

# Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s PowerPoint

# Life in the 1920s

## Teacher Notes, Prompt Questions and Links

You may wish to refer to the background information and use some of the prompt questions below while showing the [Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s PowerPoint](#) to your class.

Northern Ireland @ 100 | Key Stages 2 and 3

Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

**Introduction**

This presentation explores what it was like to live in Northern Ireland in the 1920s. Life in the 1920s was very different from how it is today.

As you explore the presentation think about how life has changed over the past 100 years.

### Slide 3: Introduction

Highlight that since the 1920s there have been many changes which have affected people's lives and improved living standards in Northern Ireland. You may find it useful to ask your pupils to write down their thoughts or questions about the information on each slide.

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Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

**Children at School, Work and Play – School Leaving Age**

Children could leave school at age 11, when they finished primary school. They could then start working at age 12.



Dardrum School children in 1922

### Slide 4: Children at School, Work and Play – School Leaving Age

Most children went to primary schools and could leave after finishing primary school at age 11.

#### Prompt questions

- Would you like to be able to leave school at age 11?
- Why do you think some children left school at age 11?
- When do you think the school leaving age was raised?
- Note: It was not until 1947 that secondary schools were introduced in Northern Ireland and the school leaving age was raised to 15 (and in 1989 to age 16).
- What are the benefits for children of raising the school leaving age?

#### Useful Links for Teachers

[Education Act \(Northern Ireland\) 1947](#)

([www.educationengland.org.uk](http://www.educationengland.org.uk))

[ESRC Cambridge University – Briefing paper: Northern Ireland](#)

([sec.hist.cam.ac.uk](http://sec.hist.cam.ac.uk))

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Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

1920

### Children at School, Work and Play – The 1926 Census

The table shows information from the Northern Ireland 1926 Census. It shows that boys and girls worked in fishing and agriculture. Children also worked in mines and quarries and in the textile industry.

Children's occupations

### Slide 5: Children at School, Work and Play – The 1926 Census

A census is carried out in Northern Ireland every ten years. This is a survey of the whole population. It gathers lots of useful information to help the government make decisions, plan and deliver services.

The Northern Ireland 1926 Census provides information about children and their occupations. It shows that many children, both boys and girls, left primary school at age 11 and started work at age 12. Some of the jobs included fishermen/women, farming, mining, working in the quarries or the textile/linen industry.

### Prompt questions

- Why did children have to work at such a young age?
- Would you like to have to start working at age 12?
- What other jobs do you think children did?
- Were there certain jobs that only boys did and others that girls did?
- Was life more challenging for children then than now?
- How would you cope with life in the 1920s?
- Was children's safety important then?
- What has changed about child employment since then?

### Useful Links for Teachers

[Northern Ireland 1926 Census – Reports](http://www.nisra.gov.uk) (www.nisra.gov.uk)  
[Statista: Population of Northern Ireland from 1821 to 2011](http://www.statista.com)  
 (www.statista.com)

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### Children at School, Work and Play - Games

Children played together in the street.

Popular 1920s street games included:

- Hopscotch
- Skipping
- Marbles
- Conkers
- Kick the can
- Handball
- Leap frog
- Tug
- Hide and seek.

These items were used in a popular children's game.

- What are the items?
- How is the game played?



### Slide 6: Children at School, Work and Play – Games

You may wish to explain these games to your pupils and bring in examples of marbles and conkers. Time permitting, the pupils could participate in some of the games. Explain that children continued to play many of the games until recently. The pupils could ask their parents and grandparents about playing these games or what other games they played.

#### Prompt questions

- Have you heard of or played any of these games?
- Are these games popular today? Why/Why not?
- Do you think they would be fun to play?
- What does the photograph show?  
*Answer: whip and top, also known as whip and peerie*
- What type of children's games are popular today?
- How have the games that children play today changed since the 1920s?

