



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Library Service Research Paper

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March 2011

# 2010 Youth Panel Survey

## *Helping to shape our future: a Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland*

NIAR 090-11

This paper presents the findings of a survey carried out to help the Youth Panel decide what a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly should look like and what it should be able to do.

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## Key Points

Overall, there was strong support for the establishment of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, with just under 90% thinking that there should be one.

- To get young people involved in the political process;
- To provide representation for young people and to involve young people in decision making; and,
- To give young people a voice.

Amongst organisations, the preferred youngest age of members was 14 years old. This was the second preference of individuals. Amongst individuals, the level of consensus was lower. The most common response was 12 years old, although only one in four opted for this age. Amongst organisations, the preferred oldest age of members was 25 years old followed by 18 years old. The preferred oldest age of members amongst individuals was 18 years old followed by 25 years old.

The highest proportion of respondents felt that members should serve for two years, with almost half in favour of this length of service. The second most popular length of service was one year.

Three quarters of respondents felt that when a young person has been a member of the Youth Assembly, they should be able to become a member for a second time.

The highest proportion of respondents felt that there should be 30 members in the Youth Assembly.

Amongst individuals, the preferred method of choosing members was selection followed by election. In contrast, for organisations the preferred method of choosing members was nomination by organisations working with young people although this was the least popular option amongst individuals.

The majority of respondents felt that, in order to make sure that all young people's views are represented fairly, a Youth Assembly should:

- Be open to all young people;

- Have members from all 18 Constituencies;
- Have members chosen to represent different groups;
- Have links to youth organisations;
- Have links to local youth groups; and,
- Have links to school councils.

The majority of both individuals and organisations thought that it was very important or important that the Youth Assembly be able to:

- Give feedback to government Departments;
- Campaign on issues chosen by young people;
- Give feedback to NI Assembly Committees;
- Investigate issues chosen by young people;
- Debate issues chosen by young people;
- Help young people understand how the NI Assembly works;
- Do things in and for local communities;
- Question Government Ministers; and,
- Meet with MLAs.

The highest proportion of individuals thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every month. The highest proportion of organisations thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every three months. Most respondents were in favour of holding meetings in Parliament Buildings and other places.

A slightly higher proportion of individuals and organisations preferred that the Youth Assembly meet on Saturdays when compared to week days.. A higher proportion of individuals and organisations preferred that the Youth Assembly meet during school term when compared to during school holidays.

Less than half of respondents said they would be interested in taking part in a Youth Assembly while a quarter said they did not know.

## Executive Summary

Between October 2010 and January 2011 a survey was administered using SurveyMonkey to identify the key decisions that would give a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly a robust shape and structure. Over seven hundred questionnaires were completed by both young people themselves and individuals and organisations interested in the prospect of a Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland.

Most of the questionnaires were completed by individuals from the North and East of Northern Ireland, the most common age being 17 years old. A higher proportion of females than males completed the questionnaire. Most of the organisations that completed the questionnaire represented the youth and education sectors although responses were also received from the community and voluntary sector, local government and a political party.

Overall, there was strong support for the establishment of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, with 89.8% of all respondents thinking that there should be one. The main reasons for this were to:

- To get young people involved in the political process;
- To provide representation for young people and to involve young people in decision making; and,
- To give young people a voice.

Those who were not in favour of a youth assembly were concerned by the cost, felt that other structures already exist that can/do carry out the same function and a small minority of young people expressed a lack of interest in it.

The majority of respondents (93.3%) felt that the youngest age should be between 12 and 16 years old. Amongst organisations, preferred youngest age was 14 years old. Amongst individuals, the level of consensus was lower. The most common responses were 12, 16, 14 and 15 years old.

In terms of the oldest age members of the Youth Assembly should be, 91.1% of participants felt that the oldest age of Members should be between 18 and 25. Amongst organisations, the most common response was 25 years old (30.8%) followed

by 18 years old (15.4%). The most common response among individuals was 18 years old (26.4%) followed by 25 years old (20.6%).

The highest proportion of respondents felt that members should serve for two years, with almost half (49.3%) in favour of this length of service. The second most popular length of service was one year (31.5%) while three years was least popular (19.2%).

Three quarters (75.9%) of respondents felt that when a young person has been a member of the Youth Assembly, they should be able to become a member for a second time.

The highest proportion of respondents (38.2%) felt that there should be 30 members in the Youth Assembly.

Amongst individuals, the preferred method of choosing members was selection (just like applying for a job: application form and interview). This was the preferred method for just over four in ten (40.4%) respondents. The second most popular method was by election (where candidates are nominated and then there is a vote), accounting for more than a third (35.8%) of responses amongst individuals. In contrast, for organisations the preferred method of choosing members was nomination by organisations working with young people (39.2%).

The majority of respondents felt that, in order to make sure that all young people's views are represented fairly, a Youth Assembly should:

- Be open to all young people (95.8% of organisations and 90.2% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have members from all 18 Constituencies (95.8% of organisations and 89.4% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have members to represent different groups such as people with disabilities, male, female, Protestant, Catholic etc (87.5% of organisations and 82.9% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have links to youth organisations (93.6% of organisations and 84.3% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have links to local youth groups (89.6% of organisations and 83.7% of individuals agree or strongly agree); and,
- Have links to school councils (68.6% of organisations and 75.3% of individuals agree or strongly agree).

The majority of both individuals and organisations thought that it was very important or important that the Youth Assembly be able to:

- Give feedback to government Departments (97.8% of organisations and 94.4% of individuals);
- Campaign on issues chosen by young people (97.8% of organisations and 96.0% of individuals);
- Give feedback to NI Assembly Committees (97.8% of organisations and 93.9% of individuals);
- Investigate issues chosen by young people (97.8% of organisations and 94.1% of individuals);
- Debate issues chosen by young people (97.8% of organisations and 95.7% of individuals);
- Help young people understand how the NI Assembly works (95.7% of organisations and 89.9% of individuals);
- Do things in and for local communities (100.0% of organisations and 90.7% of individuals);
- Question Government Ministers (93.5% of organisations and 90.1% of individuals); and,
- Meet with MLAs (95.6% of organisations and 88.1% of individuals).

Overall, the highest proportion of respondents (44.3%) thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every month. The highest proportion of individuals (45.1%) thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every month. The highest proportion of organisations (46.7%) thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every three months.

Most respondents (64.4% of organisations and 56.8% of individuals) were in favour of holding meetings in Parliament Buildings and other places.

A slightly higher proportion of individuals and organisations preferred that the Youth Assembly meet on Saturdays when compared to week days, although the majority of respondents were in favour of meetings on weekdays and/or on Saturdays.

Similarly, a higher proportion of individuals and organisations preferred that the Youth Assembly meet during school term when compared to during school holidays, although the majority of respondents were in favour of meetings during school holidays and/or during school term.

Less than half of individuals (47.0%) and organisations (43.2%) said they would be interested in taking part in a Youth Assembly. A number of people completing the survey said that, while they would be too old to sit on the Youth Assembly, they would be keen to lend their support and assistance.

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# 1 Introduction

## About the survey

The Northern Ireland Assembly is thinking about setting up a new Youth Assembly. A Youth Panel of 30 young people aged 16-18 has been helping the Assembly draw up plans. To help the Youth Panel decide what a Youth Assembly should look like and what it should be able to do, they developed a survey drawing from research and study visits looking at other models noting commonalities and differences between them.

They also reflected on their own experience as a Youth Panel. Based on all of this, with the help of facilitators from the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust, they spent one residential weekend developing and refining the questionnaire.

In order to hear the views of as many young people as possible, the Panel developed the questionnaire and made it available online using SurveyMonkey between October 2010 and January 2011. The survey was promoted on Twitter, Facebook, on the Assembly website, by email to relevant organisations (youth organisations, section 75 groups, schools, NILGA, the Education and Library Boards etc), through C2K to schools, through YouthNet “ePipe” and the Youth Service to youth organisations. Flyers were also distributed to schools and youth groups visiting the building. Recipients were also encouraged to forward the link to the survey to anyone they thought might be interested.

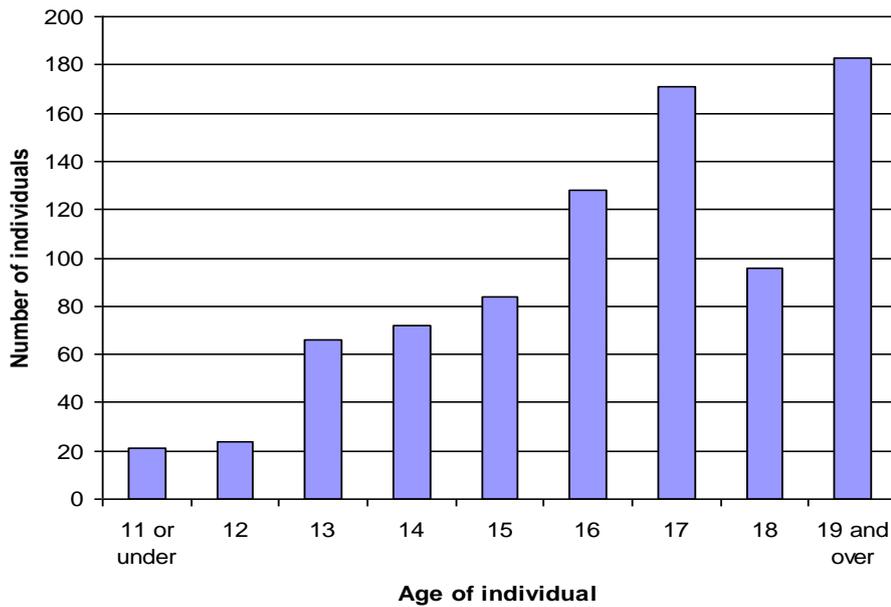
In total, 998 responses were received. Of these, 761 (87.4%) were substantially or entirely completed (participants could exit the survey at any time but were unable to save their response and complete at a later time). The results of that survey, based on all 998 responses, are presented here.

