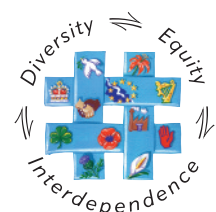




Young People's Understanding of the Past

John Bell, Ulf Hansson
and Nick McCaffery



Community Relations Council

'The Troubles Aren't History Yet' Young People's Understanding of the Past

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Executive Summary

The remembrance and commemoration of historical events are important in the process of creating and sustaining a collective identity and in building and transmitting an ethnic or national identity to future generations. In a society emerging from a generation of conflict the events of both the recent and the historical past will have a heightened significance and the stories that are taught and the lessons learned about the past will impact on the expectations people will have of the future. A cultural identity always feels permanent and the 'only way it could be', but an identity is also always a construct that is based on myths, legends, stories and the right ways of doing things that we tell ourselves and tell our children. The way we think and talk about our past will impact on the way we think and talk about our future. We can emphasise our similarities or we can emphasise our differences.

In October 2009 the Institute for Conflict Research and Achieve Enterprises were commissioned by the Community Relations Council to undertake research into the ways in which history is taught to young people in Northern Ireland, how and where young people learn about the past, and to explore what they knew of both recent and earlier historical events. The research project, entitled '*The Impact of Division and Conflict in the Past on Young People*', which ran between November 2009 and April 2010, involved surveying the views of 958 young people who were accessed through a range of schools, colleges, universities and youth organisations, and focus group discussions with 238 young people in twelve locations across Northern Ireland which enabled the researchers to explore some of the themes and issues in more detail.

The key findings of the research are that:

1. Young people's understanding of the past was partly shaped by formal education, largely through studying history, but also through subjects such as language, literature, religious education and through visits to museums and school trips.
2. However, parents, relatives and the media (particularly through films) also had a significant impact on the development of young people's knowledge and understanding, particularly of the more recent past.
3. Young people often had at best a sketchy knowledge of key events, whether these occurred during the Troubles or in the more distant past, and that knowledge was strongly influenced by their community background, and by their locality of residence.
4. Despite the strong culture of public commemoration of past events, almost half of people sampled had not participated in any form of commemoration, with Remembrance Sunday the event that most people had commemorated.
5. Young people recognised the importance of learning about history and welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the recent past through formal education and to discuss past events both among their own community and in a cross community setting.

Background Context

A review of literature and discussions with academics and educationalists on the teaching of history within the education system highlighted the limited coverage of recent local history within the formal curriculum and that many young people stop studying history around the age of 14 when it stops being compulsory and before recent events are addressed. Furthermore, the potentially sensitive nature of teaching about the recent past meant that some teachers were reluctant to teach certain topics, in particular those relating to the Troubles. The review suggested that a segregated education system, based on a strong sense of communal identity, and with a limited formal teaching of local history would lead to a narrow understanding of past events. The discussions highlighted the role that could be played by formal education outside of the curriculum and by less formal education through the community and voluntary sector to broaden knowledge and understanding and provide young people with wider perspectives of the past. The survey and focus group discussions sought to explore these and other themes with young people.

National Identity and Community Background

The research found that community background continues to influence a young person's perception of their national identity, with young Protestants more likely to refer to themselves as 'British' and young Catholics more likely to refer to themselves as 'Irish'. However, we also found that 26% of all young people described themselves as 'Northern Irish', but while more than one in three Protestants (37%) used this term, fewer than one in six young Catholics (15%) did so. We also found that young Protestants and Catholics who attended secondary schools were more likely to identify themselves as either 'British' or 'Irish', while pupils attending Grammar or Integrated schools were more likely to identify with a Northern Irish identity.

Regardless of national identity the vast majority of young people continually used the terms 'Protestants' and 'Catholics' to identify difference. Although national and political identity labels tend to be associated with community background, in the focus groups the terminology of 'Protestant' and 'Catholic', or more derogatory language such as 'huns' and 'fenians', was used by young people when differentiating between themselves and the 'Other' community.

Some young people were also less familiar with more political terms such as 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' and this highlighted the fact that social and political education was still relatively underdeveloped and it was important not to make too many assumptions about the levels of understanding of young people of basic terminology that adults take for granted.

School, History and the Troubles

The research identified that for many young people the very term 'history' implied first of all an academic sense of the word: studying books, learning dates, writing essays and passing exams. The term 'history' was not necessarily immediately equated with the local Irish or Northern Irish context and not the recent past, rather 'History' tends to be associated with events which took place further in the past or which were further removed from the local context.

For some young people the 'excitement' of learning about the Troubles was contrasted with learning about 'history' more generally, which some young people felt was 'boring'. Many

young interviewees believed that the Troubles were 'still going' and it was therefore viewed as a contemporary rather than a historical phenomenon. Although young people acknowledged that learning about the Troubles and recent events could be 'sensitive' or 'controversial', in general most young people were of the opinion that controversial and sensitive subjects could and should be addressed in the classroom.

However, while the vast majority of young people (84%) who completed the questionnaire indicated that they felt comfortable being taught about 'anything', within some of the focus groups it was clear that some young people were reluctant to talk about topics which could be perceived to be 'sensitive'. In mixed groups which were 'dominated' by several confident and talkative members of the 'Other' community, there was a real reluctance by individuals from the minority community to speak out and put their views forward. It is important therefore to bear this in mind when considering how to address potentially difficult and divisive subjects, particularly when the group of young people are from different community backgrounds.

The research found that in general, young people tended to view the teaching of history in school in a positive light, and this was particularly the case for those young people who had studied the subject for longer. Eighty nine per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that 'history helps you understand the views of others' and 66% agreed that 'learning history makes people tolerant of others', while just 17% agreed that 'it is wrong to teach sensitive issues in history in case you offend people'.

When they were asked what should be taught through the history curriculum 55% of young people suggested 'world history', while 52% wanted to learn about 'history directly related to Northern Ireland'. However, community background evidently impacted upon the topics that young respondents felt should be covered in the school curriculum: while 44% of young Protestants believed that British history should be taught in school, just 20% of young Catholics wanted to be taught British history. In contrast 59% of young Catholics believed Irish history should be taught in school compared with 28% of young Protestants.

Many young people acknowledged that they also learnt about local history through other subjects and activities: school trips were identified by 43% of young people as a means of learning about Irish/Northern Irish history (and visiting sites and locations was also identified as a means of making history come to life and be more real). But knowledge of history and the recent past was also learnt through Religious Education, English or Irish Language classes (particularly through books on the Troubles or prose by local poets), plus through Citizenship classes, drama and the arts.

However, it should be remembered that many young people give up the subject at the end of year 10 (at age 14) when they choose subjects to study for GCSE. Our respondents identified that this was for one of three main reasons: because history was considered 'boring', because it did not fit in with a career path, or because it clashed with another subject on the school timetable.

Other Influences on Knowledge of the Past

The survey found that the three main influences on young people's knowledge and understanding of the past were their parents (52%), school (47%) and relatives (25%). It is clear therefore that parents and the wider family circle play a crucial role in imparting information upon which young people develop their views about Northern Ireland's past.

Young people in the survey also acknowledged that they would be most likely to discuss politics and current events with their family (50%) followed by their friends in school (35%), while just over one-quarter of young people (26%) stated they did not discuss these issues as they had no interest in them.

Although parents and relatives were important influences in discussion and debate about the past, many young people were also very aware that the views and opinions of their parents and family were grounded in their own experience and therefore potentially reflecting either a predominantly 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' narrative rather than reflecting an objective or 'true' view of the past.

Films and television were also cited as important media through which young people could learn about the past. Young people referred to watching recent films such as 'Mickeybo and Me', 'Hunger', 'Five Minutes of Heaven' and 'Fifty Dead Men Walking' and which focused on key events or explored the attitudes of participants in the conflict. While for some young people films were considered to be a useful means of learning about the past, others were more reluctant to believe what they saw on television considering them as partisan documents, but for some films provided an insight into recent events and could still provoke a sense of anger of 'what they did to us'.

Young people used the internet to supplement their learning from other sources, but they tend to use generic search engines such as Google/Yahoo, which 64% of young people suggested they had used at one stage or another to conduct their own research about historical events in Northern Ireland, or general sites such as Wikipedia, rather than local sources such as CAIN.

Some of the young people who were interviewed highlighted the role of murals in providing information about the past. Often murals were initially dismissed as sources of information about the past, people said that they often did not notice them because they were 'permanent' features of the environment. However, several young people cited murals in their local area as being a source of historical information through which they learnt about the past, and particularly events which happened in their local areas. In this sense the murals provided a source of information linked to territory and locality.

Levels of Historical Knowledge

The historical events about which young people felt they had the most knowledge were the Famine (50% knew 'a lot'), the Omagh bomb and the Hunger Strikes (37% knew 'a lot') followed by Bloody Sunday (36% knew 'a lot'), the Easter Rising (35% knew 'a lot') and the Good Friday Agreement (34% knew 'a lot').

Although there were equal levels of knowledge of events such as the Good Friday Agreement, the Ceasefires and Partition, community background impacted on the levels of knowledge of a number of the events. For example Catholics were more likely to cite more knowledge than Protestants of Bloody Sunday (46% compared to 31%), the Hunger Strikes (46% compared to 32%) and the Easter Rising (43% compared to 33%), whereas young Protestants said that knew more than young Catholics about the Battle of the Boyne (40% compared to 16%) and the Battle of the Somme (40% compared to 22%).

Unsurprisingly young people who studied history for longer stated that they knew 'more' about most historical events than young people who dropped the subject. However young

people's 'educational' knowledge of events learnt through school tended to be different from their 'social' knowledge of particular events more firmly rooted within the context of their community background and other sources of information outside of school.

Most Important Historical Events

When we asked the young people to list their three most important historical events in Irish/Northern Irish history those selected were the Troubles (38%), the Famine (28%) and the Good Friday Agreement (23%). Both the quantitative and qualitative research indicated that community background influenced which particular historical event a young person selected. Of those young people who believed the Easter Rising was one of the three most important events in Irish history, 75% were young Catholics and 25% young Protestants, while of those young people who felt that the Battle of the Boyne/Twelfth of July was one of the most important events, 78% were young Protestants and 22% were young Catholics.

However, while community background at times influenced which events were selected, the overall numbers of young people selecting events such as the Twelfth or the Easter Rising based on their community background were perhaps not as high as might be expected. For example, only 21% of young Catholics selected the Easter Rising as one of the three most important events while just 26% of young Protestants chose the Battle of the Boyne/Twelfth of July.

Participation in Commemorative Events

We also asked young people whether they had participated in public commemorations of historical events. Almost half of all young people surveyed (42%) had not taken part in any commemorative event, with young females more likely than young males not to have taken part in any commemoration. More notably young Catholics are almost three times as likely as young Protestants not to have attended any commemorative events (59% compared to 21%).

Of those young people who had taken part in a commemorative event, more than one-third of respondents (35%) referred to having taken part in Remembrance Sunday followed by almost one-quarter of young people (23%) who had taken part in the Battle of the Boyne/Twelfth of July celebrations. Even in relation to the Battle of the Boyne/Twelfth of July commemorations, only half (51%) of young Protestants stated that they had ever attended an event (compared to 3% of young Catholics), in contrast the Hunger Strikes was the most widely attended commemoration for young Catholics but just 17% of young Catholics had attended such an event (and only a single Protestant admitted attending such an event).

'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' perspectives

Finally, we explored perspectives on young people's understanding of different versions of history. Just one in three young people (30%) believed they were equally knowledgeable of both Unionist and Nationalist perspectives, with young Protestants believing they knew most about history from a Unionist perspective, while young Catholics knew more about history from a Nationalist perspective. However, those young people who (had) attended grammar school were more inclined to believe they were 'equally knowledgeable' about both 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' history (42%) compared to young people at secondary school (27%) or an integrated school (29%).