#### Useful Links for Pupils

[CCEA: Street and playground games \(CCEA NI@100 timeline\)](http://www.ccea.org.uk)  
(www.ccea.org.uk)

[Howcast: How to Play Marbles](http://www.youtube.com) (www.youtube.com)

Northern Ireland @ 100 | Key Stages 2 and 3

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### Entertainment - The Radio

By the late 1920s radio became the main source of entertainment and news.

The BBC began radio broadcasting in Northern Ireland on 15 September 1924.



Family listening to a radio programme

### Slide 7: Entertainment – The Radio

The radio was invented in the late 1800s. Very soon after its invention, radios started to be produced commercially. They became a common household item in Northern Ireland in the 1920s.

#### Prompt questions

- What type of radio programmes were broadcast in the 1920s?
- Were there radio programmes for children in the 1920s?
- How did the radio benefit people in Northern Ireland?
- Do you listen to the radio today?
- What do you listen to?
- Is the radio popular today?
- How has the radio changed over the years?

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### Useful Links for Pupils

[BBC Northern Ireland: Our Story – The History of the BBC in Northern Ireland](http://www.bbc.co.uk) (www.bbc.co.uk)

[Who Invented Radio?](http://www.study.com) (www.study.com)

[ITU: ICT DISCOVERY – How radio works](http://www.youtube.com) (www.youtube.com)

Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### Entertainment - The Cinema

In the 1920s going to the cinema was also becoming a popular pastime.

In the early 1920s people watched black and white films with no recorded sound. These were called silent movies.

A cinema pianist or organist would play music to accompany the film.

The Avenue Cinema, Belfast

### Slide 8: Entertainment – The Cinema

Felix the Cat was a popular cartoon character in the 1920s. Felix was one of the first cartoon characters, created in the USA in 1919. He appeared in cartoon comics, silent animations and later sound animations. Children in Northern Ireland may have read his comics or watched him in the cinema. Cartoons, movies and many other forms of entertainment that developed in Northern Ireland were influenced by other countries, particularly the USA.

Going to the cinema was becoming popular in Northern Ireland in the 1920s. In the early 1920s, people watched silent black and white films. These films had no soundtrack. Instead, the films would have been accompanied by a cinema pianist or organist. The first film to have sound, or 'talkie' film, was *The Jazz Singer*, which premiered on 6 October 1927.

### Prompt questions

- Was going to the cinema more popular in the 1920s than today?
- What do you imagine the experience of going to the cinema would be like in the 1920s?
- How have cinemas and the films changed over the past 100 years?

### Useful Links for Pupils

[British Pathe: Adventures of Felix the Cat](http://www.youtube.com) (www.youtube.com)

[BBC News: The Golden Age of Belfast Cinemas](http://www.bbc.co.uk) (www.bbc.co.uk)

[Old Cinemas of Northern Ireland](http://www.youtube.com) (www.youtube.com)

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Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### Entertainment - Dancing

Dancing was also popular. People went to local dance halls.

Music and dancing were influenced by what was happening in the USA.

Popular dances at the time included:

- The Charleston
- The Fox Trot
- The Black Bottom
- The Shimmy.



The Charleston

### Slide 9: Entertainment – Dancing

Another popular pastime in the 1920s was dancing. People went to dance halls to socialise and meet friends, to listen and dance to popular music of the day. Much of the music and many of the dances originated in the USA. Popular dances at the time included the Charleston, the Fox Trot, the Black Bottom and the Shimmy.

#### Prompt questions

- How did the popular dances at the time get their names?
- How would these dances have reached Northern Ireland from the USA?
- What are popular dances today?
- How is dancing different today?

#### Useful Links for Pupils

[How to dance The Charleston from the 1920s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (www.youtube.com)  
[1920s dances featuring the Charleston, the Peabody, Turkey Trot and more](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (www.youtube.com)  
[Evolution of Dance](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) (www.youtube.com)

Northern Ireland @ 100 | Key Stages 2 and 3

Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### Public Transport

The main forms of public transport were steam trains and trams.

There were very few cars, or automobiles as they were called then.