## Who took part?

Both individuals and organisations took part in the survey. Most completed questionnaires from individuals (93.4%). Organisations made up 6.6% of responses.

More than three quarters (75.9%) of these individuals were aged between 12 and 18, the most frequent single age being 17 years old. A higher proportion of females (54.7%) than males (45.3%) completed the survey.

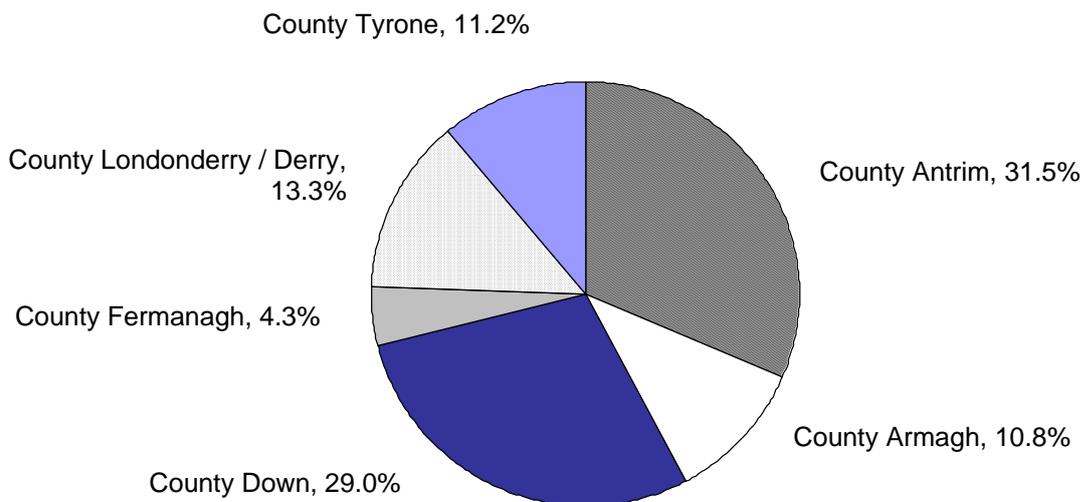
**Chart 1: Age profile of respondents**



**Where were they from?**

The majority (98.5%) of individuals who completed the survey were from Northern Ireland. The highest proportions of respondents were from County Antrim (31.5%) and County Down (29.0%). The lowest proportions were from the West and South of Northern Ireland, the lowest being from County Fermanagh (4.3%).

**Chart 2: County respondents live in (n = 845)**



Of those respondents that said they lived outside Northern Ireland, 6 were from the Republic of Ireland, 3 were from the UK and two said they lived outside the UK and Republic of Ireland.

### Organisations participating in the survey

Organisations that took part in the survey represented a range of interested sectors including:

- The youth sector;
- The public sector, particularly the education sector;
- The community and voluntary sector;
- Local government; and,
- A political party.

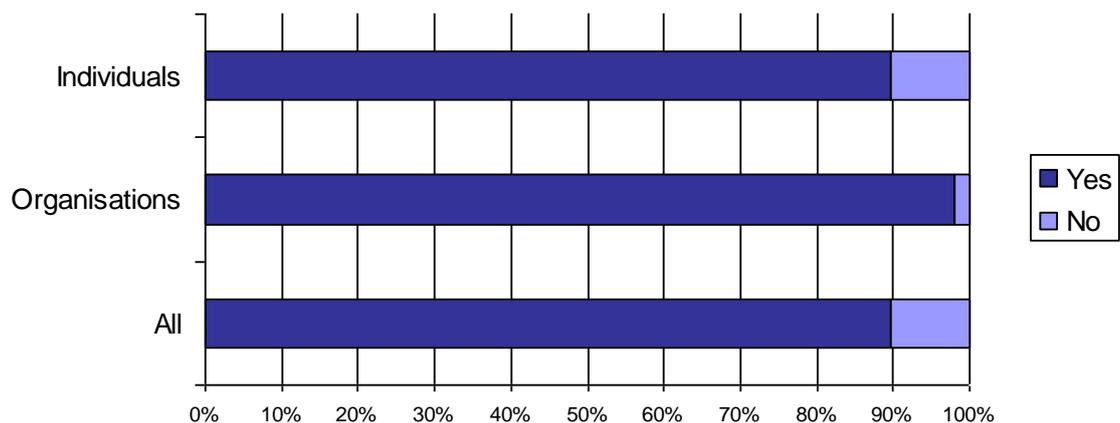
## 2 Findings

### 2.1 Should there be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly?

Overall, there was strong support for the establishment of a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, with 89.8% of all respondents thinking that there should be one.

- 89.2% of individuals think that there should be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.
- 98.1% of organisations think that there should be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly.

**Chart 3: Do you think there should be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly?**



All (n = 791); Individuals (n = 739); Organisations (n = 52)

Respondents were asked to give their views on why there should or should not be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. In total, 638 respondents gave the reasons why they were for or against a NI Youth Assembly being established.

### 2.2 Why there should be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

The main reasons respondents thought there should be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly were:

- To get young people involved in the political process;

*“To give young people an opportunity to take an interest in politics and identify with issues relevant to them”*

- To provide representation for young people and to involve young people in decision making;

*“To represent the views of young people & let them have a say in decisions affecting them”*

and

- To give young people a voice.

*“Aren't we a part of Northern Ireland? We should get a say”*

*“To voice young people's opinion”*

### 2.3 Why there should not be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

The main reasons respondents thought there should not be a Northern Ireland Youth Assembly were:

- That the money could be better spent elsewhere;

*“It is a waste of money in this current economic situation - surveys can be done in schools and youth clubs to get young people's opinions”*

*“It is a waste of money that is needed for other services”*

- Forums already exist which can engage young people in politics;

*“The idea of youth assembly is excellent but it is duplicating the NI youth forum”*

and

- Apathy/young people not understanding the role of a Youth Assembly.

*“Because it is boring”*

*“What does it do?”*

## 2.4 What should the age range for members of a Youth Assembly be?

### **Youngest age of members**

In terms of the youngest age of members of the Youth Assembly should be, 93.3% of respondents felt that the youngest age should be between 12 and 16 years old. Amongst organisations, preferred youngest age was 14 years old (44.2%). Amongst individuals, the level of consensus was lower. The most common response was 12 years old (25.7%) although only one in four opted for this age. One in six (17.6%) individuals opted for 14 years old.

Those in favour of the youngest age of members being 12 years old most commonly expressed the view that all ages/all secondary school children should have a say and can make a contribution.

*“Young people are interested in politics and what happens in the community from the age of 12 and should also be given the opportunity to get involved”*

*“All ages of secondary school children should be able to participate”*

*“As long as the younger candidates are serious and know what their purpose is I think they should not be left out”*

*“Many 12 year olds have intelligent political views”*

Those in favour of the youngest age of members being 14 years old most commonly expressed the view that at this age young people tend to be more mature and have developed the skills necessary to participate in a Youth Assembly.

*“14 is the youngest age where you would be mature enough”*

*“By 14 many have established the basic skills and interest in participating at this level of debate”*

*“Children younger than 14 don't really understand politics”*

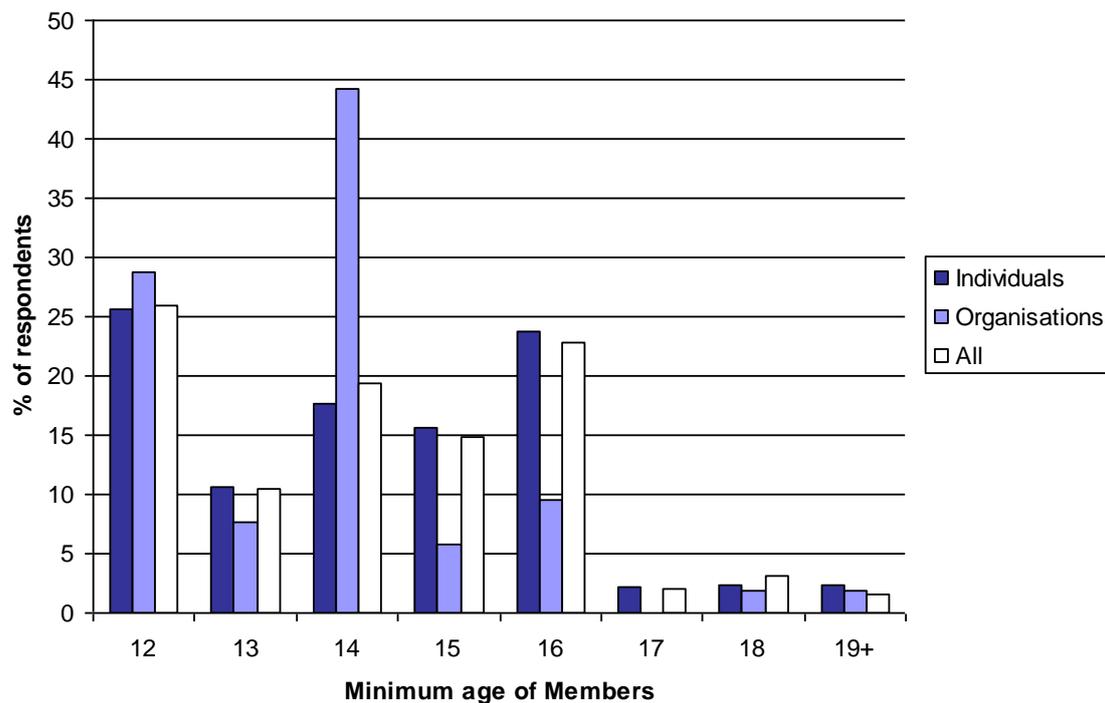
Those in favour of the youngest age of members being 16 (the second most common response of individuals, 23.7%) most commonly argued that those aged 16 and over were more responsible and mature, had a better understanding of politics and were most able to make decisions.

