


# Young People's Voices

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A report on a two-year engagement with 16-24 year-olds, exploring the perceptions, experiences and aspirations of young adults living in Northern Ireland and highlighting the views of the next generation of leaders, decision-makers and voters.

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September 2015



The IEF would like to thank all the young people who have informed this report, whether through responding to an opinion poll or engaging in events to explore issues which affect their lives and their future. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the many youth organisations and schools in helping to shape and host events where these important issues can be discussed.

Thanks also go to the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner, Koulla Yiasouma, for kindly agreeing to write the foreword for the report.



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# Key findings

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This project involved more than 2,000 people aged 16-24 either through opinion polls, focus groups, political hustings or round-table discussion. The main findings include:

- Seventeen years after the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement young people are still living with division.
- Only a minority live in a mixed area.
- The strongest perception of division is by reason of religious background
- Asked to consider education, housing and employment, most of those questioned see education as the field which is most in need of work to end division.
- More than 80% of those questioned agree that an education system bringing children of all faiths and none together in the same schools would be an important step in combatting sectarianism.
- Most young people contributing to this project would wish any future children they have to go to school with others of all religious and cultural backgrounds.
- Young political activists of all the main parties endorse integrated education and question the role and usefulness of academic selection at P7.
- A majority of young people questioned show a lack of confidence in the economic and employment prospects for Northern Ireland.
- School students say that the two main traditions in Northern Ireland do not respect one another.
- Fewer than half of 16-24 year olds in Northern Ireland feel that politicians are moving Northern Ireland towards peace.
- Despite this lack of faith in politicians, a majority intends to use their vote.

# Foreword

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I would like to congratulate the Integrated Education Fund for undertaking this piece of work and would encourage everyone to read it.

The report demonstrates both the realism and optimism of Northern Ireland's young people (aged 16 to 24). They have no doubts about the challenges presented by a highly segregated education system and housing but are confident that, in the right circumstances, we can move forward to a 'shared' society. I share their confidence but believe that there is still commitment to be secured and work to be done.



**Koulla Yiasouma**  
**NI Commissioner for**  
**Children and Young People**

As Commissioner for Children and Young People it is my job to ensure that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the framework that informs all decisions concerning children and young people. The UNCRC gives very clear guidance with regard to education which is the issue the majority of young people believed should be the most pressing priority. Article 29 of the convention states that:

*“Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child’s respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment”*

It is apparent from a myriad of reports, including this one, and from recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, that NI still has some way to travel to fully realise the aspirations of Article 29. Academic selection and our mainly segregated education system continue to attract international attention and concern which is shared by the majority of young people.

Without a doubt there have been significant and very welcome changes in NI since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, the impact of which cannot be under-estimated or minimised. Although the young people involved in this report represent the post-ceasefire generation, they have adopted a realistic and pragmatic approach recognising both the importance of greater integration but also that such developments need to be gradual, phased and considered.

This report provides an important contribution to the debate we must have in NI about the type of education system we need going forward. The young people have clearly stated that “doing nothing” is not an option; they are calling for a more integrated community and an education system that does not divide them on the basis of religion, gender or class and which gives them the best opportunities to realise their potential.

Whilst many of the young people interviewed are clearly the decision makers of tomorrow, they have the right to have their views and experiences listened to and taken into account TODAY. We, as a society, ignore their voices at our peril.

**Koulla Yiasouma**

**NI Commissioner for Children and Young People**

# Introduction

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Despite massive progress since the ceasefires and the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, today's young people have grown up in a divided society. More than 90% of public housing continues to be segregated along religious lines and Northern Ireland maintains a dual, largely segregated education system that educates its children separately, both by religious background and through crude measurements of ability, as well as, in some cases, by gender. Approximately 90% of pupils in Northern Ireland are in schools that are largely or exclusively segregated by the religious tradition of pupils.

Any progress towards a more cohesive society, where diversity and individuality are respected whilst commonality is cherished, must involve the young adults who will be expected to live with the outcomes of the policies created now. These young people will inherit the continuing task of creating a Northern Ireland for everyone. It is vitally important that their voices are heard and their experiences and opinions valued.

Over the past two years the Integrated Education Fund (IEF) has undertaken a major consultation process with young people aged 16-24. The IEF's *Young People's Voices* project sought to stimulate and hear the views of a section of the population which has largely grown up beyond the Troubles and which is now at an age ready for political and civic activity.

The project was made up of three clearly defined elements: research through independent attitudinal surveys; group conversations; and political engagement events. The purpose was to gauge and report the experiences and opinions of young people in relation to the segregated nature of our society, and to encourage debate. This would enable the IEF to identify where young people's experiences and aspirations reflect or divert from Stormont Executive policy. And, crucially, this could suggest how the opinions of young voters of today and tomorrow might help shape government strategy towards the declared aim of a united community.



### **Young people's voices surveys**

A key base for the process of engagement with young people was an insight into their lives and views gained through data-based evidence. The Fund commissioned two major surveys from independent research organisations.

In spring 2014 the IEF commissioned polling company LucidTalk to research the views of people in Northern Ireland aged 16-24. The survey was carried out from 09 April to 24 April 2014. Questions covered politics, segregation, future aspirations and education.

The IEF also commissioned a module in the annual Young People's Life and Times (YLT) Survey. The YLT Survey is run by ARK, established by Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. A sample of 1034 young people in Northern Ireland aged 16 completed the survey in the summer of 2014. The module commissioned by the IEF questioned the 16-year-olds about divisions, diversity and inclusion, and was designed to reflect the experiences and perceptions of the respondents regarding life in Northern Ireland, particularly at school.