The automobile was still a fairly new invention. Very few people could afford to buy one.



1920s electric trams in Donegall Street, Belfast

### Slide 10: Public Transport

The main forms of public transport in Northern Ireland in the 1920s were trams and steam trains. The earliest trams operated in 1872 in Belfast. They were horse drawn. In 1905 the first electric tram was introduced. The trams ran along tram lines in the roads and were attached at the top to electric cables, which powered them. The last tram passenger service was in 1948. People would also have used the railways and taken steam trains to travel to different places. The last steam-hauled scheduled passenger train left on its journey from Bangor to Belfast in 1965.

#### Prompt questions

- Why were horse drawn trams replaced by electric trams?
- What do you imagine a journey in a horse drawn tram would be like?
- What would a journey on a steam train be like?
- How has transport in Northern Ireland changed over the years?

*Note: Today, cars are one of main forms of transport. At the end of March 2019 there were 980,000 registered cars in Northern Ireland. In 1915 there were only 9,850 in the whole of Ireland.*

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### Useful Links for Pupils

[Belfast Live: End of the line: Classic photos of Belfast's trams from first outing to final flourish](http://www.belfastlive.co.uk) (www.belfastlive.co.uk)

[Railway Preservation Society of Ireland: Irish Railway History](http://www.steamtrainsireland.com) (www.steamtrainsireland.com)

[Ulster Folk and Transport Museum](http://www.nmni.com) (www.nmni.com)

Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### Healthcare – Hospitals

Healthcare was provided by voluntary hospitals and doctors.

Voluntary hospitals provided care for people who could not afford to pay for a private doctor or hospital care.



1920s hospital ward for mothers and babies

### Slide 11: Healthcare – Hospitals

Healthcare was provided by voluntary hospitals and doctors for people who could not afford to pay privately for treatment. Voluntary hospitals included the Royal Victoria Hospital, the Mater Hospital and the City Hospital in Belfast. Voluntary hospitals relied mainly on generous donations from the wealthy.

### Prompt questions

- If you were sick in the 1920s, how would you feel about visiting the hospital?
- Would everyone have access to healthcare?
- How do you think treatments and care would differ from today's?
- What is the National Health Service (NHS)?
- When was the NHS established?
- How did the NHS change healthcare in Northern Ireland?

### Useful Links for Teachers

[Historic Hospitals](http://www.historic-hospitals.com) (www.historic-hospitals.com)

[Voluntary Hospitals Database – The Voluntary Hospitals in History](http://www.hospitalsdatabase.lshtm.ac.uk) (www.hospitalsdatabase.lshtm.ac.uk)

[The Irish News: Video: Documentary charts Belfast City Hospital evolution](http://www.irishnews.com) (www.irishnews.com)

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Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### Healthcare – Diseases

Diseases were difficult to treat. Many people died from tuberculosis, whooping cough, measles, diphtheria and influenza.

Antibiotics were not yet discovered and the development of vaccinations was in the early stages. Even minor infections could become life-threatening.



Felix the Cat

### Slide 12: Healthcare – Diseases

In the 1920s, there were many serious diseases which were life-threatening, such as:

- tuberculosis, or TB, which usually affects the person's lungs, making breathing difficult;
- whooping cough, which is called this because infected people develop a persistent cough for a long period and can make a high-pitched 'whoop' sound as they breathe in;
- measles, which affects people of all ages but especially children, who are particularly vulnerable to it;
- diphtheria, which is transmitted from person to person through direct contact or through the air and affects people's breathing; and
- influenza, or flu, which can cause a fever, cough, headaches and body aches and can be serious, especially for the elderly.

Vaccinations can protect people from many of these diseases. In the 1920s, vaccinations were at the early stage of research and development. Today they are available for all ages, with vaccinations being administered to children and babies to help protect them from diseases.

In the 1920s, sometimes minor wounds could become infected and become life-threatening. Today antibiotics are used to treat bacterial infections.