*“16 because generally, young people have gained some life experience at this age”*

*“16 is an age were most people start to make important decisions in life”*

*“The ability to understand politics is not something that many people have from a young age”*

*“The people on it need to be old enough to make sensible decisions”*

**Chart 4: Youngest age members of a Youth Assembly should be**

All (n = 791); Individuals (n = 739); Organisations (n = 52)

### Oldest age of members

In terms of the oldest age members of the Youth Assembly should be, 91.1% of participants felt that the oldest age of Members should be between 18 and 25. Amongst organisations, the most common response was 25 years old (30.8%) followed by 18 years old (15.4%). The most common response among individuals was 18 years old (26.4%) followed by 25 years old (20.6%). The third most common response of both organisations and individuals was 21 years old.

Those in favour of the oldest age of members being 18 tended to be younger respondents who preferred members to be of secondary school age and consider those aged over 18 an adult rather than youth:

*“I think young people from secondary school education age should be able to be members, as they should have the maturity to voice appropriate concerns/issues”*

*“The upper limit should never be higher than the voting age”*

*“If young adults 18+ were included they may dominate”*

*“When you're 18 you are categorised as an adult rather than a ‘youth’”*

Those in favour of the oldest age of members being 21 expressed the view that those over this age are no longer a youth and may not share the same views and experiences of those who are under 21.

*“After the age of 21 most people are not really associated with being as ‘clued in’ as most young people to their views and aims”*

*“21 as the oldest because your not really a youth when your over 21”*

*“Anyone over 21 I don't think will fully understand young people's views”*

Those in favour of the oldest age of members being 25 felt that that this was appropriate as it matches the upper age limit applied by the youth sector, that those at this age would be better equipped to put forward the views of young people due to their level of education and life experiences. There was also a perception that older young people could be a positive role model and help develop younger members.

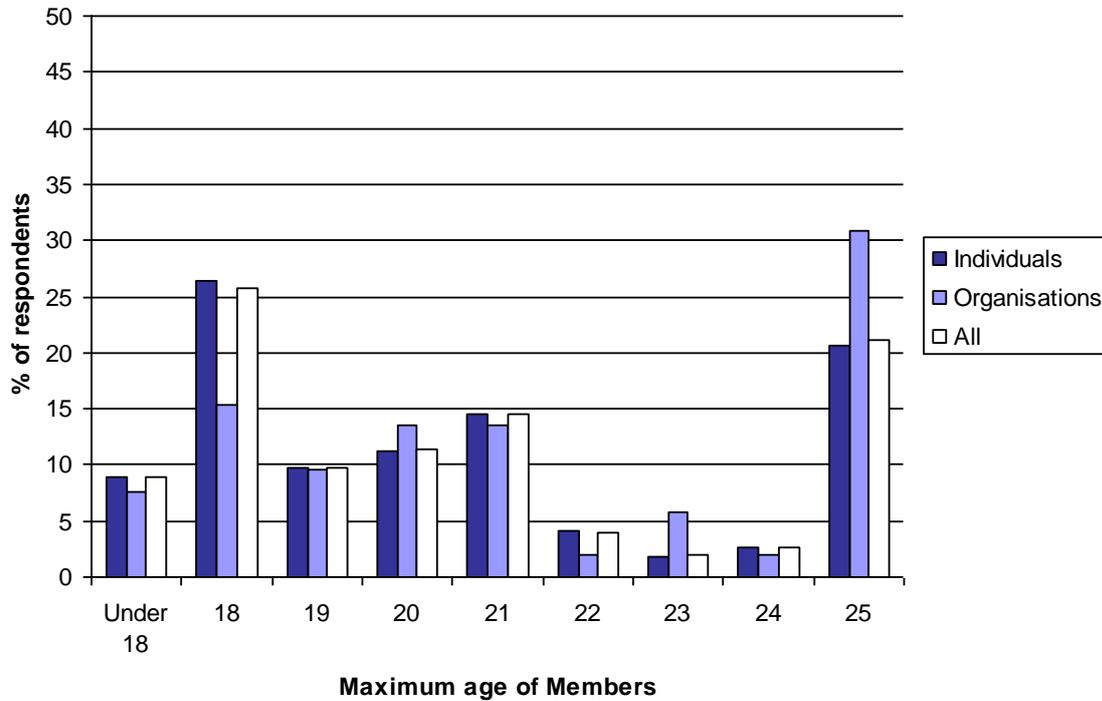
*“It should go up to 25 because this means the Youth Assembly can take advice from people who are educated to degree level and have experience in youth issues and fighting for young people”*

*“So everyone has a say”*

*“To reflect the full range of current ‘youth service’ and to ensure broad range of views of young people are represented”*

*“Those up to age 25, would provide a degree of leadership to younger members”*

**Chart 5: Oldest age members of a Youth Assembly should be**



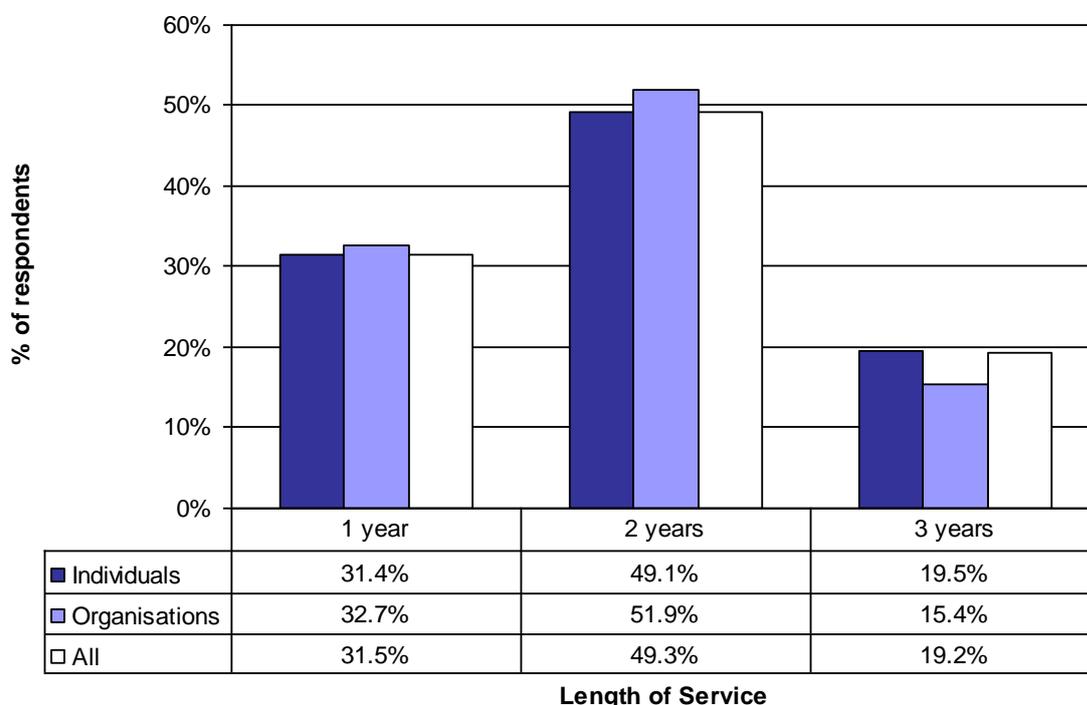
All (n = 791); Individuals (n = 739); Organisations (n = 52)

## 2.5 How long should members serve on a youth assembly?

The highest proportion of respondents felt that members should serve for two years, with almost half (49.3%) in favour of this length of service. The second most popular length of service was one year (31.5%) while three years was least popular (19.2%).

This was true for both organisations and individuals participating in the survey.

**Chart 6: How long members should serve on a Youth Assembly**



All (n = 775); Individuals (n = 723); Organisations (n = 52)

**2.6 When a young person has been a member of the youth assembly, should they be able to become a member for a second time?**

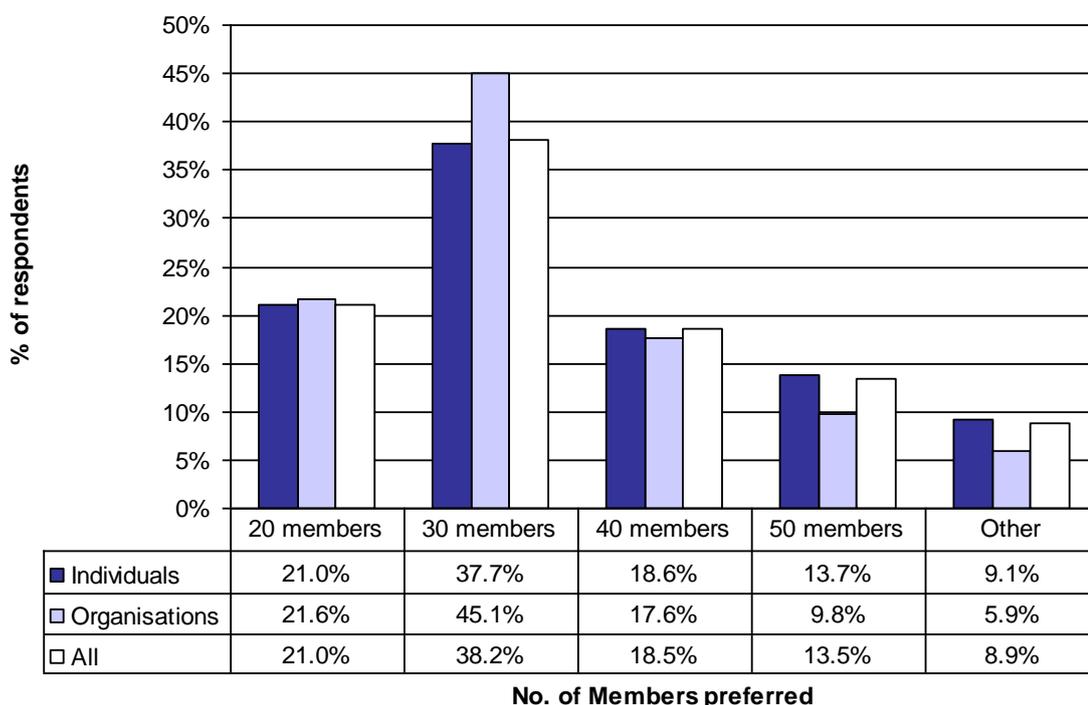
Three quarters (75.9%) of respondents felt that when a young person has been a member of the Youth Assembly, they should be able to become a member for a second time.