Both polls included qualitative research which gave respondents the opportunity to contribute opinions which illustrated the thinking behind the accompanying statistics. The data shows that the majority of young people see divisions in Northern Ireland society, particularly on religious grounds. This is countered by a widespread wish for schools which educate children of all faiths and none together and a desire to see divisions addressed by political leaders. At the same time this generation is outward-looking, with many seeing their future as lying beyond Northern Ireland, due either to a wish to access more career opportunities or to a pessimistic view of life here.

### **Outreach conversations**

Working in partnership with a number of organisations, the IEF hosted four local engagement events with young people across Northern Ireland between May and November 2014. These served as focus groups to explore topics covered in the independent quantitative research described above.

The events were held in Belfast, Derry, Ballymena and Newry and included a variety of techniques to stimulate conversation about housing, education and employment. In each case we followed the conversation with a poll, using an electronic voting mechanism, to gain a picture of the overall group thinking after in-depth discussion.

The discussions and polling combined to present a picture of young people who perceive divisions in their society, who want to see these divisions addressed and who can identify challenges to be overcome if divisions are to be broken down. There was also an overall lack of confidence regarding their own individual prospects for employment and career development.

### **Political engagement events**

The Fund also organised two first-time voters' events using a hustings model and involving representatives of the main political parties. The audience in each case was entirely or predominantly made up of politics A-level students; they were already interested in the political process and were continuing education post-GCSE. These events took place as we approached the May 2014 European Elections and the May 2015 Westminster elections respectively. At both hustings we used electronic voting to present the politicians on the platform with the opinions of the audience on issues relevant to young people.

The two hustings showed that there is a vocal element among 16 to 18-year-olds in Northern Ireland eager and able to challenge politicians over sectarianism and division as well as over the future prospects for employment and prosperity.

The Fund also hosted a roundtable discussion with representatives from the youth branch of each of the main political parties, which provided insight into the thinking of politically active young people. This gave a glimpse of how policy could develop in the future as a younger generation of politicians move through the parties and take on key roles.

The various platforms, research programmes and events have shown a perception among young people of a divided society in Northern Ireland. There was also a clear will for action to end this division, and a majority wish that future generations should be educated together regardless of tradition or belief.

# Findings

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## 1. Opinion polls

### **Northern Ireland survey of 16-24-year-olds (the LucidTalk poll)**

Independent polling company LucidTalk was commissioned by the IEF to carry out an attitudinal survey of people in Northern Ireland aged between 16 and 24, during the spring of 2014.

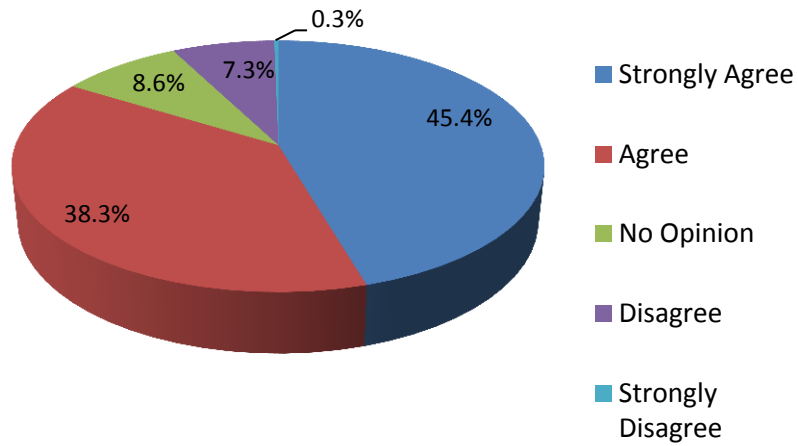
The sample of 1,075 was carefully selected to be demographically representative of that age-group within Northern Ireland. All data results were weighted to reflect gender and community background.

The survey consisted of 11 questions covering attitudes to politics and politicians; hopes and plans for the future; and community relations and segregation. The full list of questions can be found in Appendix 1. The full results of the survey can be accessed online at [www.ief.org.uk/furtherreading](http://www.ief.org.uk/furtherreading)

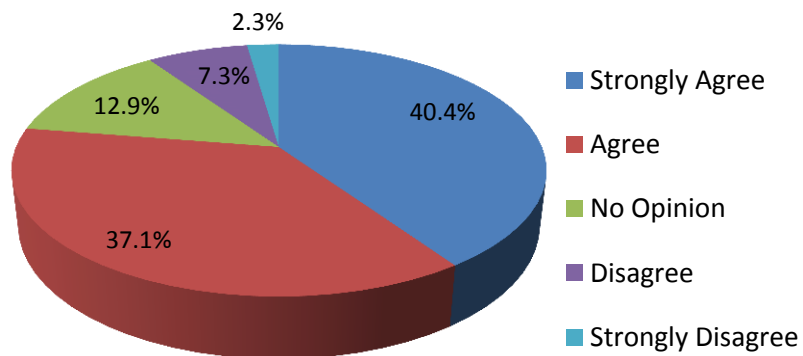
Those questions which were particularly relevant in helping to shape and direct the subsequent youth engagement work are highlighted here.

The responses show majority support for structures and policies which would bring people of all faiths and none together in housing areas and in schools.