Conclusions

The research project found that young people develop their understanding about past events from a number of different and at times overlapping sources, including schools, parents and the wider family, films and television, the internet, murals, historical commemorations and so on, although some sources of information are more influential than others and formal education and family members form the primary 'building-blocks' from which historical knowledge is further developed.

The research found that young people's knowledge of history and understanding of the past is partial at best and is loaded towards their own community's sense of history and the events that their community most values. Many of the young people who participated in the research were aware that their understanding of the history of Northern Ireland was narrow, and many young people, Protestant and Catholic, male and female, and regardless of age, expressed a desire both to learn more about historical events associated with 'their' community and also those which receive more emphasis within the 'Other' community as well.

The challenge for education providers both in the formal education sector and in the less formal community and voluntary sector is to find ways to broaden young people's knowledge and understanding of recent Northern Irish history and to do so in way that does not simply reinforce a perception of two parallel histories that only intersect through acts of violence, but rather encourages greater recognition of the complex ways that past events unfold and impact upon contemporary and future lives.

1. Introduction

Reports of children as young as ten years of age participating in 'sectarian rioting' in Belfast at the switching on of the Christmas tree lights in December 2009 led commentators to question how young people could be involved in such acts which were thought to be a thing of the past?¹ These young people are the peace process generation, most of whom were born after the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, and some were even born after the Belfast Agreement of 1998. Some of the questions asked in the aftermath of such events are pertinent for the purposes of this study. How do young people with no direct experience of the past in Northern Ireland learn about it, and from whom? How does the process of learning shape their understanding of their own identity, and their attitudes to, and relationships with, those from the 'Other' community background who grew up with a different set of narratives and perspectives on historical events here?

As an attempt to better understand how young people come to formulate their opinions of history and to assess which sources of information are the most influential upon their subsequent views and opinions the Community Relations Council commissioned research to look at young people's understanding of the past. The research, which involved a survey of 958 young people and focus group discussions with 238 young people, primarily explored young people's experience of history within the formal educational, but also considered the use of history in less formal and community-based education. The research addressed three key questions:

- How is the past understood in the culture of young people?
- How should we approach teaching and learning about the past with young people?
- How should community relations' policy be changed to reflect the reality of young people?

This research aims to increase our knowledge and understanding of these issues, and build on previous work by educationalists such as Barton and McCully (2002; 2006). It also acknowledges that there has actually been little research about how young people learn about history and how they develop an understanding of events associated with the Troubles. Previous work on this subject found that students ranked their history classes as the most influential source of where they learn about history, with history books ranked second, and family ranked as the third most important influence (Barton et al. 2003).

This research aimed to explore whether this was still the case? We also aimed to consider whether the revision of the curriculum in 2007 had any impact on how history was being taught and what issues were being covered. Are schools in Northern Ireland beginning to move away from the previously held positions of avoiding 'controversial' issues? Do Controlled schools still tend to focus on British history, while Maintained schools focus on Irish history? How do teachers and youth workers engage with 'controversial' issues such as the Troubles? And should one attempt to teach the history of the recent past when as Low-Beer suggests (1999) *'there is not one common history, there are two stories?'*.

¹ See the Belfast Telegraph news story, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/jobs-in-sectarian-clashes-at-festive-lights-switchon-14573450.html> Accessed 11th January 2010.

Recent debates in Northern Ireland on educational matters have tended to focus on issues such as the closure of schools due to falling pupil numbers and the suitability (or not) of the Transfer test for children. Thus while education has been at the forefront of policy discussions, these have focused on the process and structure of the education system rather than on any wider debate on what children are taught about the past in Northern Ireland. This seems rather peculiar, particularly given the wider debate about how best to deal with the legacy of the past and a widespread desire to ensure that we 'never repeat the mistakes of the past'. To paraphrase George Santayana, if we do not attempt to learn from past experiences and deal with its legacy because it is too 'sensitive', we leave ourselves open to the possibility of repeating it.

The report is structured into two parts. Part one focuses on reviewing previous research relating to the interrelated issues of history and identity, and the teaching of history in the formal educational sector. This section also explores the difficulties of teaching about the past when there is not one national narrative of history, but rather two, one Unionist and British, the other Nationalist and Irish.

Part two of the report is based on the research findings, and draws on both the quantitative and qualitative data in a thematic manner to consider such matters as young people's view of the teaching of history in school, and what things they learn from other sources. It also considers young people's understanding of the most important events in Irish/Northern Irish history, the depth of their understanding of key events, their levels of participation in public commemorations of historical events and also what more they would like to know about local history.

Part One – Teaching History, Learning History

2. History and Identity

Historical memory and historical consciousness have an important cultural function – they form identity (Rusen 2002: 3).

According to Liu and Hilton (2005: 1), there is a broad consensus within the social sciences that history is an essential ingredient in constructing and maintaining the 'imagined community' of nationhood (Anderson 1983; Condor 1986; Hobsbawm 1990; Kohl and Fawcett 1996; Reacher and Hopkins 2001; Wertsch 2002). Andrews et al's research (2009) indicated that these 'imagined communities' that shape students' self-identity could have an important effect on their attitudes to history (whether positively or negatively). While acknowledging that a number of factors are involved in creating a series of 'imagined communities' to which an individual feels that they belong (place, gender, religion etc), Phillips (2002) argued that territoriality and ethnicity are conventionally regarded as particularly important sources of self-identification. Similarly, Jenkins (1996) contended that often an individual's national or ethnic identity may assume primacy over other sources of identity such as gender, sexual orientation and class.

In some senses it is perhaps more difficult to 'escape' history in Northern Ireland than in other parts of Ireland and the rest of the UK (Jarman 1998). Historical and cultural representations of varying competing narratives in the form of political symbols, flags, commemorative and cultural events are a common feature of the physical and social geography of many of Northern Ireland's, cities, towns and villages. The meanings presented through such displays are continually being (re)interpreted and provide a visible reminder of the division between the two main ethno-political communities in Northern Ireland (Jarman 1998). Accordingly, each of the two main cultural/political orientations has its own version of the past and invokes its historical narratives to justify contemporary attitudes and policy positions (Conway 2004: 67; McBride 1997; Walker 1996):

History provides a symbolic reserve of materials that can be elaborated upon by group processes to create shared meaning through social representations (Liu and Hilton 2005: 6).

As such it is unlikely that a young person in Northern Ireland will proceed into adulthood without some form of exposure to competing symbols and claims to territory, many of which use historical justifications to support their case:

Children arrive in school with a range of well-established attitudes and beliefs, some of which may be negative and biased (NICIE 2008: 10).

Some children and young people come from apolitical families who may have attempted to 'shield' their children from learning about Northern Ireland's 'troubled' past. But as they get older they will be exposed to a variety and diversity of representations of the history of Northern Ireland that will transcend familial or localised narratives. For other young people research has found that even after the paramilitary ceasefires conflict remains part of their daily lives, and even though children and young people were not necessarily direct victims of the Troubles,

they were not unaffected or unaware of the legacy of the violence (Leitch and Kilpatrick 1999).² Indeed, some young people have been involved in what has been termed 'recreational rioting,' particularly at interface locations (Hansson 2005). One research study found that almost two-thirds of respondents aged between 24-25 years old believed that their knowledge about the conflict came in part from personal experience (Magill et al. 2007: 61), while Barton and McCully (2006: 14) note:

Again, stories, murals and commemorations were identified as important sources of knowledge particularly by students living in conflict areas.

They also comment that some students, and particularly those from high conflict areas (such as interface locations) often drew selectively from the school curriculum to bolster their developing sectarian perspectives. In addition, Magill et al. (2007) found that the nature of residential location had an impact on a sense of understanding of history, with young people from interface areas, or locations where paramilitaries have an influence, or from areas which had been the site of violence over the years, being more exposed to the impact of historical events on the present:

Respondents' exposure to the conflict appears to depend very much on where they live, and whether or not their parents were in some way involved in the conflict, either in policing it or as political activists or combatants (Magill et al. 2007: 34).³

Andrews et al. (2009) conducted research with 413 first year humanities and social science graduates in five universities in north-west England in the autumn of 2006 to explore the young people's attitudes to the history curriculum and how these attitudes relate to their ethnic and national identity. Their research found that participants regarded national identity as being of greatest importance to their sense of self-identity followed by their political and ethnic identity, and Grever, Haydn and Riddens (2008) found that national identity is rated as an especially important source of self-identification amongst pupils aged 14-18 in metropolitan schools in England (Andrews et al. 2009: 372).⁴ They found that political narratives, such as ideals of active citizenship, may be less prevalent in the UK than in other countries with a stronger formal constitutional tradition (e.g. France or the USA), but are increasingly recognised to play an important role in shaping the identity of young people across the UK (Andrews et al. 2009: 372; Frazer 2000).

A number of studies have looked at how some version of history forms an integral part of an individual's sense of identity (Buckley and Kenney 1995; Devine-Wright 2001; Gallagher 1989) while a more recent study by Barton and McCully (2002) examined the role of the school curriculum in the process of identity formation in school children. The findings indicated that the largest single source of identification with history focused on items associated with Protestant or Catholic communities, politics or religion. There were also indications of a

² It should be noted however that in the broader sense, children and young people were disproportionately impacted upon by the violence of the Troubles, with 36% of those killed being classified as 'children and young people' (Smith et al. 1999).

³ Another indirect impact of the conflict in Northern Ireland related to the fear and suspicion which Magill et al. (2007) found made young people reluctant to disclose their identity to others in the school environment, particularly in a mixed environment.

⁴ The research also found that students who identified themselves as right-wing in political orientation had a statistically significant positive association with a traditional view of history and a significantly negative association with multicultural views of history while students with higher educational ability also tended to have a more positive attitude towards multicultural history (Andrews et al. 2009: 373).

stronger identification with the content of the school curriculum amongst students at 'Protestant' schools, while those students at 'Catholic' schools were more likely to identify with events from the recent past which were not taught as part of the required curriculum (Barton and McCully 2002; Conway 2004: 68). For this context it is important to acknowledge that not all groups have a consensual social representation of their history. Liu and Hilton argue that a group's ethnic (or national) representations of its history have a significant impact on its sense of identity and its response to new challenges, with popular history often being a collective memory of conflicts against other groups.⁵ These collective memories form the descriptive background and provide support for present actions, as mobilization of core lessons from history will structure people's responses to new challenges (Liu and Hilton 2005: 14):

While there is often substantial agreement on what constitutes the major events and figures of history, research has shown that there is also substantial contestation over their meaning and relevance to current events (Liu and Hilton: 2005: 7).

These social representations of history, according to Moscovi (1981; 1984) are hegemonic (consensual throughout society), emancipated (different, smoothly interacting versions in different segments of society), or polemical (conflicting representations across different groups). It is arguable that while there would be differences between Unionist and loyalist and between Irish Nationalist and Irish republican representations, the over arching narrative framework would be familiar and therefore these would be emancipated representations of local history, while the dichotomous Unionist/British and Irish/Nationalist representations would in all likelihood be polemical. However, an individual's identifications with one's 'group' and their socialization into its ideology and perspectives on history will vary, and Liu and Hilton (2005) differentiate between the attitudes of 'high' and 'low' identifiers. Liu et al's (1999) study of Maori-Pākehā⁶ relations in New Zealand indicated that majority group members who know most about the minority's historical perspective (and therefore most likely to be 'low' identifiers with the in-group's historical narrative), are most likely to favour conciliatory policies to the minority which raises the possibility that educating group members about an out-group's historical perspective could be an important tool for achieving reconciliation in cases of intergroup conflict (Liu and Hilton 2005).