A higher proportion of individuals (76.6%) agreed with this when compared with organisations (65.4%).

**2.7 How many members should there be in a Youth Assembly?**

The highest proportion of respondents (38.2%) felt that there should be 30 members in the Youth Assembly. Support for a Youth Assembly with 30 members was higher amongst organisations (45.1%) when compared with individuals (37.7%).

**Chart 7: Number of members there should be in a Youth Assembly**



All (n = 757); Individuals (n = 706); Organisations (n = 51)

Of those who said ‘other’, the highest number of respondents suggested that there be 108 members (2.6% of all respondents), reflecting the number of MLAs in the Assembly. However, this was still a smaller proportion of respondents than that in favour of a 30 member Youth Assembly.

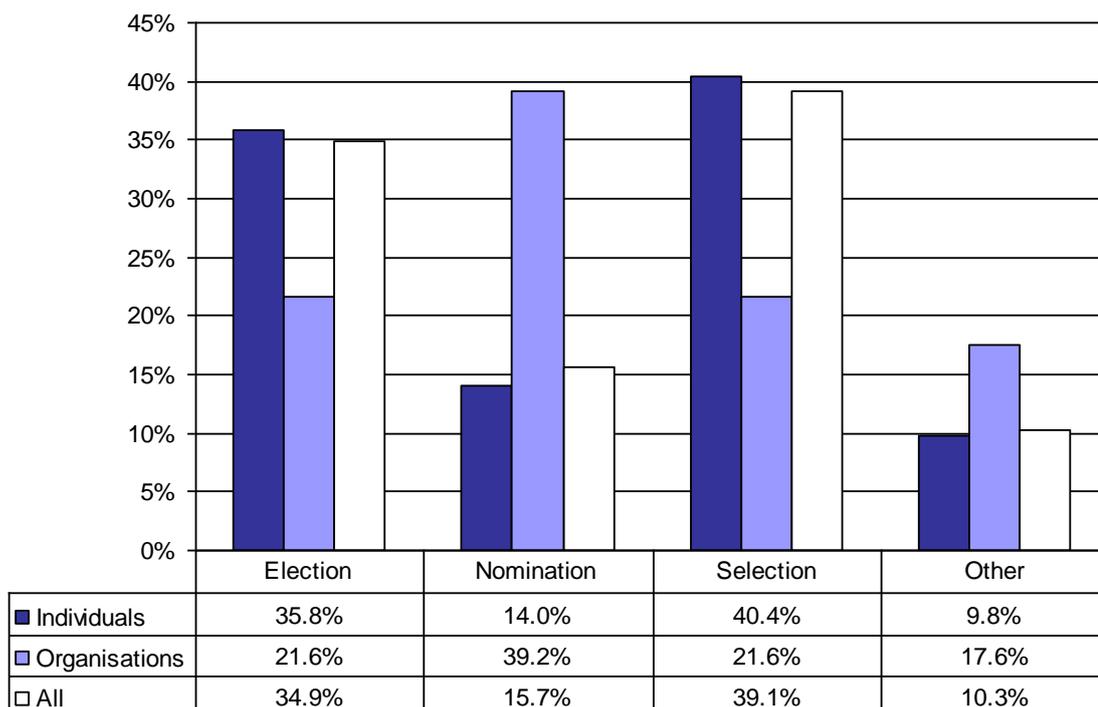
## 2.8 How should members of a Youth Assembly be chosen?

Individuals and organisations differed in their views on how members of a Youth Assembly should be chosen.

Amongst individuals, the preferred method of choosing members was selection (just like applying for a job: application form and interview). This was the preferred method for just over four in ten (40.4%) respondents. The second most popular method was by election (where candidates are nominated and then there is a vote), accounting for more than a third (35.8%) of responses amongst individuals.

In contrast, for organisations the preferred method of choosing members was nomination by organisations working with young people (39.2%). While almost four in ten organisations preferred this approach, this was the least popular option amongst individuals.

**Chart 8: How members of a Youth Assembly should be chosen**



All (n =757); Individuals (n =706); Organisations (n =51)

Of those that suggested an alternative method of choosing members, most favoured a combination:

- Nomination and selection (17 respondents);
- Selection and election (12 respondents);
- Election and nomination (3 respondents); or
- A combination of all three (13 respondents).

Other suggestions were:

- Random selection (either complete random selection or split by geography or groups such as by age and sex);

- Getting young people to write an essay on why they want to be a member and what issues they think are important and how they feel can make a change; and
- Peer assessment after a selection process.

## 2.9 How can a Youth Assembly make sure that all young people's views are fairly represented?

The majority of respondents felt that, in order to make sure that all young people's views are represented fairly, a Youth Assembly should:

- Be open to all young people (95.8% of organisations and 90.2% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have members from all 18 Constituencies (95.8% of organisations and 89.4% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have members to represent different groups such as people with disabilities, male, female, Protestant, Catholic etc (87.5% of organisations and 82.9% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have links to youth organisations (93.6% of organisations and 84.3% of individuals agree or strongly agree);
- Have links to local youth groups (89.6% of organisations and 83.7% of individuals agree or strongly agree); and,
- Have links to school councils (68.6% of organisations and 75.3% of individuals agree or strongly agree).

Similar patterns of agreement were evidenced in organisations and individuals. The highest proportions of respondents strongly agreed that a Youth Assembly should:

- Be open to all young people;
- Have members from all 18 constituencies; and,
- Have members chosen to represent different groups.

The highest proportions of organisations and individuals agreed that a Youth Assembly should:

- Have links to local youth groups;
- Have links to youth organisations; and,
- Have links to school councils.

Other ways put forward by respondents to ensure that all young people's views are represented included ensuring that the Youth Assembly:

- Does not become a platform solely for youth groups or young people interested/studying in politics;

*"The panel should not be 40 law and politics students"*

*"Although I think it is important to have links with youth groups it is also important to go to young people that are not involved in that setting as they could also have different views and opinions"*

- Targets youths from socially deprived and minority backgrounds;

*"Targeting young people who are socially excluded will give them a sense of belonging, they have become socially excluded for a reason and need to be valued within society"*

and,

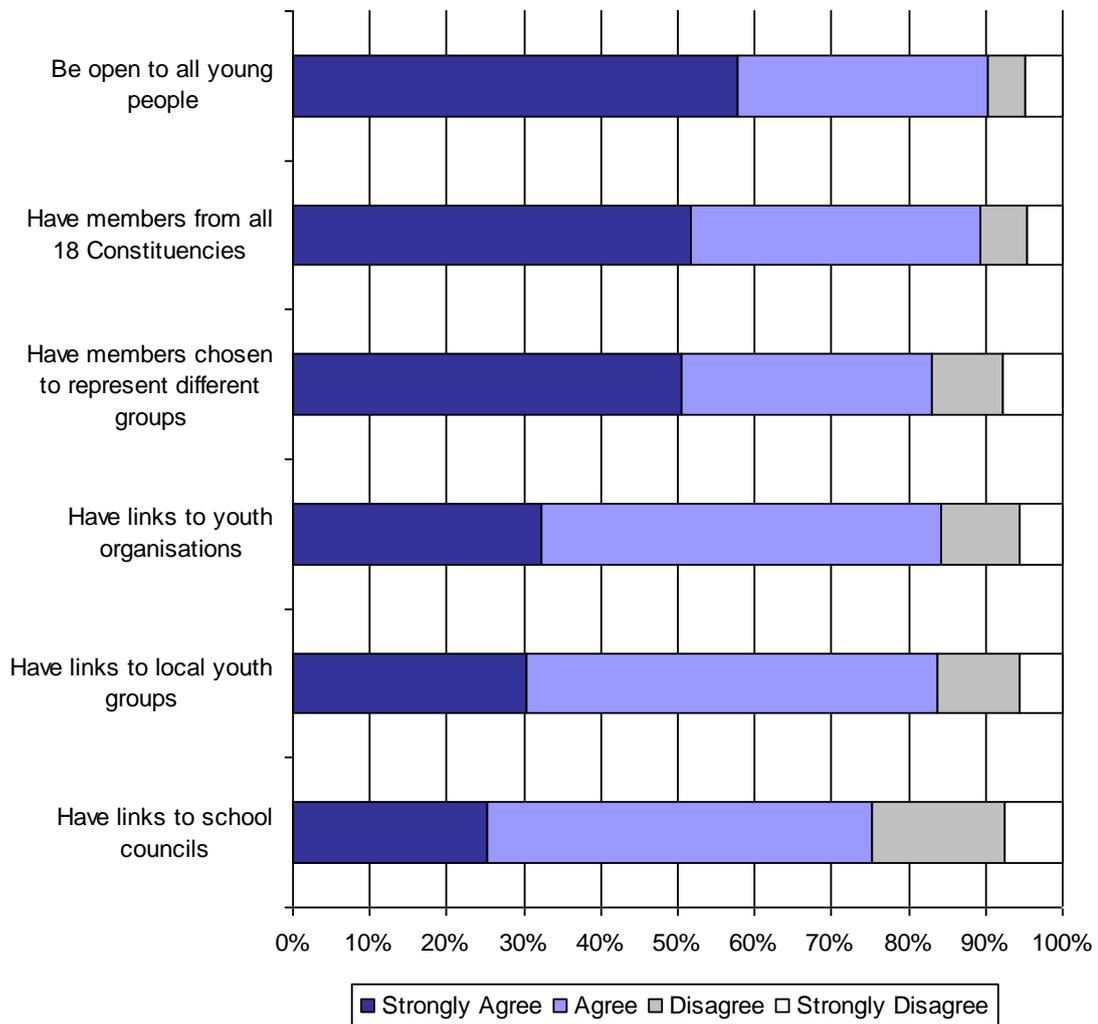
- Is representative of all sections of society.