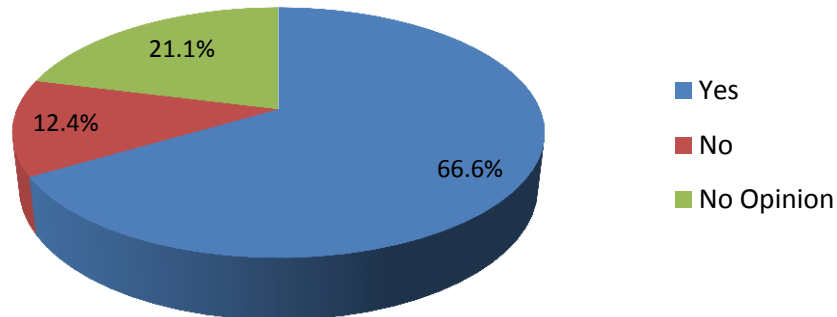
6. How would you rate the following statement: 'An education system where children of all faiths and none go to the same schools would be an important step in combating sectarianism in Northern Ireland'?



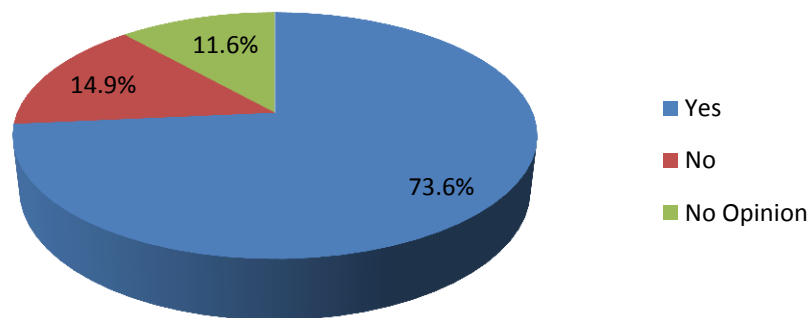
7. How would you rate the following statement: 'A housing policy which brings people of all faiths and none to live in shared areas would be an important step in combating sectarianism in Northern Ireland'?



9. *Would you have liked your school experience to have included more pupils from different traditions and backgrounds?*



10. *If you have children – or, imagining you will go on to have children in the future - would you prefer them to go to school with children of all traditions and backgrounds?*



Additional questions in the poll looked at young people’s attitudes to politicians and politics as they currently stand in Northern Ireland. A majority of those of voting age questioned (69.4%) said they intended to vote in the May 2015 election. When asked what our politicians should be focusing on, young people answered that sectarianism and the lack of jobs must be the focus at present; only 45.1% of young people questioned said that politicians were helping to move Northern Ireland towards a peaceful society.<sup>2</sup>

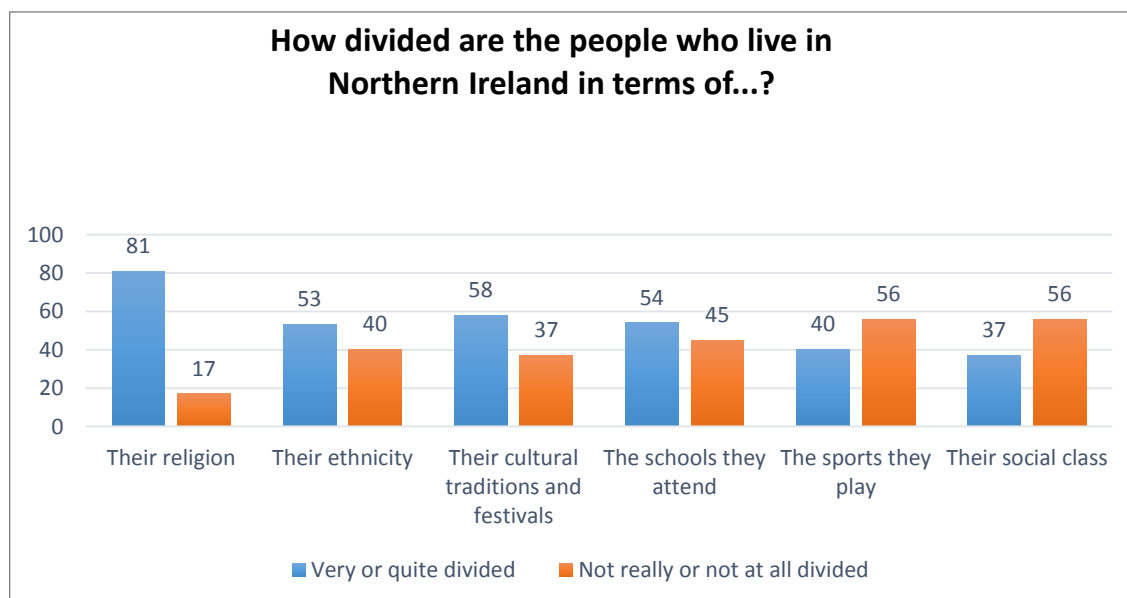
<sup>2</sup> Summary of the full survey in Appendix 1

