



# **The Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service**

## **Teaching citizenship in a divided society**

**Marina McConville**

# Education Service

*Works with young people, to educate them about the work of the Assembly and encourage them to engage with their elected representatives and the democratic process.*



# Education Service - Why?

- Engagement Strategy
- Support for the NI Curriculum - PDMU, Citizenship, Politics, History
  - ‘Diversity and inclusion’, ‘Social Justice’, ‘Human Rights’, ‘Equality’
- Promotion of the Assembly and its work?





Making decisions for Northern Ireland

The European Parliament







Out to schools



# Inward and Outreach

## **Schools (75%)**

Youth Groups

Universities

Adults

**2013-14:**

488 Groups

16,000 Participants

- Interactive **Presentation**
- **Activity**, eg mock election/ debate
- **Tour** – visit to Public Gallery
- Meeting with **MLAs**/ Assembly staff



# Debates





# 'Let's Talk'





# Website

## Evolution of Devolution



# Principles

Accessibility to all

Impartiality – facts, not analysis

Partnership

Value for money



# Our special context

- Post conflict
- Consociational model of democracy - does it reinforce division?
- Outstanding issues - parades, flags and the past (talks in progress)
- Current state of relations
  - No agreement on welfare reform
  - Failure to elect a new Speaker
  - Recent speeches
- The 'Irish dimension'
- Election fever – 3 years in a row
- Equality and Good Relations

# Future challenges for us

- Political :

- Relationship between the main parties (issues such as the Irish language)
- Institutional Reform
- Outcome of talks – flags, parades, the past
- Elections

- Financial :

- budget cuts – Departments and the Assembly - CSR
- Is Education Service a desirable, rather than essential service?
- a youth assembly for NI?



# What's happening elsewhere?

- Westminster
- Wales
- Scotland
- Ireland

# Challenges for all 5 parliamentary institutions?

- Public attitudes
- Role of the Media
- The cuts agenda
- Elections
- Under representation of minority groups
- Digital democracy
- Genuine desire to engage with young people?



# Discussion

1. How effective is political/citizenship education in driving young people's engagement with democratic institutions?
2. What challenges do legislatures face in educating and engaging young people? What opportunities are there?
3. What types of support do teachers get to teach controversial issues if any? Does it reflect their needs?
4. How can teachers reconcile the possible contradictions between 'real life' and what they teach in the citizenship class?