While there has been a plethora of literature on the importance of an understanding of history to an individual's sense of identity, Wertsch (1998) contributed to the debate by outlining the importance of the cultural, historical and institutional contexts in which human thought occurs. According to Barton and McCully (2006) understanding requires more than individual cognition and also consists of interaction between human agents and the cultural tools available in wider society. As such then, learning is not simply a matter of retaining information but can best be thought of as mastery of socially and historically situated tools for thinking and acting – and *'the principal cultural tool for understanding the past, Wertsch (2002) argues is narrative'* (Barton and McCully 2006: 3). Wertsch argues that be it in or outside

⁵ Survey research by Liu and Hilton. noted that warfare is privileged above all other categories in open ended lay nominations of the most important events in world history. Together, politics and war accounted for about 70% of the events named as the most important in world history and about 60% of the individuals named as the most influential (Liu and Hilton 2005: 8).

⁶ New Zealanders who are not ethnically Māori. Traditionally tends to refer to New Zealanders from a European background.

of school the pupil's learning about the past takes the form of mastering narrative texts, with narrative used to organize the past into meaningful wholes by configuring events into coherent plots (Barton and McCully 2006: 3). These narrative templates constitute the building blocks of collective memory and this is crucial as Wertsch notes that historical narratives are rarely neutral or dispassionate, as we know all too well in Northern Ireland, but rather are closely connected to fundamental issues of identity (Barton and McCully 2006: 3).⁷

Widdecombe and Wooffitt (1995) produced evidence to suggest that young people actively resist conventional 'adult' forms of social categorisation, but other studies indicate that school children recreate established notions of the 'Other' based on concepts of nationality and ethnicity (Archer 2003; Walker et al. 2009: 368). Hall (1996: 4) argued that the social construction of nationhood is inevitably grounded upon the 'marking of difference and exclusion', while Hein and Selden (2000) contended that stories about the past are invariably prescriptive and instruct people how to think and act as 'national' subjects and how they should view relations with members of the 'out-group'. According to Barton and McCully (2006), Wertsch's perspective on the appropriation of, and resistance to, historical narratives can be used to interpret a number of recent studies on the development of students' historical understanding in the USA which suggests that young adolescents from a variety of backgrounds draw on both school and non-school sources in appropriating a historical narrative that provides a clear sense of national identity, and while in the American context students are aware of historical events which do not easily fit into this story of 'progression' (such as the Vietnam war), *'the dominant narrative of national progress is so strong that they have few resources from which to create alternative interpretations'* (Barton 2001a; 2001b; Barton and Levstik 1998; Mosborg 2002).

But what happens when there is no common narrative with which to understand both the distant and particularly the more recent past as is the case in Northern Ireland, where competing narratives and understandings of the meaning of key events exist among different sections of the population? How is history taught, how and what should be taught? The next sections review some of the developments in education policy and practice and some of the different approaches to teaching about the past in Northern Ireland.

⁷ According to Barton and McCully, due to the importance of history in developing identity and allegiance, governments are especially likely to disseminate officially sanctioned versions of the past that legitimate contemporary social and political structures (Barton and McCully 2006: 3).

3. Development of the School Curriculum

The education system, like many other aspects of Northern Irish society, is largely segregated, and schools tend to reflect the dominant values of the communities in which they are set.⁸ While the first integrated school was established in 1981, the sector remains small in size and only approximately 6% of pupils in Northern Ireland attend an integrated school. The vast majority of pupils therefore attend either a Controlled (predominantly Protestant) or a Maintained (predominantly Catholic) school.⁹ There are a number of theories as to the impact upon educating children and young people from different religious backgrounds in different settings, one of which suggests that the fact of separation is what matters: this is termed 'social apartheid'. This view holds that, regardless of similarities in what is taught in the schools, segregated schooling initiates children into the conflict by emphasising and validating group differences and hostilities, and encouraging mutual ignorance and, perhaps more importantly, mutual suspicion (Murray 1985).

In light of this segregation within the education sector in Northern Ireland there have been a number of measures implemented which attempted to improve community relations amongst children and young people. The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 introduced Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and the related theme of cultural heritage as part of the curriculum for all grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland. CCEA defined EMU as:

about developing self-respect and respect for others and the improvement of relationships between people of different cultural traditions (CCEA 1997: 5).

The statutory provisions relating to EMU came into operation on the 1 August 1992 and applied for all Key Stage 1 (five to seven years), 2 (seven to eleven years) and 3 (11 to 14 years) pupils and pupils in the first year of Key Stage 4 (Smith and Robinson 1996: 3). This was supplemented in 1996 when the Department of Education Northern Ireland¹⁰ published a Strategic Plan which identified community relations as one of four elements for priority action.¹¹ Smith and Robinson (1996) outlined a strong commitment within the aims and objectives of EMU with particular focus on:

⁸ DENI is responsible for the overall oversight of the education system in Northern Ireland while five Education and Library Boards are responsible for providing pre-school, primary and secondary education, special education, youth services and library services throughout the geographical area encompassed by the Board.

⁹ It should also be noted that a significant number of teachers in Northern Ireland are trained in an effectively "segregated" system of teacher education when attending one of two teaching training colleges. St. Mary's Teacher Training College primarily caters for graduates who will teach in Catholic Maintained schools (and uphold the Catholic ethos in education) while Stranmillis Teacher Training College is attended mainly by young graduates who will teach in the Controlled sector (and therefore primarily Protestant schools) (Gallagher 1989).

¹⁰ While the Department of Education are responsible for overseeing the formal education system and the five education and library boards actively manage educational facilities within their jurisdiction, the RPA will mean that a new, single education and skills authority will finally be established from January 2010 and this organisation will bring together many of the former responsibilities of local Education and Library Boards and curriculum authorities (Magill et al. 2007: 4). The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment are responsible for the development of the curriculum and the setting and marking of examinations, although Northern Irish schools may also choose to sit examinations with English educational authorities if they so wish.

¹¹ The first public statement issuing a commitment to the development of a community relations policy came in 1982 by the then Education Minister for Northern Ireland Nicholas Scott (O'Connor, Hartop and McCully 2002).

- The development of respect for oneself and others as an important aspect of learning, of developing good relations and promoting social cohesion within society;
- Diversity is an important feature of human development and differences of a physical, social, cultural, religious and political nature should be respected and valued; and
- Conflict is part of the human experience, but it is better to seek non-violent ways of accepting difference and resolving disputes.

This focus within the education system on the desirability of promoting good relations has been strengthened by research in Northern Ireland which has indicated that children may be able to identify ethno-sectarian/religious boundaries from an early age. Connolly et al. (2002) found that by the ages of five and six the proportion of children beginning to identify themselves with one particular community and the use of sectarian language or comments increases.¹² In terms of the inter-generational transmission of values from parents to children there is also a perception in Northern Ireland that children learn sectarian stories of the national past 'at their mother's knee' (Conway 2004: 67; Stewart 1977: 16; Byrne 1997).

Research into EMU has suggested that while the statutory requirements of the programme were met in schools, quite often the programme was delivered to the letter of the law rather than the spirit in which the programme was meant to be delivered (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 45). Smith and Robinson (1996) found that the teaching profession was 'frightened and reluctant' in dealing with the past in terms of educational content while an internal research paper commissioned by the Youth Council in 1995 found that a very small proportion of youth organisations had engaged in work that involved discussions of contentious issues and only a small number of youth workers had taken part in any kind of professional development looking at politics, political education and discussion (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 69). According to Mauro, civic education in Northern Ireland adopted a 'minimalist approach' which avoided contentious political issues:

Department of Education guidelines for EMU programmes focused on cross-community sporting events, carol services and dramatic performances. Students received exposure to different activities and traditions, but they did not seek to isolate, comprehend or interpret political concepts and ideologies held by members of the political opposition or their own political community (Mauro 2007: 7).¹³

In light of this criticism, consultations began on how best the curriculum could be revised to increase the contribution of the education sector to the promotion of tolerance and reconciliation (Lynagh and Potter 2005). In 2003, the CCEA document 'Proposals for Curriculum and Assessment at Key Stage 3, Part I' suggested that pupils should be encouraged to:

investigate some of the challenges of living in Northern Ireland including responding to sectarianism, ethnic division and multiculturalism (CCEA 2003: 47).

Austin (nd) notes that this 2003 document highlighted three key objectives in teaching history, one of which involves 'a willingness to challenge stereotypical, biased or distorted viewpoints with appropriately sensitive, informed and balanced responses and take responsibility

¹² The study involved interviews/discussions with 353 children between the ages of 3 and 6.

¹³ Leitch (2000) suggests that despite the developments, there was evidence to suggest that in addressing the real issues these developments did not go far enough.

for choices and actions', with students required to have a strong sense of how history has affected their own lives and how it affected their own identity. According to Hanratty and Taggart (2004) the 2003 proposals aimed to give teachers back more control of the curriculum by stopping short of recommending specific literary texts and the proposals suggest that pupils can learn through literature to '*explore emotions such as anger and empathy*'. The proposed curriculum also focused on the concepts of Local and Global Citizenship which Hanratty and Taggart suggest highlights an aspiration that by reading imaginative accounts of Northern Ireland's history, pupils should be better able to empathise with their counterparts on the other side of the political and religious divide (Hanratty and Taggart 2004: 5).

These changes were implemented in September 2007 with a revision of the curriculum which included *Personal Development and Mutual Understanding* (PDMU) at the Foundation Stages of Key Stage 1 and 2 and Learning for Life and Work at Key Stages 3 and 4 with the strands of Personal Development and Local and Global Citizenship a particular focus within the classroom setting. The Local and Global Citizenship element of the revised curriculum suggests that pupils should have opportunities to:

Investigate how and why conflict, including prejudice, stereotyping, sectarianism and racism may arise in the community. Investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations and reconciliation (Magill et al. 2007: 111).¹⁴

Under the revised 2007 curriculum the statutory requirements for History at Key Stage 3 require that pupils aged 11-14 have opportunities to:

investigate the long and short term causes and consequences of the partition of Ireland and how it has influenced Northern Ireland today, including key events and turning points (Magill et al. 2007: 44).

Statutory requirements for English and Media Education at Key Stage 3 indicate that pupils should have opportunities to:

use literature, drama, poetry or the moving image to explore others' needs and rights, for example, participate in a role play involving conflicting rights (Magill et al. 2007: 46).

While the statutory requirements for RE are drawn up by the four main Christian churches, non-statutory guidance has been developed for RE teachers at Key Stage 3 to link church based curriculum aims with key objectives of the curriculum. The guidelines recommend that pupils between the ages of 11 and 14 should have opportunities to:

investigate how choices can be influenced by prejudice and sectarianism and ways in which reconciliation can be achieved through dialogue outreach and action, for example, the churches' role in peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland or South Africa, and religious response to social justice issues in today's world (Magill et al. 2007: 47).

This change in the curriculum aimed to teach pupils a range of strategies to deal with conflict situations, with a focus on increasing pupils' understanding of similarities and differences, cultural diversity, stereotypes and prejudice in an approach which aims to allow the young

¹⁴The citizenship framework also includes opportunities for pupils to investigate key human rights and strengthen democratic participation as an alternative to violence (Magill et al, 2007: 111).

people to recognize and value diversity. Part of this derives from a view of a culture of inclusion in which diversity is not viewed as a problem to be overcome but as a rich resource to support the learning for all (Lynagh and Potter 2005: 27). This aspect of the curriculum also aims to allow the young people to understand their roles in the community and their responsibilities as citizens and superficially at least follows Magill et al's (2007) recommendation that education needs to explicitly address the recent past.