*"Candidates should be able to represent a vast diverse majority of their constituency"*

On the flipside, a number of respondents thought it should be made-up of the best candidates rather than trying to represent each section of our society:

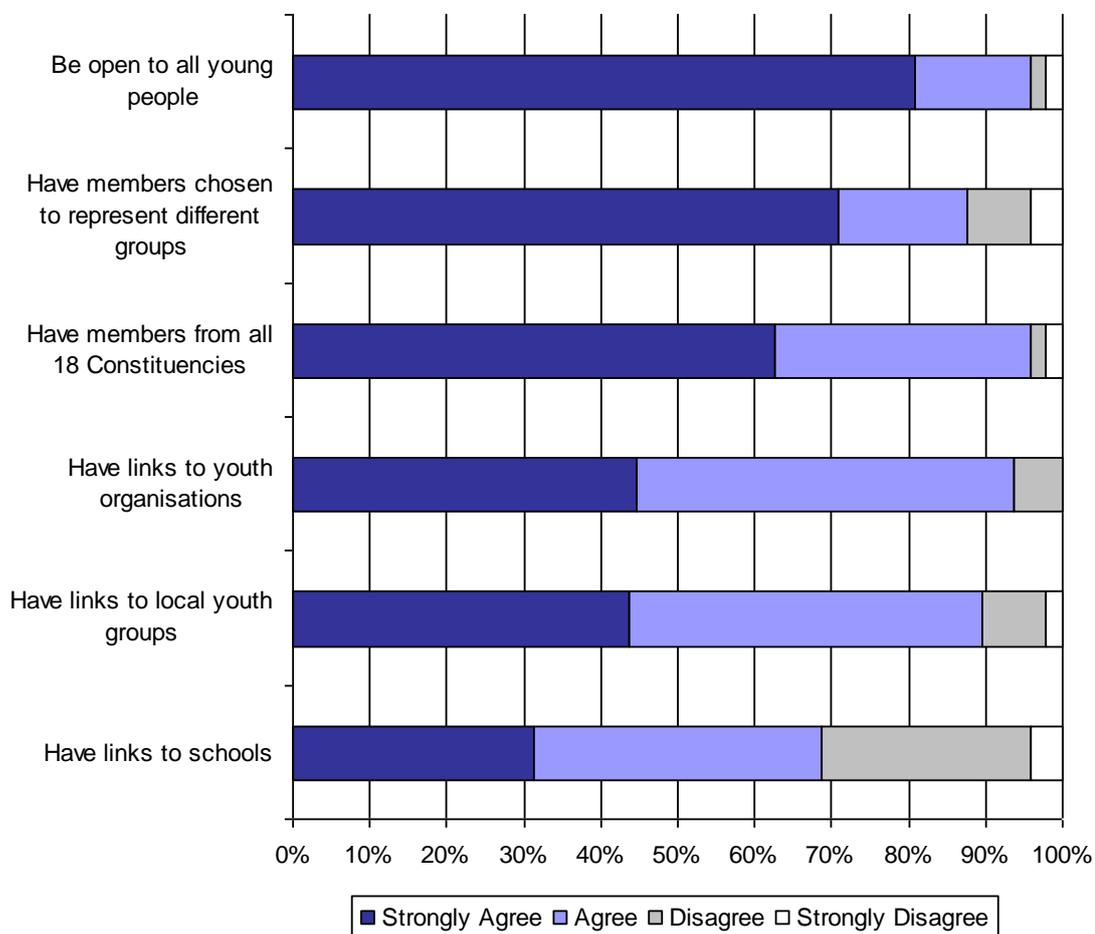
*"Making a point of having Catholics, Protestants, different races and sexes is positive discrimination - which IS DISCRIMINATION"*

**Chart 9: How the Youth Assembly can make sure all young people’s views are represented fairly (Individual responses, n = 673)**



	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Have links to school councils	25.2%	50.1%	17.2%	7.5%
Have links to local youth groups	30.4%	53.3%	10.7%	5.5%
Have links to youth organisations	32.3%	52.0%	10.0%	5.7%
Have members chosen to represent different groups	50.4%	32.5%	9.4%	7.7%
Have members from all 18 Constituencies	51.6%	37.8%	6.0%	4.6%
Be open to all young people	57.7%	32.6%	4.8%	4.9%

**Chart 10: How the Youth Assembly can make sure all young people’s views are represented fairly (Organisation responses, n = 48)**



	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Have links to school councils	31.3%	37.5%	27.1%	4.2%
Have links to local youth groups	43.8%	45.8%	8.3%	2.1%
Have links to youth organisations	44.7%	48.9%	6.4%	0.0%
Have members chosen to represent different groups	70.8%	16.7%	8.3%	4.2%
Have members from all 18 Constituencies	62.5%	33.3%	2.1%	2.1%
Be open to all young people	80.9%	14.9%	2.1%	2.1%

## 2.10 What should a Youth Assembly be able to do?

The majority of both individuals and organisations think that it is very important or important that the Youth Assembly be able to:

- Give feedback to government Departments;

*“A Youth Assembly will need to get to the heart of government”*

*“Have a formal consultative role in relation to public policy”*

*“Have access and be provided with the capability of being able to influence/debate/discuss with the civil servants who are behind the MLA's, having the capacity to truly be able to influence policies”*

*“Challenging government decisions that affect young people and lobbying”*

- Campaign on issues chosen by young people;

*“Promote practical solutions to issues can campaign for funding for them and on equality issues”*

- Give feedback to NI Assembly Committees;

*“The Youth Assembly should be able to raise issues that affect them which are open for discussion with committees”*

- Investigate issues chosen by young people;

*“The Youth Assembly should take an issue presented to them to research that issue. After that all information should be presented to a government department or minister for further action if need be”*

- Debate issues chosen by young people;

*“Like any assembly it should be up to members to bring forward things to debate and it should decide what it does by vote”*

- Help young people understand how the NI Assembly works;

*“It should be able to promote the work that the young people are doing in the Youth Assembly once it is up and running. This will create public awareness and encourage other young people to join the Youth Assembly”*

*“Increase interest in politics for young people and awareness of other political processes/ ideologies”*

*“Explain how the assembly works (what on earth is an MLA?????)”*

- Do things in and for local communities;

*“They should be enabled to do outreach work and roadshows in communities across Northern Ireland, in order to address local issues, but also to bring democracy and civic engagement to young people”*

*“Give feedback to their local communities”*

*“Have local links kind of like MLAs clinics where young people can meet them and raise issues they want addressed”*

- Question Government Ministers;

*“The Youth Assembly should be able to raise issues that affect them which are open for discussion with ... ministers”*

*“As much as possible in holding themselves and others to account politically”*

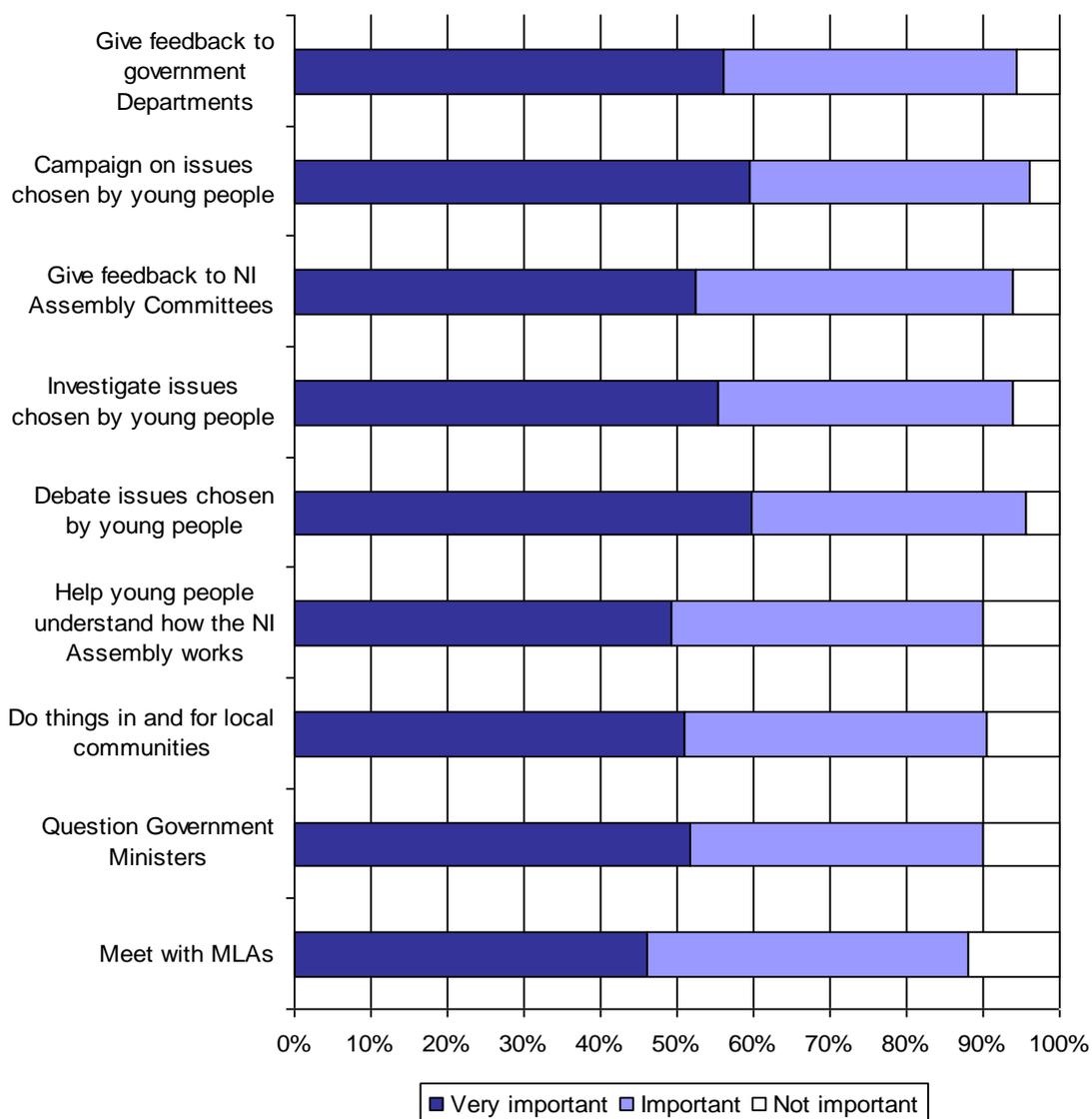
*“Each constituency should have a youth group where issues from all over the area can be dealt with on a smaller scale like what we have in the ni assembly but also where young people can bring forward their ideas and have the chance for them to be discussed on the panel”*