### Useful Links for Pupils

[The History of Vaccines Timeline](http://www.historyofvaccines.org) (www.historyofvaccines.org)

[Peekaboo Kidz: The Dr Binocs Show – Antibiotics](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

(www.youtube.com)

[Peekaboo Kidz: The Dr Binocs Show – Tuberculosis](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

(www.youtube.com)

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1920s

**Healthcare - Life Expectancy**

The average life expectancy in the early 1920s was:



55 years of age for males      60 years of age for females

### Slide 13: Healthcare – Life Expectancy

In the 1920s, the average life expectancy was 55 years for males and 60 years for females.

#### Prompt questions

- Are these life expectancies lower than today's?
- Note: In 2017–19, life expectancy in Northern Ireland was 78.8 years for males and 82.6 years for females.
- Why were life expectancies low in the 1920s?
- Why were females expected to live longer than males?
- What lifestyle choices are likely to increase your life expectancy?
- Why are we likely to live longer today?

#### Useful Link for Teachers

[Department of Health: Life Expectancy in Northern Ireland 2017–19](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)  
(www.health-ni.gov.uk)

Northern Ireland @ 100 | Key Stages 2 and 3

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**Healthcare - Dentistry**

Dentistry was just developing as a branch of medicine.

Visiting the dentist could be an unpleasant experience.

It usually meant having your teeth pulled or filled.



Dentist's surgery

### Slide 14: Healthcare – Dentistry

During the late 1850s, dentistry was developing as a branch of medicine in many countries. Before 1850 dentists had no training or qualifications. This changed after the 1858 Medical Act was passed, which required dentists to be trained and registered with the British Medical Council and led to universities being able to establish schools of dentistry. The School of Dentistry at Queen's University Belfast was established in 1919.

During the 1920s, dental treatment had to be paid for, visiting the dentist could be an unpleasant experience, and many poor people did not have the money to pay for treatment. A visit to the dentist usually meant having your teeth pulled or filled, which made many people afraid. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) was often used as an anaesthetic, and an electric drill was used and is still used today. The electric drill was invented in 1875 and replaced the foot-powered drill. This made drilling teeth slightly less painful, because it rotated much faster and was more efficient at removing decay from the tooth.

The formation of the NHS in 1948 meant that everyone in Northern Ireland had access to free dental treatment. However, by then, it was estimated that more than three quarters of the UK population over the age of 18 had complete dentures.

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### Prompt questions

- What was people's oral health like in the 1920s?
- Would you have been happy to visit the dentist in the 1920s?
- When was the modern toothbrush invented?
- How has dentistry changed in Northern Ireland since the 1920s?

### Useful Link for Teachers

[A History of The Queen's University of Belfast Dental School](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)  
(www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

### Useful Links for Pupils

[British Dental Association Timeline](http://www.bda.org) (www.bda.org)

[Smithsonian Channel: You Won't Believe What the First Toothbrush Was Made of](http://www.youtube.com) (www.youtube.com)

Northern Ireland @ 100 | Key Stages 2 and 3

Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s 1920s

### Poverty – Families Living in Poverty

Many families lived in poverty.

- Families often had little or no money for food and clothing.
- They also lived in poor housing conditions.
- Unemployment rates were high.

All this led to protests and social unrest.

1920s children in poverty

### Slide 15: Poverty – Families Living in Poverty

In the 1920s, Ireland and Britain were suffering from economic depression. This affected manufacturing industries including shipbuilding, engineering and linen, and resulted in people losing their jobs. At that time the working week was 48 hours, but because of the economic depression hours were reduced and there was a high unemployment rate. In October 1921 the rate of unemployment reached 16.3% in Northern Ireland and increased to between 20% and 23% from 1923 to 1926. Alongside this, the cost of living increased – by 133% in Northern Ireland compared to 110% in the rest of the UK. This resulted in people having to pay more for their essential foods and goods.