Policy Framework

Over the years policy documents have acknowledged the importance of education in helping to improve community relations in Northern Ireland. The *A Shared Future* policy document (2005: Point 2.4) referred to the role education should play in encouraging understanding 'of the complexity of our history' while further noting:

Education is pivotal to the search for an inclusive, reconciled and open society built on trust, partnership, equality and mutual respect (OFMDFM 2005: Point 2.4.1).

The document also highlighted the role for the then relatively new cross-curricular themes of local and global citizenship to make a 'significant contribution to understanding the causes of conflict between and within communities both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the world' (OFMDFM 2005: Point 2.4.8). ASF also recognised the role of the Further and Higher Education sector in educating children and young people to be prepared for a shared society and the document suggested that teachers have a key role to play in helping to develop an inclusive society based on trust and mutual respect by helping children and young people respect each other's values and differences (Points 2.4.11 and 2.4.16).

While OFMDFM's ten-year strategy for Children and Young People (2006 – 2016) makes a passing reference to the development of the revised curriculum, the report tends to focus on the legacy of the conflict in impacting upon young people's attitudes:

families' experience of conflict will have shaped the attitudes and thinking of many children and young people (OFMDFM 2005b: 17).

Most recently, the report of the Consultative Group on the past stated that there is the need for much more debate on dealing with the past and articulated the view that the Legacy Commission should ensure that young people are encouraged to participate in storytelling initiatives and that education programmes are developed which inform young people, in a balanced way, about the nature and impact of the conflict (Magill et al. 2007: 5). The report recognised that:

As there is no common understanding of the conflict, others highlighted the value of specific education programmes to encourage and enable young people to understand better the nature and causes of the conflict and how society has emerged from it. In this context the benefit of using creative arts as a means of enabling young people to engage with, and express their views on, the conflict and its legacy was highlighted (CGoP 2009: 73).

4. Teaching History: 'Fact' Learning or Critical Analysis?

Research has suggested that an understanding of history (or histories) is a vital component in any society's ability to deal with the past to move into a more peaceful and secure future (Cole nd).¹⁵ According to Conway, the importance and relevance of national history education lies in the fact that it promotes certain identities and values in addition to conveying knowledge and skills, and by inference, contributes to the process of identity formation (Conway 2004). The importance of studying history for Barton et al. (2003) resides in the fact that students who participated in their research themselves ranked their history classes as by far the most influential source of where they learn about history, while history books ranked second, with family ranked as the third most important influence.¹⁶ Some students surveyed believed that learning history would lead to greater tolerance or a reduction of sectarianism while several students thought that increasing understanding of the 'Other' would lead to greater sympathy for the suffering of the 'Other' community. When questioned about the purpose of history, many students connected the topic to heritage, remembrance and a sense of personal and group identity, and this sense of personal identity through history often moved seamlessly into a sense of group or national identity (Barton and McCully 2006).

In line with this, history education in Britain post World-War Two involved the imparting of a grand narrative of the past and acted as a vehicle for imparting moral values of good citizenship to young British pupils (Sylvester 1994; Haydn 2005: 17; Lee and Ashby 2000).¹⁷ However, in the 1970s in Britain, a number of history teachers and educationalists began to question this approach and whether or not it was a suitable method for the UK, particularly given the focus of the approach in the British context in representing 'Imperialist' history at the expense of those experiences of minority ethnic communities (of which the UK was increasingly being made up of post-WW2) and women among other marginalised groups. This difference is summed up by Wertsch who questions whether the goal of history instruction is to promote critical thought and reflection on texts – that is to engage in the practice of analytical history – or to inculcate collective memory grounded in '*state approved civic truth*' (Wertsch 2002: 71).¹⁸

Such debates continue over whether or not the teacher can be a 'neutral chairperson' in the classroom presenting 'historical fact' or whether in fact the teacher acts in a more facilitative role, acknowledging their own biases and viewpoints.¹⁹ Conway found that teachers in mid-Ulster in 1996 and 2001 favoured the 'neutral chairperson' strategy and were reluctant to

15 Cole (nd: 35) notes that while history teaching can potentially promote reconciliation the situation is eminently more difficult than in certain parts of Africa for example where while there were tribal and ethnic differences in a number of post-colonial states, there could be general agreement that the end of British imperialism tended to be 'a good thing' and therefore a narrative that almost all in the country could support. No such singular narrative exists (or is likely to exist) in Northern Ireland.

16 Interestingly, the study found that friends were considered the least influential source of knowledge in terms of history (Barton et al. 2003: 9). However it is obvious that there is a clear difference at a young age in considering a friend to be an unreliable authority on a topic and whether or not in a group context, perhaps under the influence of peer pressure, such potentially 'inaccurate' knowledge can be challenged by the young person. It is perhaps more likely to be the case that such narratives persist unchallenged in certain situations.

17 According to Hein and Selden (2000) the purpose of studying history is to: {...} *transmit ideas of citizenship and both the idealized past and the promised future of the community* (Hein and Selden 2000: 14).

18 Indeed Fullinwider's (1996) conception of history as a tool to support patriotism would be incredibly problematic in the context of Northern Ireland.

19 In line with the thinking behind the NICIE anti-bias curriculum McCully (2005) contends that it is vital that teachers work through the issues first themselves to clarify their own thinking before introducing the issues to young people. Gardner and Leitch (2001) also called for greater support for teachers in supporting their emotional development, to be achieved partly through a 'humanization' of the teacher process as 'reflective practitioners.'

make their political views more explicit to their students, while the study found that in Oxford teachers were more willing to be prepared to declare their political ideals or ethical stance:

When a topic is felt to be emotional, teachers tend to rely more on the use of documents rather than on discussion (Conway 2004: 73).

A number of educationalists have doubted the veracity of claims that a teacher's role is merely one of a 'neutral chairperson' as an unrealistic goal (McCully 2005: 7).²⁰ In relation to this debate, Hanratty and Taggart (2004: 18) highlighted that educationalists such as Paulo Freire, Joao Veiga Coutinho and Ann Berthoff have '*exposed the fallacy of value-free schooling or neutrality in education*'. Paulo Freire's work in terms of differentiating between dialogical and anti-dialogical education suggests that the dialogical model can develop teaching patterns of thinking which are emancipatory from the boundaries of previously held ideas often transmitted from parents to children or which are 'immersed' in a particular religious, ethnic or cultural community and influenced by the traditional normative values of such groups.²¹ As a result of these considerations, the 1970s saw the emergence of the Schools History Project which heralded a move for pupils to begin to 'do history,' by using evidence and coming to personal understandings and judgements concerning the past (Sylvester 1994). In theory therefore, the advent of the National Curriculum in the UK enshrined the use of evidence and interpretation in school history (Woolley and Wragg 2007: 714). Barton et al. (2003) note that the enquiry element of the history curriculum encouraged students to understand events from different perspectives, to recognise differing interpretations and to arrive at conclusions only after considering primary and secondary evidence.²²

Barton (2005) has assessed the crucial differences in the kinds of history students have been taught in the USA compared to Northern Ireland. He notes that in the USA, the creation of a sense of national identity is at the core of the special studies curriculum from the earliest years of schooling right through to the completion of high school.²³ In line with this, textbooks convey a clear and consistent national story that emphasizes the 'Founding Fathers,' events and documents of the nation (Avery and Simmons 2000/2001). Therefore in the US, even students whose families are recent immigrants identify with the US past and when asked why history is important they tend to focus on the role of history in helping to define their own sense of national identity. There is a clear and consistent narrative of progress through history, and while for example, African American students²⁴ do not necessarily incorporate

20 As advocated by Stenhouse et al. (HCP 1970). While Harwood (1998) has argued that teachers should maintain a neutral stance in the primary school setting at least, Lockwood (1996) and the Crick Report (QCA: 1999: 59-60) have argued for a more interventionist approach to be adopted by teachers.

21 Freire argues that anti-dialogical education is often used as an instrument of oppression in cultural and political terms (Hanratty and Taggart 2004: 19).

22 Therefore it has been argued that pupils were taught the methods of historical enquiry and the processes of historical reasoning when interpreting historical material, and this enquiry approach is assessed in examinations (Low-Beer 1999: 9).

23 Barton and Levstik (2004) have argued that in the USA, socio-cultural pressures of content coverage and classroom prevent a full exploration of historical evidence and interpretation.

24 African American students were more likely to focus on difficulties experienced in their own ethnic group's history, but still appropriated a narrative which emphasised freedom and progress (Epstein 1998; 2000) while Mexican American students were more likely to reject the school curriculum altogether as irrelevant to their own ethnic background (Barton and McCully 2006: 5).

all of the same ideas into their view of the history of the United States, nevertheless their focus remains on the USA and their place within the nation (Barton 2005: 2).²⁵ Such an approach was a particular anathema to the education sector in Northern Ireland given that in essence there were two 'competing' national narratives: one Unionist and British, the other Nationalist and Irish.²⁶

In Northern Ireland it was recognised that at the heart of the conflict in society there were contested national histories and identities. No common history could tell the 'nation's story'. There was not one common history, there were two stories (Low-Beer 1999: 8).

Prior to the revision of the curriculum in 1989 schools had been free to choose the type of history they taught to children between the ages of 5-14 (history was compulsory for this age group), and between 14-18 years old, history was an optional choice with pupils sitting either GCSE or A-level examinations (Austin nd). The general consensus in Northern Ireland appears to be that this leeway for schools resulted in history tending to be taught in a selective and biased way with 'Catholic' schools teaching an Irish Nationalist interpretation of historical events while 'Protestant' schools tended to teach British at the expense of Irish history (Low-Beer 1999: 8; Austin nd: 2). Indeed, it was entirely possible that:

Until the mid-1990s, young people in Northern Ireland could leave school without having studied any Irish history (Conway 2004: 68).

McCully suggests that the 1990s in Northern Ireland saw a number of teachers build upon previous developments from the 1970s and 1980s which challenged both Irish Nationalist and British Imperialist interpretations of the past, utilising new ideas to teach history and new methods such as the use of historical enquiry and historical reasoning by pupils when interpreting historical material (McCully 2005; Low-Beer 1999: 8). Mauro suggests that there is a need for this inquiry-based pedagogy in teaching to provide students the opportunity to study in '*an immediate and exploratory way*'. As such, an active approach to learning requires that teachers do not instruct students on what history and politics are, or what political concepts or historical events constitute a specific ideology, rather the students discover the 'meaning' of politics '*through direct experience and research of political discourse*', an approach which is believed in some quarters to be particularly effective if combined with a comparative and international component (Mauro 2007: 18-19). It has also been recommended that students should be encouraged to research different political environments and ideologies and report their findings to one another; and through the diversity of their findings they will 'introduce themselves' to the complex diversity of history and politics (Mauro 2007: 20).²⁷

25 Students in Northern Ireland develop a different view of history's purposes than their counterparts in the USA and Barton suggests that rather than referring to history in a way which identifies with the nation (conceived as either Britain, Ireland or Northern Ireland) students tend to talk about history: {...} *as a way of helping them understand people who are different than themselves, people who are far removed in time and place – and for some students, the further removed the historical time period, the more interesting it is* (Barton 2001a; Barton 2005: 3).

26 Perhaps interestingly, previous work found that history classes were perceived as being significantly more influential amongst Irish or Northern Irish students than their English counterparts, while local students were also more likely to admit that their own experience was an influential source in terms of developing an understanding of history (Barton and McCully 2006).

27 However, Mauro (2007) also commented that while increased understanding of the position of the 'Other' can at times promote positive dialogue between parties, there are also instances when the reverse is actually the case. Irwin (1991) found that at times in Northern Ireland, an increased understanding of the position of the 'Other' in political terms generated antipathy and actually entrenched political positions further.