*“Have the chance to create youth groups outside for ideas”*

and,

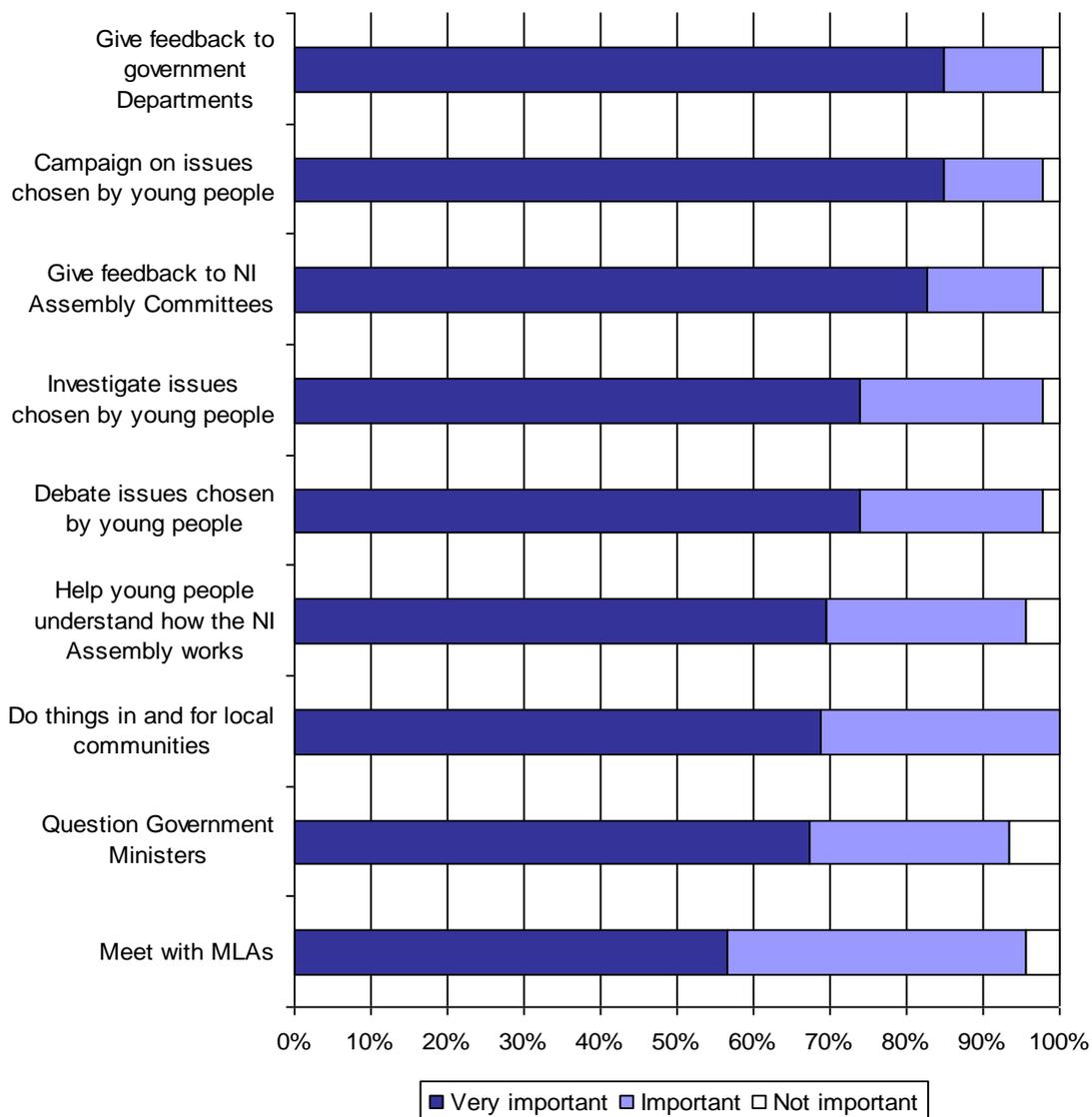
- Meet with MLAs.

**Chart 11: What the Youth Assembly should be able to do (Individuals, n = 655)**



	Very important	Important	Not important
Give feedback to government Departments	56.2%	38.2%	5.6%
Campaign on issues chosen by young people	59.5%	36.5%	4.0%
Give feedback to NI Assembly Committees	52.4%	41.5%	6.1%
Investigate issues chosen by young people	55.4%	38.7%	6.0%
Debate issues chosen by young people	59.7%	36.0%	4.3%
Help young people understand how the NI Assembly works	49.2%	40.7%	10.1%
Do things in and for local communities	51.1%	39.6%	9.4%
Question Government Ministers	51.7%	38.4%	9.9%
Meet with MLAs	46.1%	42.0%	11.9%

**Chart 12: What the Youth Assembly should be able to do (Organisations, n = 46)**



	Very important	Important	Not important
Give feedback to government Departments	84.8%	13.0%	2.2%
Campaign on issues chosen by young people	84.8%	13.0%	2.2%
Give feedback to NI Assembly Committees	82.6%	15.2%	2.2%
Investigate issues chosen by young people	73.9%	23.9%	2.2%
Debate issues chosen by young people	73.9%	23.9%	2.2%
Help young people understand how the NI Assembly works	69.6%	26.1%	4.3%
Do things in and for local communities	68.9%	31.1%	0.0%
Question Government Ministers	67.4%	26.1%	6.5%
Meet with MLAs	56.5%	39.1%	4.3%

Respondents were also keen that the Youth Assembly should:

*“Not just talk about making change but actually act on these problems; cooperation with government ministers is essential for putting plans into action”*

*“Not just be a talking shop - get things done”*

Other suggestions put forward by respondents included that the Youth Assembly have a role in:

- Developing legislation;

*“A Youth Assembly should be more than just a talking shop and draw up legislation concerning youth issues regarding the likes of suicide, drugs, and anti social behaviour etc..”*

*“They should be able to pass bills created by young people. These should then be debated and possibly passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly”*

*“Block legislation directly impacting young people, that young people have voted against, with a 2/3 majority”*

- Financial matters;

*“Challenge the funding and governance process for all organisations in receipt of monies regardless of the government department administering it to ensure that it meets actual need, has measurable impacts, is valuable and represents value for money”*

*“Award grants, designate money and have REAL power not just placatory tokenism which we see all too often”*

*“The youth movement should help with fund raising for different issues and charities in Northern Ireland”*

- Encouraging a positive image of young people;

*“Champion a positive image of young people”*

A number of respondents were also keen that a Youth Assembly should develop links with the youth sector and help improve communication:

*“Work with NIYF; and Network for Youth”*

*“The Assembly needs to mix with other young people in youth groups”*

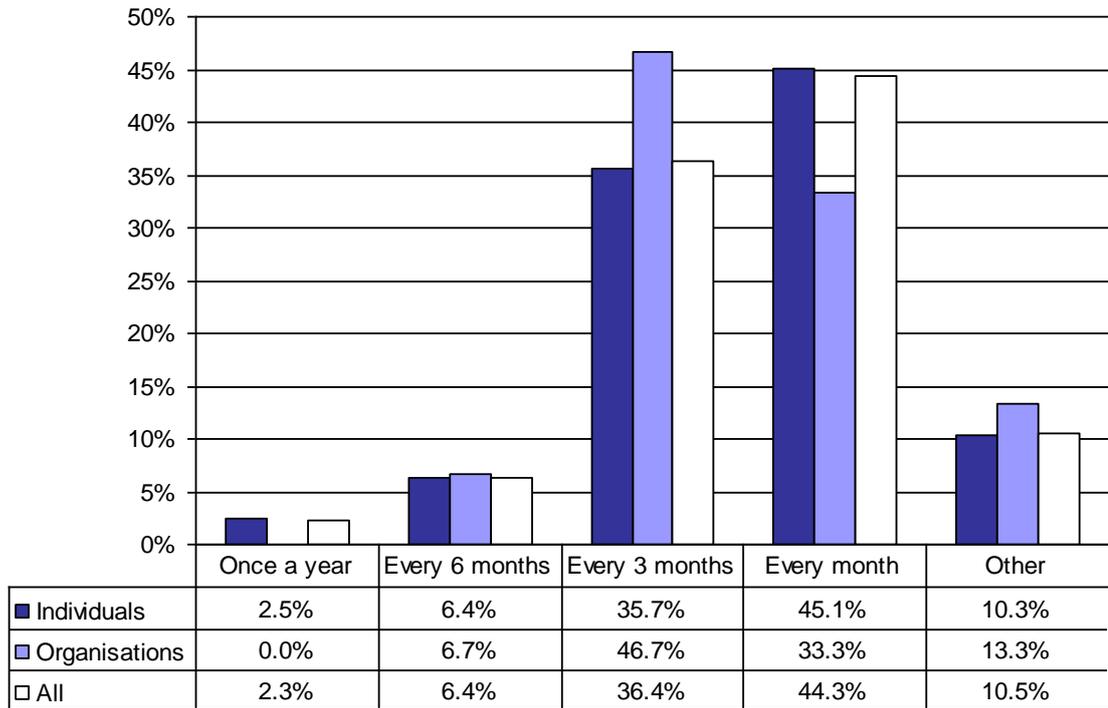
*“Communicate regularly with relevant groups i.e. Youth Groups who have sent representation and Youth work Organisations”*