## ARK Young Life and Times survey of 16-year-olds

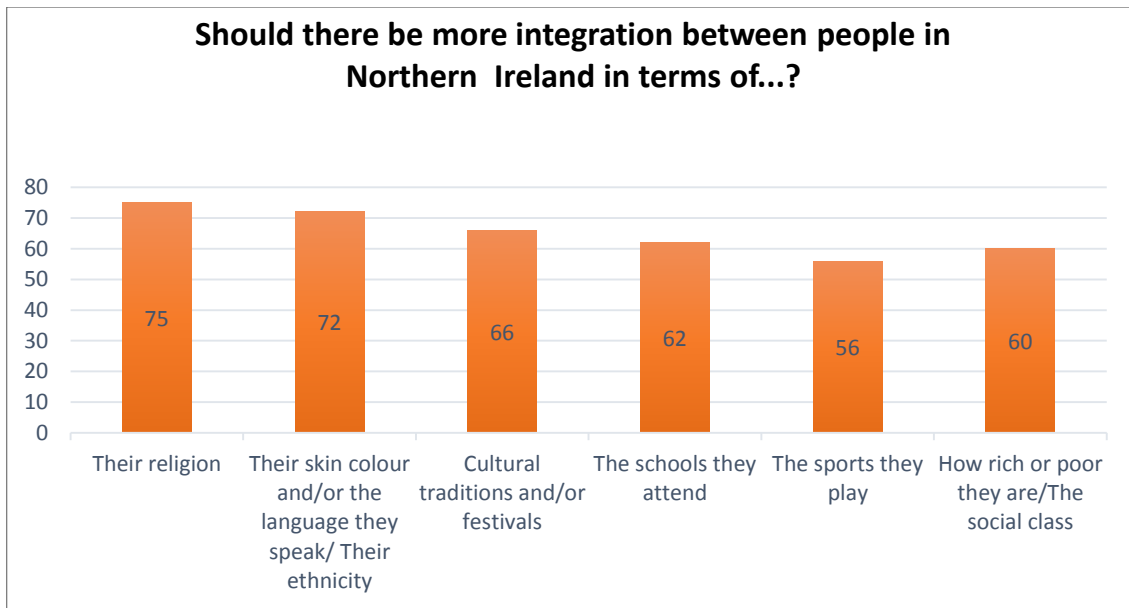
ARK (Access, Research, Knowledge) is the Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive, a collaborative project between the two Northern Ireland universities, providing attitudinal surveys on social issues with the aim of contributing to policy development. The Young Life and Times survey (YLT) began in 2003. A sample of 1034 young people in Northern Ireland aged 16 completed the survey in the summer of 2014.

The IEF commissioned a module in which the sample was asked how divided they think that people who live in Northern Ireland are in terms of: their religion; their ethnicity; their cultural traditions and festivals; the schools they attend; the sports they play; their social class.

There was a leaning towards a perception of division in nearly all areas of life. By far the strongest identification of division was by religion: 81% of those questioned think that people who live in Northern Ireland are divided on this basis. The only areas where respondents were less likely to see division were sports and social class.



Overall, the evidence suggests that young people are not content with these divisions and aspire to a different kind of society. The sample was asked how much more integration, if any, they think there should be in each of the above areas.



Respondents felt strongest about the need for more integration between the people who live here in relation to their religion (75%). They also felt strongly about the need for more integration in relation to ethnicity (72%). They felt least strongly about the need for more integration in relation to the sports they play (56%).

The results also suggest that young people are, in themselves, very open to others of all backgrounds and traditions. Asked about welcoming a hypothetical newcomer to their school, the vast majority say they would make them feel welcome regardless of the new pupil's religious, ethnic or social background, and expected others in their school to do the same.

Looking to the future, the young people were asked if, assuming they went on to have a child or children, they would choose a school where all the pupils were of one religious background, or a mixed-religion school.

The majority (59%) would choose a mixed religion school, more than twice the number (26%) who would choose a school with pupils of a single religious background.

Some 16-year-olds who chose 'mixed-religion school' for their putative children provided reasons for their choice. Their reasoning could be divided into six main categories: the chance to interact with different people; to learn about other people's cultures; to break down barriers of the past and look to a better future; to create and ensure equality; to reflect the outside world; or because it reflected their own family or educational background.

Finally the respondents were asked what three words first came to mind when they thought of the political situation in Northern Ireland. The word that was mentioned most often was the word **DIVIDED**. Other words that were chosen frequently were **CONFUSING, MESS** and **UNSTABLE**.<sup>3</sup>

The results from both research projects discussed above show a broad support for creating structures to bring all sides of the community together through education and housing. There is also a clear aspiration for future generations, as a majority of respondents in both surveys said that they would hope to send their children to a school with children of all traditions and backgrounds. In addition, in the LucidTalk poll of people in the 16-24 age group, a majority of respondents (66.6%) answered that they would have liked additional mixing in their own education setting. This flags up a significant shortfall in the availability of integrated schools in Northern Ireland (currently enrolling just 7% of the pupil population) and a gulf between education policy regarding the development of integrated education and demand for integrated schools.

## 2. Outreach conversations

Working in partnership with a number of organisations the IEF hosted a series of local engagement events. These events served as focus groups to explore the reasoning which might lie behind the responses to the independent research described above. The events were devised to provide a platform for young people, particularly for those who are otherwise marginalised and disengaged from politics and civic activity.

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<sup>3</sup> Further analysis in Appendix 2: ARK Research Update 99 June 2015



A working group was established in early 2014 in order to facilitate and shape this face-to-face engagement work. The group brought together youth advocacy organisations and bodies working directly with young people in Northern Ireland. These comprised: Youth Action; Rural Community Network; NI Youth Forum; NEET Strategy Forum; NEET Youth Forum; MENCAP; Public Achievement; NUS-USI; NICCY; and NICVA.

The resulting workshops encouraged further thinking and discussion about progress towards a more united community. The events also allowed exploration of the experiences of young people in terms of where they live, how they are educated and their attitudes and aspirations regarding employment.