At a primary level at least this debate is made somewhat redundant in Northern Ireland as political history is avoided and teaching has tended to focus on topics such as the Ancient Egyptians, Mesolithic peoples and the Vikings (Barton 2005: 3). In conducting two studies of students' perceptions of identity and national history in mid-Ulster and Oxford in 1996 and 2001, Barton et al. (2003: 1) found a lack of a common historical narrative suitable for members of both communities:

At the primary level, this has meant avoiding stories of national history and focusing instead on learning about historic societies in Ireland and elsewhere, as well as learning about the nature of historical evidence and interpretation.

Historical controversies can be sensitive and difficult to teach in school when they are part of the personal beliefs and values of different groups of people living in present society (Low-Beer 1999: 12). However, through the first three years of secondary/grammar school when history is compulsory, students do study the political history of Ireland, Britain and Northern Ireland.²⁸ Barton and McCully suggest that this approach has led to schools presenting a greater balance of Nationalist and Unionist perspectives with the primary focus being on the analysis and interpretation of evidence,²⁹ and while students will still retain elements of Unionist or Nationalist historical perspectives, these identities will more likely be on a firmer and more inclusive footing (Barton and McCully 2006: 33):

Most talked about school history not in terms of changing their views, but of making their views more informed, that is, it had helped them make the transition from biased perspectives to unbiased ones. These students might still use history to support their original political commitments, but they now did so on the basis of a more complete understanding of the past.

However, there have been disputes over what exactly pupils have been taught and how, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that prior to its revision, curriculum tended to restrict the teaching of history to a relatively 'dry' presentation of dates and events with little real engagement amongst pupils.³⁰ Indeed, in relation to the delivery of the curriculum before it was revised most recently in 2007, Kitson commented:

In three years of required study, students are exposed to major topics in the development of Northern Ireland as a political entity. These topics are presented in a balanced, almost apolitical way, and teachers rarely go beyond the official 'cut-off' date of 1922 even when they could make pertinent modern parallels – meaning that links to current controversies are often missed (Kitson 2004).

28 The studying of history as compulsory occurs at Key Stage 3 level (between the ages of 11 and 14), with each of the three years requiring a module which focuses on a period which is deemed to be necessary for understanding Irish history, but which is placed within the wider context of Britain and Europe and topics include the Normans, conquest and colonization, the Act of Union and partition.

29 For example, in relation to the events of 1641 and 1972 in a number of schools the "pupils are not told one version of the story, but are given several different accounts of how the events were seen"... (Low-Beer 1999: 9).

30 It has also been argued that a more distanced, dispassionate approach has resulted in students having fewer opportunities to make links between the past and present when studying history at school (Barton and McCully 2006: 1).

As such Barton argues that primary level history in Northern Ireland shows greater promise because of its emphasis on the experiences of diverse people from around the world, but at secondary level, history fails to capitalize on its early success and although students move away from the study of other societies and toward their own national past, the subject is presented in such a way that it does not encourage any common identification. As a result students are left to draw from it selectively in support of historical identities that arise in their families and communities (Barton 2005: 4).

Another difficulty in essence in dealing with the past in the formal educational sector are that the subjects within which such topics would most likely be covered, for example History and Government and Politics are declining in popularity with students. Prior research has found that many pupils ranked history somewhere in the middle in terms of its importance in relation to other school subjects, (Haydn 2005: 9) while pupils' perceptions that GCSE history would be dominated by written work was seen as one of the major deterrents to taking the subject past the age of 14, even by pupils who had enjoyed history at Key Stage 3 (Adey and Biddulph 2001; Nicholls 2004).

Dealing with 'Controversial' Issues

It has been suggested that prior to the latest revision of the curriculum in 2007, a significant number of schools, if they could, avoided teaching about Northern Ireland's recent past altogether as it was felt to be too controversial a topic. In relation to the situation as it stood in the late 1990s, again anecdotal evidence suggested that many history departments opted for 'Northern Ireland 1939-1965' as their teaching choice for Key Stage 4 History because it was the less contentious of two choices, the other being Northern Ireland after 1965 and therefore would include teaching about the Troubles (Democratic Dialogue 1997). School inspectorate observations about the teaching of 'The Union to Partition' in Key Stage 3 also found that in many schools understanding was sacrificed to a presentation of factual information with the subject being viewed as 'purely' academic so as it could not be viewed as contentious (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 47). Similarly, Barton and McCully (2006) noted that the required curriculum (before its revision again in 2007) stops in the early Twentieth century just after the partition of Ireland and as such most teachers avoid discussion of modern controversies:

unless students elect to study history at a higher level, they will have no exposure to most of the events of the past 80 years, and therefore connections between past and present will necessarily remain indirect (Barton and McCully 2006: 10).

In contrast to this approach taken previously by some schools, young people have generally appeared to believe that controversial and sensitive topics should be taught on the curriculum. Three quarters of respondents (75%) in two surveys in 1996 and 2001 disagreed with the statement 'It is wrong to teach sensitive issues in History in case you offend people' while a further 66% agreed with the statement that 'It is important to teach even topics that might embarrass people in order to learn the truth' (Conway 2004). In addition, 80% of young people surveyed by Democratic Dialogue in 1997 stated that they would like to learn more about politics in school and 79% of young people felt that they should have the opportunity to learn about politics in school (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 83 & 94). Although since 1990, all young people in Northern Ireland aged 11-14 learn about the historical origins of the 'two communities' between 1600 and 1920, only young people who choose to do history to GCSE level are required to study the more recent events of the Troubles (Magill et al. 2007: 20). As a result, two thirds of 24-25 year olds interviewed in one research study believed that the

Troubles were not adequately addressed when they were at school and indeed a number of young people felt that teachers had avoided talking about the Troubles in class (Magill et al. 2007):

Even at A-level where the subject is recognised as an academic study, there are teachers who will not offer the Northern Ireland section of paper 1 because it entails a study of the 'isms' of Northern Ireland's political parties – loyalism, republicanism, nationalism and unionism... (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 47).³¹

In terms of adopting strategies to deal with teaching controversial issues in the classroom, it is generally accepted that teachers without training will find it more difficult to deal with recent and controversial history (Low-Beer 1999: 13).³² Previous research also highlights that teachers and youth workers often cite the lack of institutional support as a reason for avoiding more contentious issues (Smith and Robinson 1992: 32; JEDI 2001: 60). Perhaps a pertinent question to ask in the local context is what do we mean when we talk about controversial and sensitive subjects in Northern Ireland?

Defining themes which are controversial can be difficult but often include aspects of religion, race and ethnicity (Woolley and Wragg 2007: 715).³³ It is supposed that controversial or sensitive issues in this sense go beyond those 'controversial public issues' identified by Hess (2002) such as nuclear disarmament in that in the Northern Irish context issues pertaining to religion, culture, and politics go right to the 'heart' of students' sense of identity (McCully 2004: 30). Perhaps important for the purposes of our study, research has found that pupils often rate four particular factors as important in affecting whether a topic would be controversial in the history classroom: ethnic background; religion; pupil experience; and the political allegiance of parents (Woolley and Wragg 2007: 716).

One could argue that in many parts of Northern Ireland all four of these factors are present in the classroom, which may in part explain the difficulties described by many teachers in dealing with the legacy of the past here. According to McCully (2004; 2005), in the context of teaching sensitive issues in Northern Ireland, "*neither aggressive posturing nor avoidance contribute to trust building*" and he outlines that a challenge facing teachers and practitioners in addressing controversial issues is to foster an open environment in which it is legitimate to express strong viewpoints and emotion, but which viewpoints can also be challenged within the safety of the confines of the classroom.³⁴

In Northern Ireland trust building was seen to be at the core of effective practice if discourse was to move into the uncomfortable territory of exploring deeply held, sometimes sacrosanct positions (McCully 2004: 14).

31 Indeed, the fact that history after the age of 14 is optional led to differing levels of awareness and knowledge about the Troubles amongst pupils at a post primary level in one study (Magill et al. 2007).

32 McCully states that sensitivity in handling the emotions of others should be an integral part of teacher training within the context of a divided society (Low-Beer 1999: 10).

33 In April 2007 a UK Department of Education and Skills/Historical Association report suggested some teachers were avoiding controversial topics in the history classroom (Woolley and Wragg 2007: 713).

34 Rudduck (1986) cautions against deeply emotional conversations between students at an early stage, but McCully argues that over time the practice can evolve into a balance between the 'rational' and 'emotional' (McCully 2004: 10). According to McCully (2004), a number of theorists have identified that open relationships are also critical to facilitating the handling of controversial issues, and Jeffs and Smith (1999: 24) refer to the "truthfulness of the educator" while Ruddick (1986: 17) similarly refers to teacher 'integrity'.

The Council of Europe have suggested that some constructive ways for teachers to deal with controversial subjects in the classroom include:

- Studying comparative or parallel events with the emotive ones. This strategy was used in Spain and helps give a distance and perspective to controversial issues;
- Approaching difficult issues at first through a period further back in time;
- The teacher can use compensatory strategies, presenting the other side, highlighting contradictions in pupils' views or de-mythologising popular but partial beliefs;
- Empathetic strategies and role-play by pupils can help them to see the 'Other' side;
- It may be valuable for students to work in small groups and to deliver rules for discussions such as to listen and not interrupt so that everyone can input their views (Low-Beer 1999: 15).³⁵

McCully (2005) has documented ten factors (some of which overlap with the CoE's guidelines) which he suggests are widely acknowledged as good practice in teaching controversial issues in a divided society:

1. A trusting open relationship between practitioner and students: Environment must be secure and trust established with ground rules of discourse firmly laid out in advance.
2. Understanding where the group is coming from, being sensitive to personal biography and acting through professional judgement.
3. Sharing biography, acknowledging the possibility of uncertainty.
4. Recognising the legitimacy of expressing strong points of view but ensuring that all views are challenged.
5. Building up the confidence and capacity to handle potentially controversial issues: As such the Schools Cultural Studies Project (which will be referred to later in the section) referred to this as the '*gradient of controversy*' by which pupils firstly engage with less contentious issues (which also gives the teacher experience of handling the issues), and confidence and skill building in the early phases mean that more challenging material can be dealt with later in the curriculum.³⁶
6. Using distancing and comparative study when appropriate: This is linked to programme structure and means that students first deal with societies in conflict in a different context other than their own before studying their particular situation and McCully points out that such an approach had been used numerous times in community relations work in Northern Ireland, for example the SCSP asked students to investigate apartheid South Africa. Despite the merits of some aspects of this distance study approach, McCully warns of the danger inherent in this approach when both students and practitioners become too comfortable dealing with issues further away and therefore less controversial in the local context.
7. Using key concepts as reference points: A main criticism of Education for Mutual Understanding was that it put too much emphasis on individual relationships and not enough on the underlying causes of conflict (Smith and Robinson 1996: 82). As such, the Local and Global Citizenship elements of the revised curriculum encourage increased understanding of terminology (such as prejudice, diversity and inclusion, equality and social justice etc.).

³⁵ One of the CoE's priority recommendations was teacher training in relation to alternative textbooks containing new methods as teachers can only communicate to pupils what they understand in their own minds (Low-Beer 1999: 200).

³⁶ McCully (2004) suggests that this model of dealing with controversial issues is designed to promote rational thinking, but he argues that quite often the proponents of such an approach (Stradling et al. 1984; Wellington 1986; Lockwood 1996) can place undue emphasis of the ability of individuals to think rationally in emotionally charged situations, and unless the emotional dimension is taken into account and given expression, any engagement will be limited (McCully 2004: 4).