*“Help existing youth groups in Northern Ireland to communicate with each other and with more young people”*

## 2.11 How often should a Youth Assembly meet?

Overall, the highest proportion of respondents (44.3%) thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every month. The highest proportion of individuals (45.1%) thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every month. The highest proportion of organisations (46.7%) thought that a Youth Assembly should meet every three months.

**Chart 13: How often a Youth Assembly should meet**



All (n = 684); Individuals (n = 639); Organisations (n = 45)

Other suggestions were:

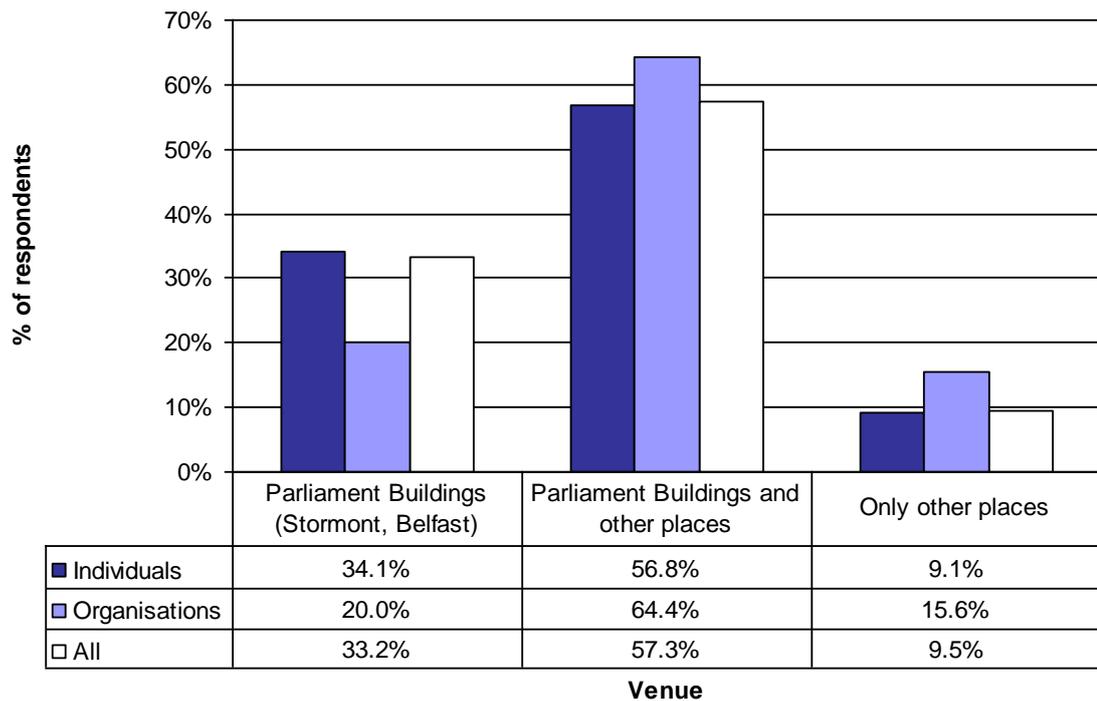
- More than once a week (three people);
- Weekly (eight people);
- Every two weeks (14 people)
- Every two months (20 people); and,
- Quarterly (five people);

Three people suggested that there be regular local meetings with a less frequent meeting of the whole Youth Assembly.

## 2.12 Where should a Youth Assembly meet?

Most respondents (64.4% of organisations and 56.8% of individuals) were in favour of holding meetings in Parliament Buildings and other places.

**Chart 14: Where a Youth Assembly should meet**



Of those who said that they would prefer meetings to be held only in other places, the majority (62 respondents) felt that meetings should be rotated around Northern Ireland.

*“Take turns in every constituency and chose anywhere available”*

*“The Youth Assembly should not only meet in Stormont but in members constituencies to ensure maximum attendance from all members”*

*“Meetings should be moved around Northern Ireland”*

Seven preferred a central location, such as Cookstown and three preferred Belfast.

In terms of setting, respondents suggested:

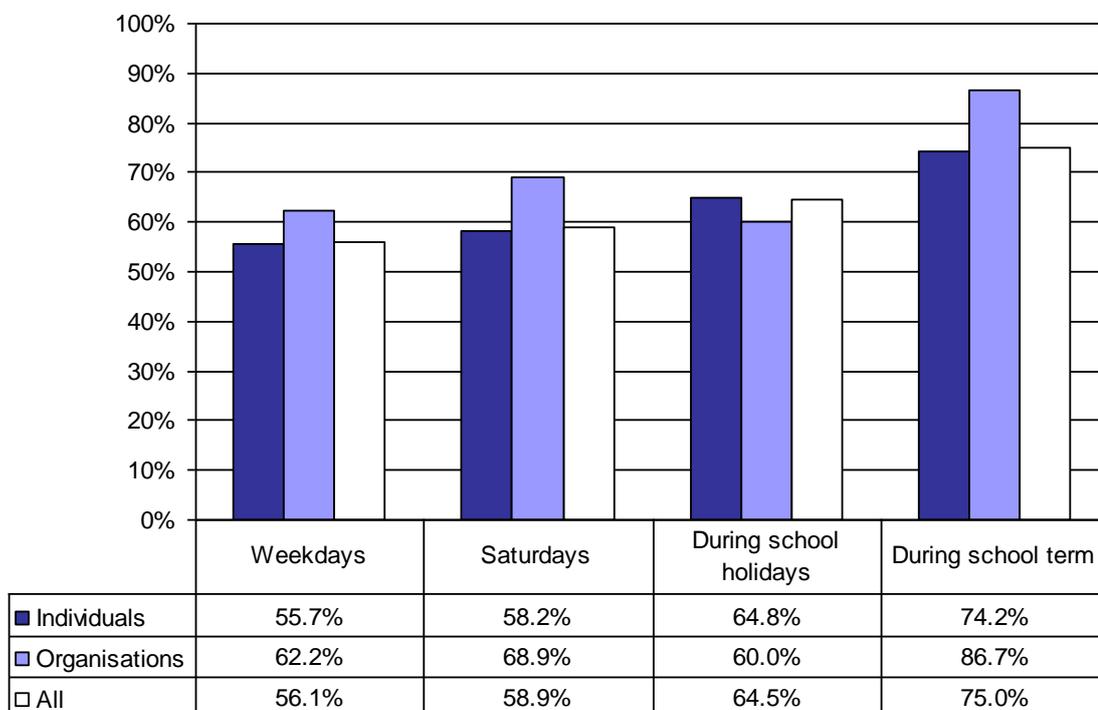
- Civic Centres, City Halls or Council offices (19 people);
- Youth clubs, centres or organisations (16 people);
- Community centres (11 people);
- A young-person friendly or informal environment (6 people); and,
- Somewhere neutral (three people).

### 2.13 When should the Youth Assembly meet?

A slightly higher proportion of individuals and organisations preferred that the Youth Assembly meet on Saturdays when compared to week days, although the majority of respondents were in favour of meetings on weekdays and/or on Saturdays.

Similarly, a higher proportion of individuals and organisations preferred that the Youth Assembly meet during school term when compared to during school holidays, although the majority of respondents were in favour of meetings during school holidays and/or during school term.

**Chart 15: When the Youth Assembly should meet**



All (n = 684); Individuals (n = 639); Organisations (n = 45)

## 2.14 Other suggestions

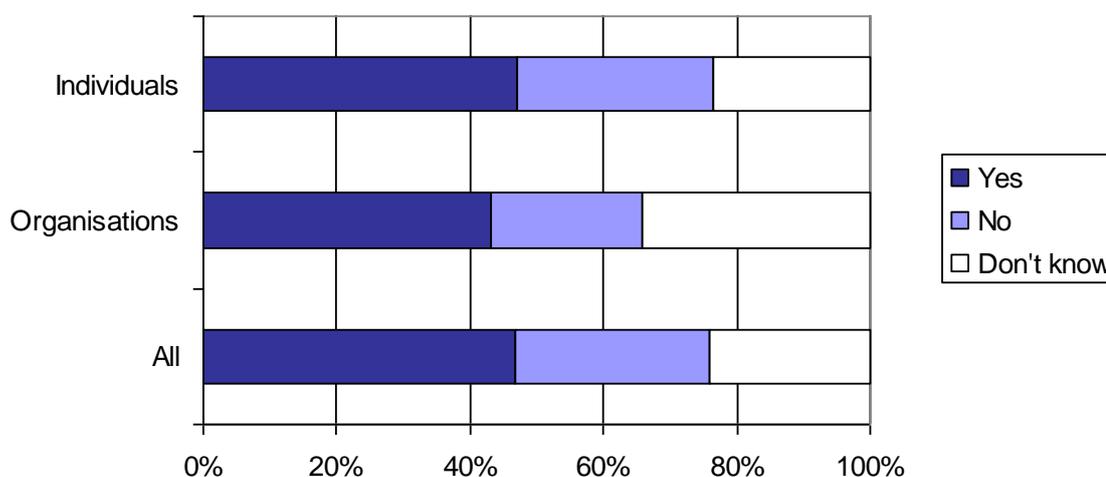
In total, 150 respondents gave suggestions about how a Youth Assembly should work. A representative selection of suggestions covering fair representation, what the Youth Assembly should be able to do, how the Youth Assembly should be run, how the Youth Assembly should link to the Assembly/MLAs and organisations such as the youth sector as well as issues regarding communication are presented in Annex A.