A pilot event was run in Belfast following which the programme was reviewed and developed for three further events in different locations - Newry, Ballymena and Derry – in order to reach young people across Northern Ireland. The meetings were promoted through the partner organisations, through local youth organisations and through local post-primary schools. Each event was attended by 20-35 local young people, and a number of young people from Belfast travelled to all of the events. The lead facilitator at each session was a member of the Youth Action staff.

The sessions contained three parts, covering separately housing, education and employment. Activity began with small group conversations, facilitated by members of the working group and local youth workers. These conversations enabled detailed exploration of participants' views and encouraged consideration of the thinking behind them. This stage was followed by an invitation to write comments, or record opinions on video, and then the guests were invited to give their views through an electronic straw-poll on the various issues.

### **Housing**

Participants were first asked to describe the area in which they lived. It emerged from discussions and from the electronic survey that a minority (less than a third of participants) considered themselves to be living in a mixed area. There was then a conversation about the impact of segregated housing. There was recognition that segregation can have a negative impact on community relations.

Several participants noted that they were unable to visit friends who lived in certain areas and vice versa. However, many speakers said they felt that separating communities was safer and some participants shared previous experiences of mixing which had led to increased tension and even violence. In spite of this, a small majority said they would support more integrated housing rather than our current system.

Participants were asked to identify barriers to the development of integrated housing. Recurring answers included politicians, and religious and racial discrimination from within communities.

The deliberative polling of these groups suggested that many young people would aspire to having integrated housing across Northern Ireland, although the majority agreed that Northern Ireland will only move gradually towards this position.

## **Education**

The discussion about education looked at the school experience of participants, their views on integration, and the opportunities that they had within the classroom setting to discuss issues of segregation, division and diversity.

The young people involved had attended a range of schools: integrated; controlled; maintained; grammar; all-ability; and both single-sex and co-educational. Many young people did not feel that their education had adequately prepared them for employment and a number of participants stressed that there is not a consistent quality in education across Northern Ireland's schools and colleges.

Other concerns raised were bullying (including racist or sectarian bullying) and school uniform – the latter seen as a leveller but also expensive and, outside school, an identifier of difference.

There was support for integrated education. Several participants felt that integration not only of religious background but also of gender and ethnicity should be promoted, with a number of people saying that the government should create legislation for this.

It was argued that integrated schools would break down barriers, enabling young people to learn from others different to themselves and to have a wider group of friends. However some participants questioned whether all integrated schools currently work adequately to achieve this. There was also a small number of people supporting a segregated education system, saying that parental choice should be preserved and believing that it avoids contentious issues and promotes individualism. Some participants also wanted to see the grammar system protected.

Most of the young people had not had the opportunity to discuss these types of issues in school; however, many had been able to discuss these things at youth or community groups, outside of formal education. It was noted by participants that schools, by disregarding these subjects, were failing to prepare their students for later life when they would meet people from many backgrounds in further education or in the workplace.

The electronic voting after discussions showed majority support for schools educating children of all faiths and none together. Of those expressing an opinion, 65% thought that all schools in Northern Ireland should be mixed in this way. However, there is a belief that progress towards this will have to be gradual, with more than 50% of participants believing this could take anything up to 20 years to achieve.

## **Employment**

The majority of those participating in the engagement events were not yet in full-time employment. The young people had a range of ambitions for future work, from law through social work to youth work. In contrast, a number of jobs were very unpopular with the young people, including politics and the police.

Integration is seen as a positive aspect of the workplace; the vast majority of respondents believed a person's background does not affect their ability to do a job well.

From the series of engagement events a picture emerged of a lack of confidence when participants considered their future.

Many of the young people did not have a belief in their ability to secure their dream job. This runs alongside both the aforementioned awareness of division in Northern Ireland society and a degree of pessimism regarding any prospect of an improved quality of life or increased job opportunities. Thus it cannot be surprising that a large number of the young people attending these events expected to leave Northern Ireland, either because they wanted to or because they felt they would have to due to the lack of jobs here.

This was borne out in the electronic polls, showing that all but 17% of participants would be willing to leave Northern Ireland for a job; however, 50% of respondents said that if they left they would at some point return.

A final question was asked at each of the events: where do you think (in terms of the topics discussed) most work needs to be done to address segregation in Northern Ireland? The overwhelming response over the three events was that education needed most work, with more than double the number voting for education over housing and with only a very small number choosing the workplace.

A more detailed report of the engagement events with a breakdown of the electronic voting can be found online: [www.ief.org.uk/furtherreading](http://www.ief.org.uk/furtherreading)

### **3. The political interface**

#### **Hustings for youth**

The political youth engagement included two hustings events for schools. Broadcaster and journalist Jim Fitzpatrick chaired proceedings on both occasions.

It was felt that, with a three-year run of elections imminent (for the European Parliament, Westminster, and the Northern Ireland Assembly), promoting civic activity and political awareness among young voters was important. Many of those who attended were studying Politics at AS/A-level and so had already developed an interest in the political and election processes.

The first hustings was held in the Senate Chamber at Parliament Buildings before the European Election in May 2014. This event was attended by more than fifty 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils from integrated schools across Northern Ireland and by members of the WIMPS (Where Is My Public Servant?) youth organisation. Representatives of other organisations were also present. The event was devised to educate young people about the impact that European politics and policies can have on life in Northern Ireland.

The audience was introduced to the main parties standing for election and their policies on EU issues which impact young people. The panel comprised EU election candidates Ross Brown (Green Party); Alex Attwood (SDLP); Stephen Farry (Alliance Party); Tina McKenzie (NI21); and Mark Brotherton (Conservatives); and party representatives Phil Flanagan (Sinn Fein); Mervyn Storey (DUP); and Danny Kinahan (UUP).