The 1911 National Insurance Act meant that workers who had made national insurance contributions could claim unemployment benefit. Workers who became unemployed could claim benefits for up to 15 weeks in a year, which helped; however, after that they, like many others, depended on poor relief. This contributed to many families living in poverty and in poor housing conditions. In 1922, the unemployed workers and members of the Labour Party and Committee for Unemployed Workers began to organise and hold regular public meetings to protest about unemployment and lack of government support.

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### Prompt questions

- What would it be like for a family living in poverty in the 1920s?
- How would children be affected by living in poverty?
- How would poverty affect people's health?
- Would living in poverty in the 1920s in Northern Ireland be different from living in poverty today?

### Useful Links for Teachers

[Creative Centenaries: 16 May 1921, Unemployment in Ireland Rises to 125,000](http://www.creativecentenaries.org) (www.creativecentenaries.org)

[Schools History: The National Insurance Act 1911](http://www.schoolshistory.org.uk) (www.schoolshistory.org.uk)

[Belfast Telegraph: Over 300,000 people living in absolute poverty in Northern Ireland \(May 14, 2020\)](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk) (www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk)

Northern Ireland @ 100 | Key Stages 2 and 3

Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### Poverty - The Workhouse

The Victorian workhouse was a place where poor and sick people were forced to go if they could not financially support themselves or their families.

Children were separated from their parents. Adults and children had to work in return for shelter, food and clothing.



Children in the workhouse

### Slide 16: Poverty – The Workhouse

Modelled on the new English Poor Law of 1834, Poor Laws were introduced in Ireland in 1838 and, from that time, the country was divided into 130 Unions run by Boards of Guardians. The Poor Laws were introduced to reduce the costs of looking after the poor, keep beggars off the streets and encourage people to work and support themselves. This led to the establishment of workhouses throughout Ireland and Britain, and the 1834 law formally established the Victorian workhouse system.

The first workhouses opened in 1836 in England and in 1841 in Ireland. The Victorian workhouses were created to be a place of last resort for poor and sick people. This included the elderly, unmarried mothers, the disabled and those with mental illnesses who were essentially forced to go because they could not financially support themselves or their families. On entering the workhouse, inmates were given workhouse clothing to wear. Families were separated, children from mothers and husbands from wives. Conditions were crowded and often insanitary. The inmates were not allowed to talk to one another and were expected to work long hours doing manual labour. Workhouse punishments included having food withheld and being locked up. Children were often treated cruelly and physically and emotionally abused. Each workhouse was managed by a locally elected Board of Guardians.

The workhouse system was abolished in Ireland (except Northern Ireland) in 1925, in England in 1930, and in Northern Ireland in 1945.

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## Teacher Notes, Prompt Questions and Links

### Prompt questions

- What was the purpose of the workhouse?
- What types of people would find themselves in the workhouse?
- Were there any benefits to having the workhouses?
- How would children feel being separated from their parents on entering the workhouse?

### Useful Links for Pupils

[The National Archives: 1834 Poor Law](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

(www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[Ireland Reaching Out: Ten Facts about Irish Workhouses](http://www.irelandxo.com)

(www.irelandxo.com)

### Useful Link for Teachers

[Poverty Relief and the Economic Crisis in the Region of Belfast from 1921 to 1939](http://www.workhouses.org.uk) (www.workhouses.org.uk)



**Terraced Housing**

Many families lived in small terraced houses.

These houses usually had two bedrooms, a small living room, a scullery, a back yard and an outside toilet.

They had no central heating or electricity.

Street Kids Circa 1920

### Slide 17: Terraced Housing

In Northern Ireland towns and cities, many people would have typically lived in streets with rows of red brick terraced houses. These were built in Victorian times, during the Industrial Revolution, when new mills and factories were being built. The industrialists at the time wanted to have their workers close to their place of work, so they built houses nearby. These could accommodate large numbers of people in a relatively small area. The houses usually had two bedrooms, a small living room, a scullery (a small kitchen), a back yard and an outside toilet. They had no central heating or electricity. Overcrowding was common. Although many of these traditional houses have been demolished, others remain today.