8. Examining multiple perspectives and interpretations: By recognising that events and issues are likely to be interpreted differently depending on the perspective of participants.
9. Underpinning opinion with enquiry and evidence: McCully acknowledges that dialogue in an informal setting can actually '*become trapped in circular arguments*' and he states that it is imperative that there is also an investigative element based on investigation and analysis of evidence.
10. Using experiential learning approaches and attractive resources as short-cuts into controversy: Teachers in the Northern Irish context often cite lack of training and resources as reasons as to why they are reluctant to tackle sensitive cultural and political issues (Smith and Robinson 1996: 21) but in reality it is more likely that uncertainty and a lack of confidence are the main reasons that teachers 'ignore' controversial topics in their lessons.

A paper produced in relation to a seminar held by the Council of Europe on *Teaching controversial and sensitive issues in history education for secondary schools* highlighted that in the case of Spain:

Teachers have learnt to teach history by new methods using many different kinds of source material including pictures and cartoons, rather than just one textbook. Pupils are presented with a range of historical documents reflecting the differing ideologies of the period, so that pupils can see for themselves the different versions from a variety of points of view (Low-Beer 1999: 7).

McCully suggests that it is much more difficult to discuss 'controversial' issues in a divided society as it is extremely difficult for young people to utilise the skills of critical objective reasoning when the "*issues under consideration go to the heart of students' sense of ethnic or cultural identity*" (McCully 2005: 3).³⁷ He further argues that unless the emotional dimension is taken into account and given expression, it will dominate any attempts at engagement and 'block out' more rational thinking processes (McCully 2005: 4):

because our teaching does not address the feelings and emotions already associated with students' existing 'knowledge' of the world, those feelings and emotions caused the students to ignore our teaching (Johnson 1998: 141).

A number of commentators have argued that a balance needs to be struck between emotion and rationality in discussion; too much emotional debate and participants are likely to retreat into 'defensive tribal positions,' and conversely, too great an emphasis on rationality may lead to 'politeness' preventing true opinions from being expressed and thus contentious engagement is avoided (Arlow 2004: 264; McCully 2004: 5; Eyben et al. 2002: 15-16). Several studies have found that while in the main many teachers desire to critically engage with controversial issues, they are unaware of the best way to do so (Woolley and Wragg 2007), and two areas in which the study found them least confident in relation to was dealing with parents and using historical sources which may be critical of a particular religion. Indeed, student teachers were convinced that one answer to teaching controversial history was the presence of multiple perspectives³⁸ in the history classroom and a number of teachers felt

³⁷ As such, McCully differentiates these sensitive cultural issues from 'controversial public issues' as defined by Hess (2002), which include nuclear disarmament, juvenile crime or state-assisted suicide related issues.

that knowing the pupils better allowed them to more easily overcome the challenges presented in teaching controversial issues (Wooley and Wragg 2007: 719-720),³⁹ although Her Majesty's Inspectorate have pointed to the teaching of historical interpretations as one of the weakest points in history pedagogy (Ofsted 2004).

While all of these difficulties have restricted debate on the past within the formal education system, the sector has not been without its successes. Indeed, in response to the question '*What has influenced your understanding of the Troubles most?*', 79% of student respondents in a 1996 and 2001 study highlighted that learning history at school in Northern Ireland was the most important factor, followed by 'a combination of things (16%), and personal experience (16%),⁴⁰ 9% stated friends, 9% television, 9% reading and lowest of all was family background at just 5% (Conway 2004):

Often, students pointed out that despite being repeatedly exposed to historical images and other aspects of the conflict in popular culture and the media, their understanding was fragmentary or incomplete before they studied history at school (Barton and McCully 2006: 25).

Students also believed that school history provided an alternative history to that which they learnt elsewhere and many students felt that the distinguishing characteristic of school history was its lack of community bias; pupils expected and indeed were willing to appropriate what they generally believed were the 'truthful' narratives they learnt in school (Barton and McCully 2006: 29-30). It should also be pointed out that young people believed that the legacies of the past were being addressed, to a limited extent, through subject areas other than history. These subjects included geography, language, personal development, politics and religious education (Magill et al. 2007: 83).

38 A different study also found that young people in Northern Ireland, particularly in the 16-18 year age group were keen to understand the causes of the conflict, but the research also asserted that this task can only be undertaken if there is a commitment to include multiple perspectives and encourage critical thinking (Magill et al. 2007: 108).

39 One issue with this was raised as the fact that history education is less regular than the likes of English and Maths and therefore the teachers do not have the same amount of time in which to build a relationship with the pupils in which trust allows greater flexibility in discussing certain topics (Wooley and Wragg 2007).

40 It should be noted however that these findings are based on only 24 questionnaires in total of A-level students taught between 1980 and 1989.

5. Other Forms of Teaching about the Past

The following section moves away from the discussion surrounding what is (or indeed is not) taught within the history curriculum in schools and instead shifts the focus to alternative sources of information about history and the past for young people. Indeed, one other way in which schools have utilised resources to teach issues relating to the past has been to use Information Technology. Northern Ireland's schools are now integrated online with ICT facilities, originally through the Classroom 2000 programme and subsequently through the 'Learning NI' managed learning environment (Austin nd).⁴¹ Discussing the benefits of using ICT as a tool in teaching history, Austin (nd) comments that the creative process and juxtaposition of image, music and commentary involves fine judgement about the effect this will have on the audience; and therefore the communication of historical understanding using this approach is greater in potential than writing an essay, not least because much ICT exercises require teamwork:

In other words, here again, we are moving away from individual pupils writing their own account of the past, to a context where meaning has to be negotiated between members of the group (Austin nd: 12).⁴²

In 1998 the Departments of Education in Belfast and Dublin initiated the *Dissolving Boundaries* project which aimed to link student teachers across the border using ICT. The student teachers created a joint website which was developed on the basis of curricular collaboration.⁴³ The project involved approximately 121 schools, and broadly speaking, half of the schools were based in Northern Ireland and half in the Republic of Ireland. Both pupils and teachers used real-time video conferencing and also asynchronous conferencing to produce joint power-point slides and a website (Austin nd: 8). The fact that the process was asynchronous allowed pupils who would traditionally be quiet and shy in the classroom environment to fully participate in the online learning process as each student was given time to prepare a piece of work in relation to the questions posed by the moderators. Indeed, an evaluation of the project found that:

students prepared thoroughly, wrote more incisively and were far more ready to look at the quality of the argument that was being made rather than the person making the comment (Austin nd: 10).

Austin suggests that this medium also helped the pupils learn new social and academic skills by participating in a community of practice (Wenger 1998) in which they were at the centre of historiographical debate about meaning and interpretation in history (Austin nd: 7). An evaluation of the project also found that the visual aspect of video-conferencing "made the link across the border more real" for participants. Research by Stringer et al. (2000) found that it is contact between young people which is the most effective way to promote attitudinal change, and while Stringer was focusing on face-to-face contacts, Austin (nd) suggests that the 'virtual' contacts established through programmes such as the 'Dissolving Boundaries' also impact upon attitudes by aiming to increase mutual understanding. According to Austin:

41 The Learning NI programme provided broadband access to a common hardware platform by the end of 2005, and all prospective teachers in Northern Ireland are given ICT training.

42 However, perhaps a word of caution is appropriate for as Austin himself points out, a 2003 report on the quality of teaching in England using ICT found that a significant number of lessons involving ICT were either only satisfactory or poor (Austin 2003).

43 While the project was initially entitled 'The Island We Live on', the project developed into the 'Dissolving Boundaries Through Technology and Education' project (Austin nd: 8).

The presence of a distant audience of peers gives the pupils the chance to express their understanding through both real time links in video-conferencing and through computer conferencing (Austin nd: 8).

The evaluation found that *"the children are not overwhelmed by having too many superficial contacts but neither are they limited to a one-to-one link,"* with the focus of the learning on collaboration within each group and between the groups north and south. In addition, the project resulted in links being made between young people in special schools and those pupils in mainstream education. According to Austin (nd), pupils in deaf schools on both sides of the border used video-conferencing to communicate through sign language while another partnership involved a deaf school in the Republic of Ireland working with a mainstream school in Northern Ireland to use computer conferencing to investigate imperialism. Austin (nd) commends the use of ICT in 'bringing together' young people to communicate with others with whom they would not ordinarily get the chance to do so. Similarly, the *Creative Learning in the Digital Age* project sought to give teachers and young people the opportunity to develop their awareness by analysing digital archival film of events in Northern Ireland, which they could subsequently edit and add pupil interpretation and commentary. One school in Belfast, St Malachy's College, produced 4 DVDs covering the Easter Rising of 1916, the American Civil Rights Movement and also the Home Rule Crisis of 1914-1916. According to Austin (nd) the predominantly Catholic pupils of the schools skilfully presented the case of Protestants in Ireland opposed to Home Rule:

It is impressively neutral, neither applauding nor condemning their actions but pointing to the long-term impact these events have had (Austin nd: 11).

More recently, the BBC NI Schools project has established bilingual 'cartoons' and information online on mythical and historical figures such as Cu Cuhulainn and King William III. The project has also focused on the impact of the Irish Famine and is aimed at children between the ages of 3 to 11 years.⁴⁴ These historical topics come under the 2007 revised curriculum's theme of 'The World Around Us.' The BBC Schools site also caters for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. This resource goes into much more depth than the resource for younger children and explicitly deals with The Troubles and events such as the Ulster Workers' Council Strike, the Hunger Strikes and the Anglo-Irish Agreement and issues relating to stereotyping and Orange parades among other issues, and is aimed to provide information to be used by teachers in the classroom.⁴⁵

Youth Work Practices and the Speak Your Piece project

One response to the growing realisation that perhaps issues were not being addressed as effectively and in as joined up an approach across sectors as perhaps they should have been was the development of the *Speak Your Piece* project in 1997. The project was a university based research and development project supported by the Channel 4 educational television series *Off the Walls* which focused on five themes of Identity, Culture, Religion, Politics and Future Choices. The project worked with both teachers and youth workers on how to handle controversial issues and according to McCully (2005: 5) helped disseminate experiential community relations' youth work into formal education.⁴⁶ The project was:

44 See, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/william/> Accessed 14th January 2010.

45 See, http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/schools/index_11_16.shtml Accessed 14th January 2010.

46 The Youth Work Sector's 'Model for Effective Practice' devised in 1987 was underpinned by principles of equity, diversity and interdependence.

founded on the principle that educators have a positive contribution to make in helping young people engage with controversial social, cultural and religious and political issues by enabling dialogue which is forthright and inclusive and providing alternatives to violence as a means of resolving conflict (CCEA 1997: 3).⁴⁷

The project eventually informed the development of the Local and Global Citizenship programme which became a statutory part of the revised curriculum as of 2007. According to McCully (2004), six themes emerged as central to community relations practice as a result of the project: these were materials and resources; training; support from managers and organisations; the process of community relations work; the promotion of democratic values and characteristics of effective practice.

It is important to note at this juncture that schools, universities and the formal education sector are not alone with regards to their potential to teach young people about the past, the less formal youth sector also has a role to play in this respect. While the findings of a review of the project indicated that *'the different professional contexts of teachers and youth workers have a significant bearing on how they relate to young people and that a comparison is worthy of future analysis'* (McCully 2004: 8), as the project showed, there are a number of long-established youth work practices which have proved to work well in practice in the classroom setting, such as the drawing up of a pupil-teacher contract etc. Indeed, youth work practices have much to contribute to dealing with the past in a more effective manner:

HMI inspectorate reports have noted that structured, pre-planned youth work has more impact on young people – in terms of their understanding of political issues and involvement in running the clubs – than where learning is coincidental (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 53).

