

Getting involved - have your say!

KEY:

N: Narrator

(MUSIC)

N: The word Democracy means "government for the people, by the people". In Northern Ireland we elect 108 MLAs* to pass laws and make decisions on our behalf. Even though you're probably too young to vote, you can still make your voice heard about issues that concern you.

There are lots of ways to find out what goes on in the Assembly. MLAs meet in the Assembly Chamber on Monday and Tuesday. This is called 'plenary' and it is when issues are debated, laws are voted on and Ministers are questioned about their work. These sessions are open to the public, so you can see for yourself what's being discussed.

Most Committee meetings take place on Wednesday and Thursday. They're also open to the public. During committees, you can hear MLAs scrutinising the work of ministers in real detail. Committees have the power to call witnesses. These people are experts in their field and you can listen to them give evidence about a particular issue, be it health, education or the environment.

On Fridays, MLAs work in their constituency office and this is an opportunity for you to meet them and raise issues. If you can't visit Parliament Buildings, you can still find out what's going on using the Assembly website. Plenary debates and committee sessions are streamed live and you can read what was said in the Official Report.

Thousands of students visit Parliament Buildings every year. The Assembly's Education Service runs programmes designed to explain the work of the Assembly, and your school can book one of these visits by contacting Education Service.

The work of the Assembly often features on local TV news and you will always see journalists around the Great Hall looking for their next big story. You can follow the Assembly on Twitter or Facebook and watch features on the Assembly's YouTube channel.

There are lots of ways to highlight issues that matter to you, no matter what age you are. You can get in contact with your MLAs: just send them an email or write a letter. Go to the Assembly website to find out the names of your MLAs and their contact details. You can also meet MLAs face-to-face in their constituency office on Friday.

Another way of making your voice heard is to organise a petition. Once you've enough signatures, send it on to one of your MLAs. Lots of pressure groups have been set up to campaign about certain issues, like the environment, poverty or road safety. You could set up a pressure group of your own, maybe using Facebook. Everyone has the right to protest if it's done in a lawful way. Peaceful protests show the government that a lot of people really care about an issue.

While you can't vote until you're 18, you can join a political party and most parties have youth wings. Viral videos, the radio, Facebook and Twitter are all useful ways to get publicity

for your campaign. It's not only easy to keep up to date with the decisions made by the Assembly - you can also keep the Assembly up to date on the issues that matter to you.

*The number of MLAs was reduced from 108 to 90 in the March 2017 election