

READY TO VOTE?

A Citizenship Teaching Resource



Teacher Notes

The Ready to Vote? presentation has been designed to encourage pupils to think about:

- how and where decisions are made;
- the election process;
- registering to vote; and
- how they can be active citizens.

The following background information is intended to support pupils as you guide them through the presentation and associated activities. Links to relevant websites have also been included.

Types of government (slides 2–7)

A **dictatorship** is a type of government where one person holds all the power. The person in charge of the country is called a dictator.

Communism is a type of government and an economic system where individual people do not own land, factories or machinery. Instead, the government or the whole community owns these things. Everyone is supposed to share the wealth that they create.

A **democracy** is a type of government in which citizens choose who is in power through free and fair elections. If the people are not happy with their elected representatives, they can choose not to vote for them in the next election. Citizens, opposition parties and the press are free to criticise the government.

Devolution

Devolution is the transfer of power from a national government to a regional democratic institution. The UK has three regional governments, also called devolved governments:

- the Northern Ireland Assembly;
- the Welsh Parliament; and
- the Scottish Parliament.

The UK Parliament has given these devolved governments the power to make laws and decisions about a range of matters in their own regions.

Some advantages of devolution:

- Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different needs to England, and this can be reflected in regional governments.
- Government is brought closer to the people at a more localised level.
- It can reduce the workload of the UK Parliament and Government as the responsibility is passed on to another body.

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There are three levels of government in Northern Ireland:

- UK Parliament
- Northern Ireland Assembly
- Local Council

An MP is a Member of Parliament

There are 650 MPs elected across the UK. They are elected to represent us in the UK Parliament in London.

There are 18 Westminster constituencies in Northern Ireland. Every citizen of Northern Ireland has one MP to represent their area (constituency) so there are 18 MPs from Northern Ireland in total.

MPs consider and propose new laws as well as raising issues that matter to you. MPs split their time between working in Parliament in London and working in the constituency that elected them.



MPs meet in the Commons Chamber and make decisions for Northern Ireland about matters such as:

- tax and minimum wage
- immigration
- defence
- elections
- currency
- nuclear energy
- international relations

Electing MPs to the UK Parliament

Elections to the UK Parliament are normally held every five years and are called general elections. Usually (but not always) elections are held on the first Thursday in May.

Relevant Links

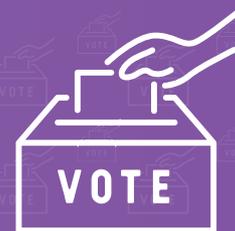
- Electoral Office for Northern Ireland www.eoni.org.uk
- Electoral Commission www.electoralcommission.org.uk
- UK Parliament www.parliament.uk

In elections to the UK Parliament, each eligible voter has one vote in their local constituency and the candidate with the most votes becomes the MP for that area. Voters write an X on the ballot paper beside their preferred candidate. This voting system is called First Past the Post.

Usually, the political party with the most MPs after an election forms the government. However, two or more parties with a combined majority of MPs may form a coalition government.

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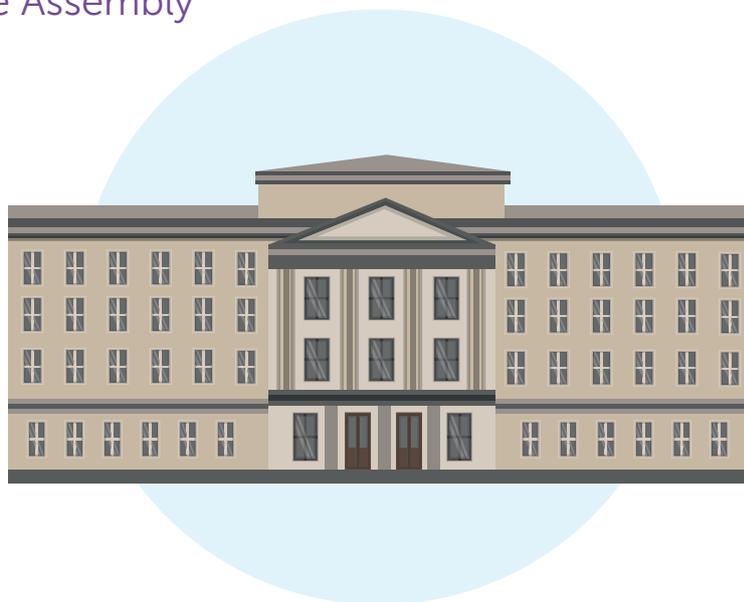


An MLA is a Member of the Legislative Assembly

There are 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland and each one has **five** MLAs. That means there are 90 MLAs elected from across Northern Ireland.

MLAs are elected to represent us in the Northern Ireland Assembly, which meets in Parliament Buildings, Stormont in Belfast.

MLAs consider and propose new laws. They also raise issues on behalf of their constituents. MLAs divide their time between working in the Assembly in Belfast and working in the constituency that elected them. They each have a local constituency office where they can hold meetings with their constituents.



MLAs have responsibility for taking decisions and passing laws in areas, including:

- hospitals
- environment
- education
- economy
- agriculture
- housing
- roads
- sport
- tourism

Electing MLAs to the Northern Ireland Assembly

We elect MLAs every 5 years. Usually (but not always) the election is held on the first Thursday in May.

Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service – find out more about elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly [here](#).

Assembly elections follow a different system to that of general elections. Rather than electing just one person per constituency (as in a general elections), each of the 18 Northern Ireland constituencies elects **five** MLAs, resulting in a total of 90 MLAs being elected.

On election day, every voter ranks the candidates in order of preference 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and so on. Voters can rank as many or as few candidates as they like.

This voting system is called Single Transferable Vote.

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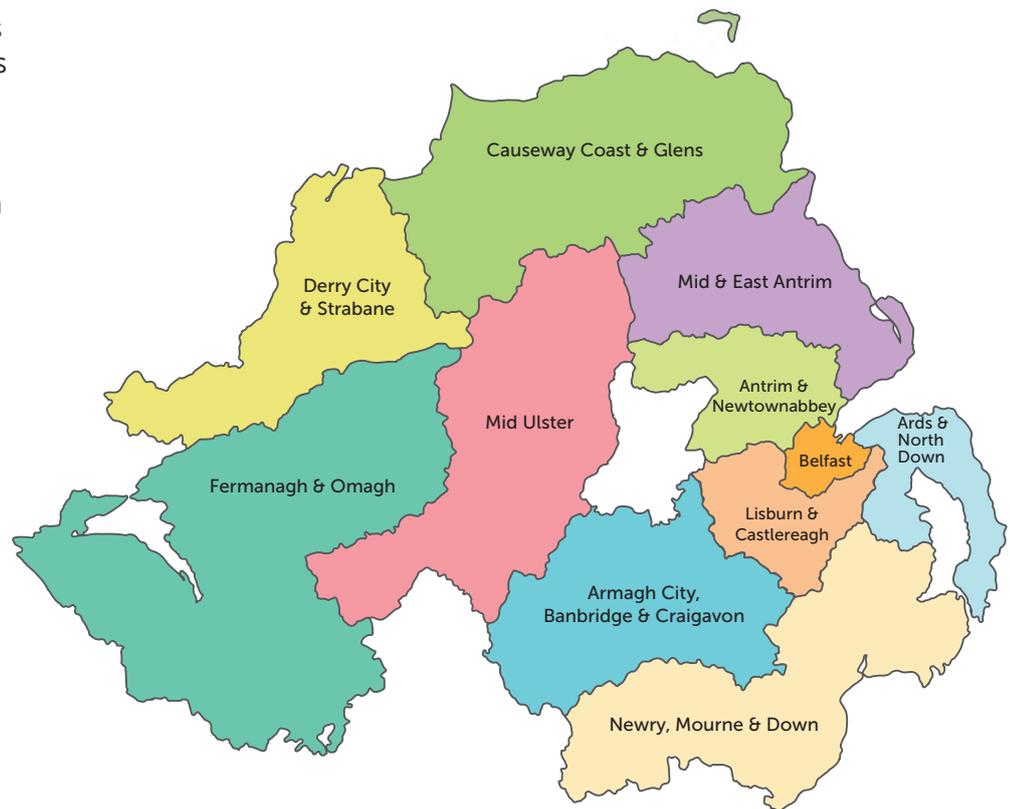


A Local Councillor is elected to the Local Council

There are 462 local councillors who sit on the 11 local councils across Northern Ireland.

Councillors do not pass laws, but they are responsible for making important decisions on behalf of the local community about services such as:

- waste collections
- local tourism
- leisure facilities
- food safety
- street cleaning
- dog control
- roads
- planning
- parks, playgrounds and community centres
- heritage



Electing Local Councillors to Local Councils

Elections to local government, commonly called Local Councils, take place every four years. Councils are divided into District Electoral Areas (DEAs).

Each DEA is represented by councillors – usually between five and seven.

Like in the Northern Ireland Assembly elections, every voter ranks the candidates in order of preference 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and so on. A voter can rank as many or as few candidates as they like.

This voting system is called Single Transferable Vote.

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Registering to vote (slides 8 – 9)

At what age can you register to vote?

You can register to vote at 17. Some 16 year olds can also register depending on when their birthday falls. Details are available from the [Electoral Office website FAQs](#)

How do you register to vote?

There are two ways to register to vote:

1. You can [register online](#) on the www.gov.uk website. This is the quickest and easiest way to register. It only takes a few minutes. All you need is your national insurance number.
2. If you are unable to register online, you need to complete a paper registration form. This form can be downloaded from the Electoral Office website or, if you contact them, they can post one to you. Then return it to the Electoral Office. When someone joins the electoral register, the Electoral Office processes their personal data securely according to their privacy notice which can be found here: <https://www.eoni.org.uk/Privacy-Notice>.

What is the poll card for?

If you are on the Electoral Register, you will be sent a poll card approximately six weeks before the election. The poll card provides important information including where you need to go to vote. You don't need to bring it on the day.

When do we vote?

Election day is usually on a Thursday. Voting takes place between 7 am and 10 pm at polling stations throughout Northern Ireland. These are public buildings such as schools.

Where do we vote?

There are three ways to vote:

- in person at a polling station;
- by post; or
- by proxy – where you appoint someone on your behalf.