One example of a highly praised youth work project was the *Off the Walls* project which was aimed at 14-17 year olds, and which explored the impact of identity, culture, religion and politics on the lives of young people in Northern Ireland, with the main aims of the project including to enable dialogue which is forthright and inclusive; provide alternatives to violence and avoidance as a means of resolving conflict; and facilitate participatory decision-making which encourages the democratic process (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 44).⁴⁸

Similarly, YouthLink ran a three-year programme called the KAIROS project entitled *'Empowering Young People to Shape the Future'* which worked with approximately 200 youth workers. The project consisted of six training sessions on two topics, 'Understanding the past (1921-1996) and 'Shaping the future'. There has also been some work by the Ulster People's College in relation to providing training for young people and establishing political education programmes on the past. The result of training and education programmes such as these was that young people expressed a desire to learn more about the 'Other' community and young people often expressed the desire that they wouldn't 'become stuck' in the same traditions and ways as their parents (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 45).

⁴⁷ A more recent project, the JEDI Initiative was established in the summer of 1998 and is an example of partnership working within the youth and educational sectors. JEDI is a creative partnership aimed at producing a cultural change within the youth service through embedding the principles of Equity, Diversity and Interdependence (EDI). The vision was *"to increase the ability and confidence of youth organisations and young people to be at ease with difference, acknowledge one another as equals and promote improved relations between all"*. The partnership emerged from a piece of research conducted by the University of Ulster in 2007 and includes the provision of EDI Training Programmes which are delivered in the field by the Education & Library Boards and two Regional Voluntary Youth Organisations: YouthAction NI and Youth Link NI.

⁴⁸ The project's activities included group work, role play, simulation games and videos and offered up to 27 modules for training courses which addressed issues such as religion, politics, history, cultural traditions and cross-community activities (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 45).

However, there have also been a number of difficulties identified at times with some youth workers' roles in educating children and young people. A survey on *'Teenage Religion and Values'* found that some youth workers, who were often volunteers with little formal training and support were at times ill prepared to tackle issues relating to moral and spiritual controversies (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 44). Lomas suggests that it is not possible, nor even desirable, to translate the classroom into youth work partly due to the different power structures involved in the two sectors and more generally a lack of resources and training has led to most youth clubs being unable to provide opportunities for political discussion (Democratic Dialogue 1997: 87).

Despite the changes in the teaching of history over the last ten to fifteen years, one crucial difficulty in teaching young people about past events relates to the fact that the influence of the school may often be less powerful than the influence of family and community (Low-Beer 1999). Barton et al. (2003) questioned whether schools were doing enough to counter what students were learning outside the classroom and suggested that the years of Key Stage 3 (11-13 years old) are a critical time in the development of the students' linkage of history with identity. The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey found that in response to the statement, *'Schools in Northern Ireland are effective at encouraging understanding of the complexity of our history,'* 29% of respondents in 2008 ranked schools' achievement in this regard as 7 or higher out of 10, compared to 24% who had done so in 2005 (ARK 2005; 2008). Conway posed pertinent questions of the role of the formal education sector by asking whether the teacher can 'compete' with other factors such as the mass media and community versions of history which also have the potential to construct identity? (Conway 2004: 1).

Sources of Information Outside School

It would be naïve to believe that the formal education sector or informal youth work were the only influences on young people in developing their knowledge and perspectives on the past in Northern Ireland, and research suggests that students have learnt about history not only at school, but also from relatives, print and electronic media, museums and public history sites⁴⁹ (Barton 2005).⁵⁰ Cole (nd) actually suggests that other sites of history learning such as familial transmission, film, literature and museums are perhaps more influential than classroom education and that students at times 'selected' events from the school curriculum which supported their pre-existing, and often sectarian narrative template:

In other cases, students have appropriated an alternative narrative – grounded in ethnic, political or religious allegiances – that leads them to resist school accounts or to reinterpret texts and events so that they more closely conform to prior frameworks (Barton and McCully 2006: 6).⁵¹

A comparative study on the role of education in the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland and Bosnia Herzegovina found that with regard to children and young people's experiences of the Troubles there were significant experiential differences. But these differences were

⁴⁹ Barton (2005) suggests that museums and historic sites in Northern Ireland tend to avoid political history.

⁵⁰ Museums, folk parks and heritage sites at times can be used to reinforce students' historical identifications for example (Barton and McCully 2006: 22).

⁵¹ Porat (2004) found that Israeli students who attended a religious academy and who had also aligned themselves with the right wing of Israeli politics adhered to a heroic narrative of the Tel Hai event of 1920, even when they read textbook accounts which portrayed the event as accidental and largely insignificant. Therefore Barton and McCully argued that the students reinterpreted or added details to the textbook accounts so that they fitted more closely with their prior narrative framework (Barton and McCully 2006: 5).

dependent on two key factors, where the respondents lived and the impact of the conflict on their parents (particularly if ex-army, prison service or former paramilitary members) (Magill et al. 2007). The research found that in both Bosnia-Herzegovina and Northern Ireland, children and young people's main sources of information about the conflict were, adults (parents/grandparents/teachers); personal experience (depending on age); media; and school (subjects such as history/religion/politics/personal development) (Magill et al. 2007: 2). Furthermore friends tend to be a much less important source of information about the Troubles than parents, grandparents and teachers (Magill et al. 2007), although peer pressure has been found to increase some young people's antagonism towards the 'Other' community when with their friends as they didn't want to be 'left out.' Despite this however:⁵²

Even when students admitted to having their ideas as a result of learning history in school, they sometimes made it clear that they were unlikely to share their new perspectives in public and many would be reluctant to challenge or confront their peer group about history (Barton and McCully 2006: 32).

Low-Beer (1999) found that there were difficulties with the enquiry-based approach to teaching history in Northern Ireland particularly because the influence of the school was often less powerful than the influence of family and community. According to Barton and McCully students experience a conflict between the politicized use of historical narratives outside school and a distanced, analytic approach in school with the secondary school history curriculum aiming to expose students to a more systematic and comprehensive treatment of local history than they are likely to encounter through family stories or local traditions (Barton and McCully 2006: 9):

Indeed, some pupils seems to carry two versions of history in their heads: the rational analysis encouraged in school and useful for passing exams, and the partisan loyalty valued outside school (Low-Beer 1999: 10).

Conway found that the majority of teachers interviewed for her study thought that factors external to the class were the most influential in the formation of the political views of young people, with a number of teachers believing that there was very little they could do to challenge deeply held beliefs absorbed from parents or from the community (Conway 2004: 75). They also tended to associate prejudiced views with family background and family attitudes:

Adults – particularly parents, but also grandparents, aunts and uncles and teachers – were an important source of information about the Troubles. More than half of the respondents in the 24-25 and 16-18 age groups mentioned speaking to their parents or family about the Troubles on occasion. A third of respondents in the 24-25 and 16-18 age groups commented that during the Troubles and more recent instances of civil disorder, their parents sometimes spoke to them about the conflict in order to keep them safe – for example to advise them to stay out of particular areas, especially during the marching season, or to be wary of particular people in the areas (Magill et al. 2007: 55).

The research also found that for two thirds of respondents in the 24-25 year old age group, their parents sometimes avoided talking about the Troubles with them:

⁵² Comiskey (DD 1997: 68) referred to his work with young people revealing a relative consensus that young people were worried about 'breaking ranks' within their own community by speaking 'out' on political issues. The young people surveyed expressed fear of paramilitaries, risks of isolation, disagreement and threats or reality of violence.

Some parents also advised their children to steer clear of conversation about Catholic and Protestant 'stuff' in order to avoid offending others and to stay safe (Magill et al. 2007: 55).⁵³

A number of respondents also reflected on the potential for parents to have a positive influence on children's attitudes towards members of the 'Other' community background although young people also acknowledged the potential for parents to negatively influence their children's attitudes (Magill et al. 2007: 57):

That said, it would be disingenuous to suggest that all family stories are partisan narratives; research has found that they can be apolitical and personal in nature, with students at times attributing their general curiosity in learning about the past to the enthusiasm of parents or other members of their family (Barton and McCully 2006: 15).

A number of organisations and media outlets have also produced their own educational materials for use with young people. The Linen Hall Library established the *Troubled Images* project which used CD-ROMs to digitize and 'tell the story' of the posters and graphic material archived in the Northern Ireland Political Collection at the library. BBC Radio Ulster have also been involved in a number of projects appealing more generally to the adult population, such as their 2007 History Series.⁵⁴ Indeed, the potential transformative power of media resources should not be underestimated. Haydn (2005: 21) found that listening to and/or watching video extracts was one of the most frequently mentioned 'positive' elements of history lessons, while Barton and McCully (2006) found that most students referred to knowledge they had acquired through television and movies, with others citing the use of electronic learning through the Internet and CD-ROMs. They found that the students were more likely to learn about history from media sources than they were from textbooks and accordingly:

many attributed their general knowledge of history to movies, TV dramas, documentaries and news programmes (Barton and McCully 2006: 13).

Aside from media and online resources, other organisations have produced their own resources and developed their own training programmes which focus on historical events and their links to an individual's sense of identity. The Orange Order's establishment of the 'Diamond Dan' character was clearly an attempt to 'reach out' and appeal to young people and the education department of the Order have been involved in outreach work with schools including those within the Maintained Sector. Organisations such as The BASE have been engaged with local history projects over the past number of years in taking the first steps in opening up discussions about the past while the *Off the Streets* youth project in Derry Londonderry are conducting a project involving young people and their knowledge of the past and the impact on their sense of identity. A number of youth forums such as the Belfast Youth Forum based out of the Belfast City Council involve young people working together on a cross-community basis dealing with issues impacting upon them, including local politics. While we are aware of a number of projects out there on the ground dealing with the subject matter, we do not as of yet know the outcomes of the programmes, although it is clear that in line with the calls from the Consultative Group on the Past that there should be much greater attempts to discuss and engage with issues relating to the Troubles and beyond, it seems that at the very least the beginnings of this process are underway, although we don't yet know how effective it will be.

⁵³ However the report also noted that for some respondents, the fact that the violence was more or less a 'thing of the past' meant that their parents felt more comfortable talking to them about the Troubles (Magill et al. 2007: 60).

⁵⁴ See, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/radioulster/historylessons/> Accessed 14th January 2010.

6. Young People's Perceptions of Learning about the Past

Having looked at some of the issues in relation to the importance of some form of understanding of history to a sense of individual and collective identity and the difficulties in teaching the past in a society in which there is no one national narrative, we are left to consider the young people's perspectives. What do they think about their understanding of the past? A number of studies in recent years have attempted to explicitly address the relative dearth in material on the views and opinions of young people themselves and what they learn about history and the past in Northern Ireland.

One aspect of the study conducted specifically by Barton and McCully in 2003 with 253 young people in school focused on assessing student responses to a selection of images presented to them based on either traditional Unionist or Nationalist events and/or historical figures. In response to the question, '*Which of these pictures have the most to do with you, or who you are?*' the study found that the most popular images chosen by pupils fell into five broad categories the three most popular of which were national history, religion and culture. As such, the reasons provided by students for their choices highlighted that 21% of explanations were phrased in the importance of national or religious communities for the first and second year students, while 35% of third year students gave these reasons for selecting the images (Barton and McCully 2006).