## 2.15 Interest in taking part in a Youth Assembly?

Less than half of individuals (47.0%) and organisations (43.2%) said they would be interested in taking part in a Youth Assembly. A number of people completing the survey said that, while they would be too old to sit on the Youth Assembly, they would be keen to lend their support and assistance.

Just under a quarter of respondents (24.2%) said they did not know if they would be interested.

**Chart 16: Interest in taking part in a Youth Assembly**



	Yes	No	Don't know
<b>All</b>	46.8	29	24.2
<b>Organisations</b>	43.2	22.7	34.1
<b>Individuals</b>	47	29.5	23.5

The main reasons given by young people for being interested in taking part in a Youth Assembly were to share their ideas and opinions, to make a difference, they are interested in politics and to represent young people:

*"I would like to contribute my ideas into the community"*

*"I would like to give my opinions"*

*"Because I want to make a difference that counts"*

*"I would like to make a difference in what and how young people feel in our society today"*

*"I think it would be an interesting experience and I have an interest in politics being a sixth form politics student"*

*"I am interested in politics, welfare and the world around me"*

*"Be interested in changing how young people view politics"*

*"I think it would be a great idea to be able to represent my age group, gender group and my peers"*

The main reasons given by young people for not being interested in taking part in a Youth Assembly were that they:

- Were not interested;

*"Because I'm not really interested in politics"*

- Had no time or too many other commitments such as studies or involvement in community and youth work;

*“I feel it would be too much pressure due to the fact that I have other commitments that take up a lot of my time”*

- Don't feel they know enough;

*“I don't feel I know enough”*

or,

- That they lacked the confidence or skills to become involved.

*“I would be interested in being involved but I wouldn't be confident enough to voice my opinions”*

Most of those that were unsure said they would need more information in order to decide.

*“Would need to know more about it before I would consider taking part in it”*

**Annex A**

Responses to the question “Do you have any other suggestions about how a Youth Assembly should work?”

**Fair representation**

*A Youth Assembly should be done fairly and everyone’s opinion should be looked at and treated fairly.*

*A Youth Assembly is only relevant if it can bring about change and if it is representative of the views of all young people. The impact of the Youth Assembly needs to bring benefits to all young people including groups who are generally alienated.*

*Everyone on the Youth Assembly should have a fair say even if you are the youngest of the assembly, you should have an equal say as someone who is the eldest.*

*I think young people should also be informed of how to apply for the assembly and for it to be open to all.*

**What the Youth Assembly should be able to do**

*It needs to be clear regarding its functions and how it can carry these out. If not then it will be a waste of tax payer’s money.*

*A Youth Assembly should work in an ideal world like a small house of parliament. There should be vote in a Youth Assembly on issues arising in government that effect youth, tuition fees for example.*

*A Youth Assembly would need to command power and be able to influence the Government on decisions if it is to be taken seriously. The Youth Assembly should also be able to take part in Stormont debates and votes.*

*For me, the Youth Assembly should be an organisation where people can have ideas and argue them.*

*I think the youths should come together and associate with the problems of each community and bring it forth to the Elected Representatives. They should be able to debate with the ministers. Organize things that teenagers in our communities want.*

*I don't think that the Youth Assembly need mirror the NI Assembly in the way it does business. It is important the Youth Assembly be participative, worth while and fun.*

*For the Youth Assembly to be inclusive to all young people across Northern Ireland, give the young people responsibility to ensure that it is a worthwhile process. Allow it to be young person lead so they have a sense of belonging and able to be creative.*

*I would like to see the Youth Assembly operating on a similar level with that of our British counterparts. Educating young people of politics and the political system(s) which govern them.*

*In an ideal world it should run alongside MLAs in decision making etc*

*Look at and priorities issues important to young people, such as careers & student grants, employment, poverty, environment, transport etc. take on one or two issues per year.*

*The narrower the focus the greater the success for the young people involved. Give the Youth Assembly a significant budget that could provide small grants to individual and local groups of young people*

*They should mass survey youth ,find out what they have to do in their spare time( not a lot) and lobby for more low cost, facilities and activities. They could compare these activities with those of their counterparts in other countries and lobby government*

UNCRC gives young people the right to be involved in decisions affecting them. Y. Ass. Needs a formal role in public policy processes and Assembly/Executive business, and make recommendations to the Assembly and the Executive.

### **Running of the Youth Assembly**

*The framework in which the Youth Assembly works is the key to its success. This will include things like what is expected of the group; what they can realistically expect to achieve; conduct and attendance guidelines; etc.*

*Yes this needs to be a representative forum, reflective of status and class in terms of Youth Culture. Open and transparent processes, well marketed and profiled, managed by young people with appropriate support.*

*Agenda and all aspects of the Youth Assembly is decided by young people.*

*We have trained youth facilitators - there to support the young people - it's important that they are given confidence and ability. There should be a set of rules agreed for their participation.*

*It is imperative that the agenda of the Youth Assembly is informed by the views and experiences of the children and young people involved and not directed and steered by the adults who are supporting them.*

*There should be some one who is a higher authority from every one else to keep control and make sure every ones paying attention.*

*As long as all participants agree to how it is run and their views are listened to and not tokenism.*

*Every meeting should be open to/advertised for public viewing.*

*Get as many young people involved as possible who are accountable & must attend meetings.*

*Those within the committee should behave themselves at all times, when in the chamber, outside of it, and of course on Facebook or too.*

*All members should take part in cross community projects before being allowed to sit in the assembly.*

*An incentive for active involvement. Young people once recruited should have the opportunity to be trained specifically for the role, be given a job specification and job description.*

*As a team, they would need to go through team building exercises to ensure that no one takes over and that no one is left out or ignored. They should not disregard anyone's ideas as useless and listen to other young people across N.I.*

*It should have support from civil service (i.e. like a standing committee of NI Assembly) and resources in order carry out investigations. It should have a support worker (at least one) with youth worker experience and qualifications to advise and support*

*Should automatically ban members who show ANY signs of racism, bigotry.*

*There should be an MLA or someone at every meeting for control and to tell us what ideas can be brought forward or what may be immature.*

*Youth Assembly members should have the responsibility to run or attend local Area Conferences on an annual basis to advise youth on developments and seek opinion to take back to Stormont.*

*This group should have the opportunity to explore and visit International and EU Youth Assembly's. Opportunities to have motivational guest speakers visit the group. Have N.I Youth Assembly T.V and Media progress up date.*

### **Links with the Assembly/MLAs**

*We should be allowed to scrutinise the MLA's over issues concerning young people.*

*Allow young people to sit in on assembly meetings.*

*The Youth Assembly should be totally independent from the NI assembly. This means that they will not be silenced over important issues and can speak freely without bias.*

*There should be a select number of members from the Youth Assembly in Stormont and able to debate in Question Time, just like MPs and MLAs.*

*They could perhaps sit in on a session with MLAs debating motions and then discuss them on their own. Make it an integrated process rather than two separate entities.*

### **Links with other organisations**

*Members should have no affiliation with political parties.*

*The members of the Youth Assembly should pick a party and campaign for them.*

*The Youth Assembly should be representative of the makeup of the parties which are present in the Northern Ireland Assembly.*

*They have to be representative, be able to press issues without party influence and mainly be able to make a difference.*

*I feel schools and youth organisations should be strongly behind this concept and new technology such as conferencing web etc should be used to engage Y.P in playing an active role in raising issues and determining the future for themselves.*

*Needs to have better links to local youth groups and youth councils.*

*Supported by NIYF. NIYF could promote and signpost members to YA. YA may end up elitist. Partnership approach would help stop this.*

*The NIYA should be a direct and permanent link to the NIA, and they should work on increasing communication between young people, youth organisations and the assembly. The Youth Assembly shouldn't overlap with the work already being carried out by other youth organisations.*

### **Communication**

*I think this would be a positive thing for Northern Ireland and it would get the youth more "switched on" to politics in everyday life. It must be a positive thing to hear everyone's view, young & old!*

*Communication of the workings of the Youth Assembly through T.V., internet, radio, newspapers, twitter. T.V or radio programme once a year showing the Youth Assembly at work.*

*I think the Youth Assembly should tell us more about their ideas and ask what we think as we are also going to be affected by their ideas.*

*It should be something that all the youth of Northern Ireland know about. So many things that are on are not publicised enough and people are unaware of how and when they can get involved.*

*It should have its own website where teenagers can send their views in and discuss them with other teenagers, like a forum.*

*Questionnaires should be sent round schools so that the youth can tell the assembly what they believe needs to be considered.*

*The importance of the role should be supported by the young people being encouraged to attend by their school, college or university, by being able to take time to attend during term time.*

*This country's youth are quite in the dark about our politics, they need enlightened, perhaps a large initiative aimed at schools, technical colleges and the public sector would help raise support for our current government.*