The theme of the event was “What Europe Means to Me” with discussion covering inclusiveness and society, skills and employment, learning, travel and breaking down barriers. The structure involved an electronic vote to open proceedings, asking the audience which candidate or party they would support.

This question was asked again at the end of the event, and the voting system was also used to gauge opinion on the topics the candidates were debating at intervals throughout the event. Regarding the impact of EU membership, the most popular answer was “Cultural diversity”. Asked where they saw their long-term future, only 22% saw this as being in Northern Ireland.

For the second hustings, preceding the 2015 Westminster election, the Integrated Education Fund partnered with Lagan College. Lagan College pupils were joined at the event by pupils from three other schools: Grosvenor Grammar; Ashfield Boys and Ashfield Girls Schools.

This event was an opportunity for pupils in 6<sup>th</sup> forms to engage with and challenge parties fielding Westminster candidates.

The panellists were: Ross Brown (Green Party); Fearghal McKinney (SDLP); Chris Lyttle (Alliance); Mairtin O'Muilleoir (Sinn Fein); Paula Bradley (DUP); and Rodney McCune (JUP).

The topics debated were education, skills and employment, and cultural expression within Northern Ireland. Again, electronic polling was used to give a flavour of the views of the audience and to stimulate debate.<sup>4</sup>

A large majority (81%) of the students agreed that an education system where children of all faiths and none go to the same schools would be an important step in combating sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Asked whether they thought the two main traditions in Northern Ireland respect each other, 89% of the audience said "no". The politicians were asked, from the floor, how they could lead on this issue given the behaviour of Assembly members towards each other and the deep divisions between political parties.

The two events showed that there is a vocal element among 16 to 18-year-olds in Northern Ireland eager and able to challenge politicians over sectarianism and division as well as over prospects for employment and prosperity.

On this latter point, the electronic polling showed that only 22% at the first hustings said they saw their future as being in Northern Ireland. This rose to 36% - still a minority - at the second event a year later.

Electronic voting at both these events also showed a move among young people away from the traditionally strong parties towards those smaller parties seen as representing the 'middle ground'.

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<sup>4</sup> For a full list of questions see Appendix 3

### **Young politicians' roundtable discussion**

To broaden the scope of the Fund's engagement with young people we sought the perspectives of those who are politically active, through the youth wings of the main political parties in Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup>.

A roundtable discussion was arranged in Belfast, so that all the different political youth branches could discuss a range of topics and gain a better understanding of the policies of the other participants. The meeting was held *in camera* so that all present could feel comfortable in expressing and debating a range of views.

The agenda comprised the economic viability of the current education system, the role of the new Education Authority, and the key challenges we are currently facing in relation to education.

The conversation at the roundtable meeting showed areas of concern for the young politicians and, presumably, for a large element of the younger members within their respective parties.

It was pointed out that there is currently widespread duplication of provision in the education system, which is impacting on the Northern Ireland economy.

There was discussion of the nature of current integrated schools, and the need to address divisions beyond the traditional sectarian split in our society such as those based on gender, socio-economic inequality and ethnicity. Overall there was support for integrated education, with hope expressed that it could be developed to address these wider issues.

It was noted that current provision means not all communities can choose integrated schools locally. However it was felt that a community must work at the right pace and in its own way to develop local provision.

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<sup>5</sup> DUP; Sinn Fein; UUP; SDLP; Alliance; Green Party – each sent two representatives

The support of the community was an important element for the young representatives in planning local education provision. “Community” was seen as encompassing not just those who have children at the local school or who have involvement in the school but the wider community around a school.

One particular concern which emerged was the division created by academic selection at 11 years and the resulting two-tier education system. It was felt that transfer tests can have a detrimental impact on young lives and it was also felt that the tests reinforce socio-economic divisions within our society.

Participants felt that more needs to be done to address the difference in perceived status between not only a grammar school education and that of a secondary school, but also between academic and vocational qualifications. The young people felt that the lack of recognition for vocational qualifications and the continued use of selection tests by post-primary schools support significant division in education in Northern Ireland.

Further, the current education system was declared no longer fit for purpose with a clear disjunction between the classroom and the requirements of available jobs. Participants felt that this is responsible for a ‘brain drain’ of young people who seek further education, training and employment elsewhere. In this respect, the views of the young people who took part reflect those views from the business community about the curriculum and the skills which are taught in schools.<sup>6</sup>

There was in many cases a striking difference between the beliefs of the young political activists and those of their elders. Several representatives did acknowledge that the youth branches do not always see eye to eye with some of their main party policies. This suggests that our future political landscape could be quite different from that which we currently see at Stormont, with change driven by the younger generation as they grow and move into more prominence and influence in their parties.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Business of Education: Integrated Education Fund 2014*



# Making the connection

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Seventeen years after the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was signed and endorsed by referendum, our young people are still growing up in a context of division and segregation, with some evidence that the fear of conflict and violence remains strong in many areas.

The information gathered throughout this work underlines that, despite choosing 17 years ago to move towards a shared future, Northern Ireland continues to be a religiously segregated country. Many of those who participated in the events run during this project continue to experience and to be impacted by divisions, in particular through segregated housing and education. For those who do experience it, this can have a negative impact on their quality of life.

There is also expressed among the young people involved a widespread discontent with a disjunction between our education system and employment skills; our young people are not being educated to meet the job requirements of the current market.

