minute 41 seconds, to view most effectively on a whiteboard:

- Click on the full screen button at the bottom right of the video player to play the video animation full screen.
- When finished, press the *Esc* button to exit full screen mode.

Before viewing the video, remind the pupils that they will shortly be delivering their speeches to win the votes of the rest of the class. Voting in an election is the system we use to choose the people to represent us and is an important way to participate in democracy.

Related Activities

The **Years 8–10** section of the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service website contains other multimedia resources which may be related to this activity:

How Do We Elect MLAs?
The interactive Constituency Map can be used to explore the names/location of the constituencies of the Northern Ireland Assembly elections, as well as research the MLAs/parties representing each constituency.

Evolution of Devolution
This is a timeline of historical events 1900–1999, including the implications of partition on constituency boundaries and proportional representation in early Northern Ireland.

MLA for a Week
Get the bigger picture of what an MLA does in the week by taking on that role. As well as juggling a busy diary, other tasks to participate in include writing a speech, question time and press conferences.

The Democracy Cookbook – Northern Ireland Assembly Special contains additional information and activities related to the Northern Ireland Assembly elections and the Single Transferable Vote system, including the 'Voting timeline – Northern Ireland' activity on page 21 and the 'Single Transferable Fruit' game on page 29. The Democracy Cookbook can be found in the Northern Ireland section of the Electoral Commission website at: www.dopolitics.org.uk

Follow-Up Activity

Presenting a Manifesto

The pupils nominated as leader of each party are the candidates standing for election. Each leader should give their speech to the class and present their manifesto, with the rest of the party supporting by displaying their poster and slogan.

If time permits, each leader may take questions from the class.

Voting

When each party has had the opportunity to present its manifesto and take questions, recap how the class will now elect two representatives by voting for the candidates using the Single Transferable Vote system.

As an alternative to the paper method detailed below, the class could use one of the many STV ballot counters available on the internet to vote. You can find an example of an STV ballot counter in **Session 4**, **Activity 2** section of the EU4U resource. This resource can be found in the **Key Stage 3**, **Learning for Life and Work** section of the Northern Ireland Curriculum website at: www.nicurriculum.org.uk

Using Resource 2 as a template, give your pupils a ballot sheet with the name of each party on it. Ask them to mark '1' beside their first preference candidate, '2' beside their second preference candidate and so on. Encourage them to vote according to the policies and performance of candidates. They do not have to vote for the group they belonged to – the result of the first count will be a foregone conclusion if they do. There are two seats available. When they have voted, they should submit their ballot sheet.

To decide on the two candidates elected, use the following simplified version of STV:

• Sort the ballot papers into bundles, according to first preferences (number one votes) and count these.
• The candidate with the highest number of first preference votes is declared the first elected candidate. Keep a note of the totals.
• Set all of the ballot papers aside **except the bundle of winning first preference votes**.
• Sort these ballot papers into piles according to second preference (number two votes).
• Count them and add the total for each candidate to their first count total – the candidate with the highest number is the second elected candidate.

Congratulate the successful parties and evaluate why the pupils in the class voted for their manifesto. Complete the activity by discussing the reasons why people do/do not vote.

Resource 1: Party Manifestos

Violet Party

Policies:

- Consult all pupils about the appointment of teachers at their school. If over 75 percent of pupils sign a petition against a teacher in their school, that teacher must be sacked.
- Raise the age you can take the driving test from 17 to 21, to reduce deaths and dangerous driving on the roads.
- Introduce an on-the-spot £150 fine for litterers (regardless of age).

Indigo Party

Policies:

- Make all schools single sex (research indicates that girls perform better in single sex schools).
- Raise the minimum wage for under 21s to the same level as over 21s and introduce the same minimum wage for under 16s.
- Force pupils who cause disruption throughout the year at school to attend school during the summer.

Crimson Party

Policies:

- Allow fast-food companies to take over the provision of meals in schools.
- Give all under 16s free travel on public transport.
- Ban sales of violent video games to under 21s.

Ultramarine Party

Policies:

- Create free fitness 'boot camps', to tackle the obesity crisis and improve the population's fitness.
- Start and end post-primary schools two hours later, to match teenagers' sleeping patterns.
- Make any teenager found guilty of anti-social behaviour wear luminous yellow overalls when in public for one year.

Jade Party

Policies:

- Exempt children under 16 from having to pay Value Added Tax (VAT) on goods that they buy (meaning a reduction of 20% on most items).
- Allow pupils to work from home by making more lessons available online.
- Introduce a new waste collection system weighing the waste produced by each household. People creating too much waste pay a £250 fine.

Resource 2: Ballot Paper

Put the numbers 1–5 beside the parties you want to vote for, with 1 for your first choice, 2 for your second choice and so on ...

Party Name	Your Vote