### Prompt questions

- What would it be like to live in a terraced house in the 1920s?
- How would a 1920s terraced house be different from a modern terraced townhouse?

### Useful Link for Teachers

[Ulster Architectural Heritage Society: Looking Back, Moving Forward – Homes Through the Ages](http://www.ulsterarchitecturalheritage.org.uk)

(www.ulsterarchitecturalheritage.org.uk)

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Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### The Corner Shop

Corner shops were common on many streets.

These were small shops where local people bought their groceries, milk, bread and sweets.

Today, there are very few traditional corner shops still open.



The Corner Shop

### Slide 18: The Corner Shop

Corner shops were a common feature and an integral part of local communities. The owner usually lived in separate accommodation within the shop. People would have bought their groceries, bread, milk, newspapers, sweets and other items from the corner shop. Often, they were just a room in someone's house. At the time they were successful because they were convenient and reasonably priced. Sometimes the owner let people buy goods on what they called 'tick', or credit, when they had no money.

### Prompt questions

- What were the benefits of having a local corner shop?
- Why are there fewer corner shops today?
- Would you prefer to shop at the local corner shop or the supermarket?

### Useful Links for Pupils

[Belfast Live - Belfast's iconic corner shops which sold all the essentials and plenty besides](http://www.belfastlive.co.uk) (www.belfastlive.co.uk)

[Ulster Folk and Transport Museum Old Sweet Shop](http://www.youtube.com) (www.youtube.com)

Northern Ireland @ 100 | Key Stages 2 and 3

Living in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

### The Role of Women

Society had very fixed views about women and their roles.

Women were viewed as wives and mothers.

Voting rights for all women didn't come into effect until 1928.

Women who worked had to leave their jobs once they were married.

Women were not paid the same as men for doing the same job.



Women Suffragettes

### Slide 19: The Role of Women

In the 1920s, society had very fixed views about women and their roles. They were generally viewed as a housewife and/or a mother and expected to conform to these roles. Many women were also widowed due to losing their husbands in the First World War, and thousands of mothers raised their families without the support of a partner.

Many women worked in the manufacturing, textile and linen industries. The 1926 census shows that 1,124 women were employed in the civil service and 13,666 in commercial, finance, clerical and administrative jobs. Much of the unpaid work of women on farms and in family businesses went unrecognised and does not appear in official records.

During this period there were very few women doctors or dentists. In 1926, only 14% of the medical profession was female, and very few women practised dentistry. The legal profession was also predominately male. The women who worked in any of these professions came from fairly wealthy middle-class families who could afford the university fees for the courses and qualifications.

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Women often faced discrimination from their male counterparts. Some people claimed that a woman's career in medicine was detrimental to her family life. Others said it was a way for a woman to shirk her responsibilities. Women who worked had to leave their jobs once they were married!

During the late 1800s, laws prevented women from voting in the UK and Ireland. The women's suffrage movement was a movement to fight for women's right to vote and was very active in the UK and Ireland. Women in this movement were called suffragettes. The suffragettes sought to change the laws, and in 1928 a law was passed allowing all persons over the age of 21 to vote.

Women were not paid the same as men for doing the same job. It was only in 1970 that the UK Equal Pay Act prohibited any less favourable treatment between men and women in terms of pay and conditions of employment.

### Prompt questions

- What are your thoughts about the role of women in the 1920s?
- Were women treated fairly?
- If you were a young girl living in this period, would you have the same opportunities as boys?
- Why did society hold these views about women?
- How has the role of women changed over the past 100 years in Northern Ireland?
- Are women still discriminated against today?

### Useful Links for Teachers

[A Century of Women: 1920s](http://www.acenturyofwomen.com) (www.acenturyofwomen.com)

[Northern Ireland 1926 Census – Reports](http://www.nisra.gov.uk) (www.nisra.gov.uk)

### Useful Link for Pupils

[CCEA: Understanding 1917 and Beyond – The Suffrage Movement](http://www.ccea.org.uk) (www.ccea.org.uk)