When considered alongside the other post-conflict challenges that Northern Ireland is still facing, it is not surprising that a majority of young people, asked at different points in this engagement project, would be willing or indeed expect to leave Northern Ireland due to a lack of job opportunities. This has been reflected in other recent opinion polls run independently of the IEF's *Young People's Voices* work.

Young voters either currently in the education system or having recently emerged from it, see the need for policy changes which would bring young people together across traditional divisions and which would offer better life chances to all pupils. The more politically active youth identify a duplicated, *de facto* segregated education system as a drain on the public purse in Northern Ireland; there is also a strong sense from the young people of all backgrounds – both those surveyed by pollsters and those expressing opinions at engagement events - that the system and the school experience discourage their generation from staying in Northern Ireland and contributing economically.

# Key messages for Government

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Overall, this work highlights that there is a desire among young people for a shared future in Northern Ireland which includes more religious, ethnic and socio-economic integration. There is recognition that integration in all aspects of life brings social and economic benefits. There is also a recognition that major challenges must be addressed to enable further integration, including community-led initiatives to tackle the underlying issues - but hopes for the future do remain.

The broad agreement among politically active young people (in party youth branches) on issues relating to social cohesion, gives the impression that the next generation of leaders will bring a different approach to the political process, preparing the way for progress.

However, current policies aimed at developing a united community or at bringing young people together through the education system are moving Northern Ireland forward at a slow pace. Provision of integrated education falls far short of that envisioned by most of the young people encountered during the research.

Whilst some young people engaged in the IEF project said some sections of the community are cautious in terms of moving on from segregation, the majority of young people themselves are keen to realise a vision of a more united, cohesive Northern Ireland underpinned by integrated systems of housing and education.

Although the young people involved in the IEF project expressed an intention to vote, it has to be asked whether current politicians and parties are speaking to young voters, addressing issues which concern young people and inspiring engagement among the young.

# Where to from here?

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The IEF will continue to engage with and seek to empower young people to discuss political issues and confront division through working with schools as the next election (for the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2016) approaches. More hustings events for young voters will be staged and the Fund's digital media platforms will provide a resource to encourage political and civic engagement among younger voters.

The links forged with youth organisations such as NICCY, WIMPS/Public Achievement, Bryson House and Include Youth will be retained and strengthened so that channels of communication with young people beyond integrated schools can be maintained. Relationships initiated with the youth wings of the main political parties in Northern Ireland will be developed through briefing meetings, IEF participation in further debates and in party youth events.

The ARK project carries out annual surveys of P7 children (Kids Life and Times) as well as the Young Life and Times and adult surveys. The IEF sponsored a section in the 2014 KLT survey and the results showed a much lower perception of division than that evidenced in the YLT.

A useful and interesting piece of research would revisit the same children questioned for the KLT 2014 to see if post-primary education reinforces awareness/perception of division, or whether the younger generation is in fact growing up in a less divided Northern Ireland.

Crucially, the IEF takes from this research support for integrated schooling and the organisation's campaign to develop integrated education will continue with the confidence that the Fund is advocating the education system that the rising generation wants to see in Northern Ireland.

# Comments from young voices

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Quotations from conversations and opinion polls:

**“ ... I believe that all schools should be integrated to teach young people in Northern Ireland, to make our society more accepting of diversity.”**

*“There are no jobs here - people learn and then go to Australia.”*

*“I think we should live in a mixed area so that there is more peace and not so much hatred.”*

**“People should be integrated from primary to prevent as much racism or religious issues so it is natural for them.”**

*“I personally believe education should be secular and not to care about another person’s religious background. It should be about the child’s development socially and personally and religious teaching should be centred at home.”*

**“There should be an independent process to review opinions from sixth formers, and from those who have just gone through the education system. As these are the people who have the fresh experiences and ideas for the future.”**

**“There is an enormous waste of money in education.”**

*“It’s possible to live in peace, just difficult to achieve it.”*

*“I live in an interface area in Belfast and don’t like the segregation but if it wasn’t there, there would be more trouble.”*

**“If I had the choice, I would move out of this country and get a job as there is no jobs here and there is loads of jobs.”**

**“Integration in education is not as important as the education itself.”**

**“I felt let down by the school education. It’s because I didn’t get the education I needed.”**

# Further reading

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The following material can be found online at [www.ief.org.uk/furtherreading](http://www.ief.org.uk/furtherreading)

Access Research Knowledge (ARK) (2014) Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey

Campbell, E and McMahon, D. (2015) *Children's Law Centre's Young People's Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.*

Children's Law Centre and Save The Children (2014) *NI Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for consideration during the Committee's examination of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Government report*

LucidTalk (2014) Northern Ireland-Wide Youth Poll: 16-24 Year-Olds

McDaid, S. (2015) *From shared schools to shared space: integrated education initiatives in Northern Ireland in comparative perspective.*

Nehring, J and Szczesiul, S. (2015) *Redefining High Performance in Northern Ireland: How do secondary schools serving high poverty communities under pressure for test performance also teach 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills?*

The Integrated Education Fund (2014) *The Business of Education Report.*

The Integrated Education Fund (2015) *Young People's Voices: Outreach Conversations May – November 2014*

# Appendix 1

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## Questions from the Lucid Talk survey

1. **If currently, or if when, you are able to vote in NI elections, do you think you will use your vote? (please tick one answer) Yes / No / Don't Know**
2. **If you are intending to vote in the forthcoming NI elections in May this year, which political party would you be thinking of voting for at this time?**
3. **Please rate the following statement: "Northern Ireland politicians are helping to move Northern Ireland towards a more peaceful and integrated society"**
4. **Please rate the following statement: "What are the most important issues our politicians should be focussing on? Please grade the following issues/options from 1 – 5, in terms of the relative importance of each issue, in terms of what our politicians should be focussed on, where 1 = Very Important to 5 = Not important.**
5. **How hopeful are you about your own future.** Please grade your answer 1 - 5 where 1 = Very hopeful to 5 being Totally unhelpful.
6. **How would you rate the following statement: "An education system where children of all faiths and none go to the same schools would be an important step in combating sectarianism in Northern Ireland?"**
7. **How would you rate the following statement: "A housing policy which brings people of all faiths and none to live in shared areas would be an important step in combating sectarianism in Northern Ireland?"**
8. **When did you first engage meaningfully with someone from a different culture or religious background from your own? (Please tick one answer)**
9. **Would you have liked your school experience to have included more pupils from different traditions and backgrounds? (Please tick one answer)**
10. **If you have children, or imagining you will go on to have children in the future, would you prefer them to go to school with children of all traditions and backgrounds?**
11. **Should student teachers of all faiths and none be trained together in the same colleges? (please tick one answer)**

# Appendix 2

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## Questions from IEF module in ARK 2014 survey

1. **Thinking about Northern Ireland today, how divided do you think the people who live here are in terms of:**
  - Their religion
  - Their ethnicity
  - Their cultural traditions and festivals
  - The schools they attend
  - The sports they play
  - Their social class
  
2. **Thinking of Northern Ireland again, how much integration do you think there SHOULD be between people who live here in terms of:**
  - Their religion
  - Their ethnicity
  - Their cultural traditions and festivals
  - The schools they attend
  - The sports they play
  - Their social class
  
3. **If a new pupil came to your school, or the last school you attended, how welcome do you think the other pupils in your class would make them feel if:**
  - They were of a different religion from most other pupils'
  - Their ethnicity was different from most other pupils'
  - Their social class was different from most other pupils'
  
4. **Thinking about yourself, if a new pupil came to your school how welcome do you think you would make them feel if:**
  - They were of a different religion from you
  - Their ethnicity was different from yours
  - Their social class was different from yours
  
5. **Thinking about the future, if you had children of your own would you prefer them to attend a school where all the children had the same religion as you or would you prefer them to attend a mixed–religion school?**
  - Own religion only
  - Mixed religion school
  - Other
  - I don't know
  
6. **If you were asked to describe the political situation in Northern Ireland today what are the first three words that come into your head?**

# Appendix 3

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## Electronic voting questions at the 2015 IEF hustings event at Lagan College

1. **If you had lived in Scotland, and you had a vote at the time of the Scottish Independence Referendum - Which way would you have voted?**  
Yes / No
  
2. **If you can/could vote in the 2015 Westminster election, which party here today would you vote for?**  
DUP / Alliance / UUP / Sinn Fein / SDLP / Green / Other Party / None - Wouldn't Vote
  
3. **Do you think the two main cultures in Northern Ireland are respected by each other?**  
Yes / No / Don't Know - No Opinion
  
4. **Please rate the following statement: 'An education system where children of all faiths and none go to the same schools would be an important step in combating sectarianism in Northern Ireland?'**  
Strongly agree / Agree / No strong view / Disagree / Strongly disagree
  
5. **Where do you see your long-term future?**  
Northern Ireland / Great Britain or Republic of Ireland / Other EU member states / US A or Canada / Australia or New Zealand / Other
  
6. **After the discussions here today, which party would you now vote for?**  
DUP / Alliance / UUP / Sinn Fein / SDLP / Green / Other Party / None - Wouldn't Vote



# Appendix 4

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## Youth engagement events agenda

Activity	Discussion areas
<p><b>Discussion topic 1</b></p> <p>Where you live</p>	<p>Discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you think you live in a mixed area?</li> <li>• Do you have friends who live in different areas, who have a different faith background? Can you visit your friends in their communities?</li> <li>• Has where you live ever stopped you from going to an event, visiting a friend, travelling to school?</li> <li>• Should we have integrated housing?</li> <li>• What is stopping us from having integrated housing?</li> </ul> <p><b>Electronic voting:</b></p>
<p><b>Discussion topic 2</b></p> <p>Where you learn/ study</p>	<p>Discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What type of school do you go to? (all boys/girls, all Catholic/Protestant?)</li> <li>• Do you think education is important?</li> <li>• Did you discuss the impact of segregation at your school, in class?</li> <li>• Did you discuss these issues outside of school? In other groups?</li> <li>• Do you think school should be a place for people of all faiths and none to mix?</li> </ul> <p><b>Electronic voting:</b></p>
<p><b>Discussion topic 3</b></p> <p>Jobs &amp; Skills</p>	<p>Discussion questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you could do any job in the world, what would it be? If that job was available, could you get it now?</li> <li>• Has your education given you qualifications and skills that you want?</li> <li>• Picture Board: Which of these jobs would you never do and why?</li> <li>• Do you think workplaces should be mixed, with people of all faiths and none?</li> </ul> <p><b>Electronic voting:</b></p>
<p>Final comments from tables</p>	<p><b>Electronic voting:</b></p>
<p>Message to politicians</p>	
<p>Introduction to Fixers</p>	<p><a href="http://www.fixers.org.uk">www.fixers.org.uk</a></p>

Integrated education  
Opening minds



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