In Controlled schools the images chosen were often pictures of King William III, the Siege of Derry, the Somme and the formation of the UVF, Carson and Home Rule, Cū Chulainn etc., while at Maintained schools the images tended to be of Bobby Sands, the Hunger Strikes, the Easter Rising, St. Patrick, the Civil Rights Movement, Daniel O'Connell etc. The authors note that at integrated schools pupils tended to select images based on their own community background, and therefore there was no distinct sense of any 'shared' identity which transcended the sectarian divide. Accordingly, these events provide the 'schematic narrative templates' (in Wertsch's terms) for popular perceptions of history in Northern Ireland, and such historical identifications and grievances are often credited with maintaining community division (Barton and McCully 2006: 8). One key finding of the study was that while Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist perspectives do not dominate amongst the younger students in years one and two (11 and 12 years of age), they become increasingly dominant over the course of the three years of learning history in school. Indeed:

After the third year of study, though, their choices and expectations have narrowed considerably, and they are much more likely to focus on pictures related to their own national, religious and cultural backgrounds. It seems then that Key Stage 3 – the time when the study of national history is compulsory – is precisely the period during which many students are developing a sense of identity grounded in national history (Barton et al. 2003: 9).

As students progress through secondary/grammar school therefore, their identifications begin to narrow and they begin to define themselves more as Irish or British or as Unionist or Nationalist, but Barton and McCully contended that the young people 'experienced' history beyond simply adopting Protestant/Unionist or Catholic/Nationalist heritage⁵⁵ in more complicated ways than had previously been thought. They learnt about the past in a variety of formal and informal settings, and while settings outside school at times conveyed politicized stories of Northern Ireland's past, other times they exposed students to more general historical topics and led to a variety of interests that extended well beyond sectarian narratives:

⁵⁵ The authors recognise that these binary terminologies are indeed somewhat arbitrary; however they are used for the purposes of simplicity.

students' responses contradict any simplistic generalizations about their historical identifications. Although items related to their national, religious and cultural backgrounds were the most common sources of historical identification for students, less than a third of students' responses involved such choices (Barton et al. 2003: 9).

The authors found that students navigated between a multitude of information sources to refine and extend their historical understanding and that home, school, popular culture and the community were not entirely separate avenues for developing such an understanding, rather students tended to follow up on interests initiated in one setting by seeking out information from other sources (Barton and McCully 2006: 12-13). Students were also aware that the historical representations they encountered were not disinterested accounts of past events but served current societal purposes, for example many students felt that murals and their implicit messages were aggressive and designed to 'annoy' the 'Other' side. Therefore, students did not necessarily identify with the simplified set of historical themes that are often viewed as typical of adult historical representations and when provided with the opportunity to identify and categorize their own identification with historical representations the young people selected a wide range of individuals, events and topics (Barton et al. 2003: 8). The students in Northern Ireland were not simply appropriating or resisting particular historical narratives, they were using multiple and even conflicting sources of historical information and they were aware that the narratives they learnt from their family and community might serve contemporary political purposes and could be highly partisan, a point which as Barton and McCully point out, Wertsch (2002) suggests is atypical.

Indeed the authors assert that it may be more appropriate to conceptualise students in Northern Ireland, not as merely appropriating or resisting narratives, but rather the process should be viewed in the light of Bakhtin's distinction between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. For Bakhtin, authoritative discourse is (re)presented in the language of parents, adults and teachers, demands our 'unconditional allegiance' and must be either totally affirmed or rejected (e.g. USA narrative in schools). However, internally persuasive discourse represents the 'inner monologue of human beings' and is not backed up by authority, rather individuals begin to develop to think in 'an independent, experimenting and discriminating way' (Bakhtin 1982: 345), and distinguish their own thoughts from authoritative discourses and involves ongoing interaction with other discourses (Barton and McCully 2006: 38):

Many of the students in Northern Ireland appeared to be developing this kind of internally persuasive discourse as they wrestled with two competing views of history – not with competing Nationalist and Unionist views, but with those of school and their own communities, neither of which they fully appropriated or resisted.

The arts have also been found to be another way with which to critically engage young people in dealing with 'Other' perspectives on the conflict in Northern Ireland. Seamus Heaney referred to the paradox of the arts being that they are all made up and yet allow us to get at truths about who and what we are or might be (Heaney 2002: 68-69)⁵⁶ and it is within this context that Hanratty and Taggart (2004) carried out video-recorded discussion over two school terms with sixth-form students in a representative sample of schools in the Greater Belfast area in 2002/2003.⁵⁷ All the students were studying A-level English, and were provided with a mini-

⁵⁶ John Wilson Foster referred to the strong case for the reading, remembering and study of English literature as a potentially reconciliatory force in a divided society like Northern Ireland (Wilson Foster 2003: 77).

⁵⁷ Representative meaning a combination of grammar, comprehensive and secondary, Catholic and Protestant schools, single sex and co educational institutions and one integrated school.

anthology of poems by Seamus Heaney, James Simmons, Michael Longley and Pádraic Fiacc as well as a selection of Irish short stories and excerpts from novels.⁵⁸ Each text was reviewed for approximately 30 minutes with the main questions covering issues such as is the poem/writing from a Nationalist or Unionist perspective? Is the writer justified in their use of certain terminology? If the author was from a different background would they have written a different kind of poem? Does some of the poem's imagery convey a subtle political sub-text? While the research found that pupils tended to believe that the literature would have stirred up more emotion amongst their parents' generation, ongoing interpretation of the texts demonstrated the existence of a fairly deep seated cultural and political legacy. The authors added that ongoing sectarian strife in the vicinity of the schools was also important in determining the response of the rest of the pupils to the poem (Hanratty and Taggart 2004: 9).

In the case of Seamus Heaney's 'The Toome road,' the vast majority of pupils in a Controlled secondary school, situated close to a 'sectarian' interface responded in a relatively one-sided manner, emphasising the 'protective' role of the soldiers and the need to hunt down the 'terrorists.' In a similar vein, pupils in the Maintained school sector tended to refer to 'an army of occupation,' while in the single integrated school the researchers found that opinion tended to be split in a similar way between Protestant and Catholic students. Pupils tended to see poems which reflected opinions from 'their own side' as more neutral than poems and texts from the 'Other':

By contrast – and predictably by now – the response in both Catholic and Protestant boys' schools, at any rate to begin with, were generally more political and more identified with a "them and us" mentality (Hanratty and Taggart 2004: 14).

Despite pupil responses often initially being divided by community background, as discussion continued a significant number of pupils began to appreciate and respect alternative viewpoints and acknowledged that the poem had prompted a new way of evaluating previously entrenched political perspectives (Hanratty and Taggart 2004: 9). Findings from the project indicated that the vast majority of female pupils, whether in co-educational or single-sex schools, tended to focus more readily on the humanitarian aspects of the literature and particularly the exposure of suffering while boys tended to concentrate more on the obvious political aspects of the texts. Hanratty and Taggart (2004) are reasonably optimistic about their findings and believed that given the right kind of literary stimulus and opportunity for structured debate, the vast majority of pupils had a strong sense of the need to look outwards, to think from a humanitarian perspective and seek new understandings. They suggest that this may lead to pupils discovering what Heaney (2002) termed the '*boundlessness of our sympathies*' and suggest that the study of such Troubles related literary texts can foster something akin to Freire's dialogical model of education and provide an ideal forum for the consideration of problematic social and political issues (Hanratty and Taggart 2004: 19).

⁵⁸ In total six texts were selected for discussion: Heaney's 'The Toome road', Simmon's poems 'Claudy', and 'Lament for a Dead Policeman', Fiacc's 'The Ditch of Dawn', Eugene Stranney's story 'Sudden', David Park's 'Killing a Brit' and Maurice Leitch's novel 'Silver's City'.

7. Conclusions: Learning History

Research suggests that developing an understanding of history (or histories) is a vital component in any society's ability to deal with the past to move into a more peaceful and secure future (Cole nd).⁵⁹ According to Conway (2004), the importance and relevance of national history education lies in the fact that it promotes certain identities and values in addition to conveying knowledge and skills, and by inference, contributes to the process of identity formation (Conway 2004).

The presence of a divided society in Northern Ireland, is manifest in the divisions in education, and has created difficulties for schools and teachers when attempting to engage critically with what may be perceived as 'controversial' or sensitive issues and particularly the recent history associated with the Troubles. Wertsch notes that historical narratives are rarely neutral or dispassionate, and in Northern Ireland are closely associated with fundamental issues of identity (Barton and McCully 2006: 3). However, as seems to be the case in Northern Ireland, difficulties emerge when there is no common narrative with which to understand either the distant past or the often more problematic recent past. Until recently the version of history that a young person learnt in school depended very much on the type of school they attended, their teacher and the ethos of the history department. And prior to the revision of the required curriculum in 2007 there was little opportunity to teach the recent history of Ireland or Northern Ireland since partition (Kitson 2004).

However, the avoidance of recent history or controversial issues in formal education until relatively recently does not mean that young people do not learn about the past, rather they learn from different sources, such as parents and family, community and the media. Which of these influences proves to be the most pervasive and influential on a young person's formulation of their opinion of history? Can more dispassionate analysis of events from a range of sources and perspectives in school 'counteract' more selective and 'biased' representations of events from a family/community perspective which is invariably grounded in experience as Barton and McCully suggest? Part Two of the report sets out the research findings which will address a number of these issues in greater detail.

⁵⁹ Cole (nd: 35) notes that while history teaching can potentially promote reconciliation the situation is eminently more difficult than in certain parts of Africa for example where while there were tribal and ethnic differences in a number of post-colonial states, there could be general agreement that the end of British imperialism tended to be 'a good thing' and therefore a narrative that almost all in the country could support. No such singular narrative exists (or is likely to exist) in Northern Ireland.

Part Two: Research Findings

8. Methodology

The research project explored young people's understanding and knowledge of history and the past in Northern Ireland, to identify their sources of information, and consider how their knowledge and understanding contributes to their sense of individual and collective identity. To this end, the study sought to provide a representative view of young people's experience of history within the formal educational curriculum as well as examples of the use of history in less formal and community-based education. The research, which was conducted between November 2009 and April 2010, included a questionnaire which was completed by 958 young people; and focus group discussions with 238 young people across Northern Ireland.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed by ICR, Achieve Enterprises and CRC (see Appendix). A small number of questions were utilised from previous studies to allow for the possibility of comparison with prior research findings (Andrews et al. 2009). The questionnaire aimed to capture:

1. The personal characteristics of the young person;
2. The educational background of the young person, including the type of school attended and level to which the young person had studied history;
3. The young person's experiences of history teaching in school;
4. Their understanding of Northern Irish/Irish history and knowledge of specific events;
5. What influences/sources of information regarding history were outside of the classroom.

The questionnaires were distributed both through a selection of educational establishments, and to participants in the focus groups and through a number of youth groups and organisations. The questionnaire was also available for completion online on the Public Achievement website. Eight schools, three Institutes of Higher and Further Education and one university participated in the research project. These were located in Belfast, Castlederg, Derry Londonderry, Enniskillen, Magherafelt, Newry, Omagh and Strabane. Seven of the schools were co-educational facilities while one school was single sex. The schools included one grammar school; two integrated schools; three Controlled secondary schools; and two Maintained secondary schools. A number of other schools (including an Irish medium school) were approached with a request to participate in the research and either refused to take part or failed to respond to our requests. As a result of one of the integrated schools supplying a substantial number of questionnaires, our overall sample is over-represented by young people in integrated education (23% of young people who completed the questionnaire attended integrated education compared to the approximate figure of 6% of the Northern Ireland population of school age who do so).

Focus Group Discussions

Numerous youth organisations and groups across Northern Ireland were contacted by telephone, letter, and/or visits with requests to facilitate focus groups. Participants in the majority of focus groups either volunteered or were selected by organisations because it was felt that they had experiences which would be beneficial to the research. The discussions aimed to assess: young people's understandings of the importance of the past; the role that

past events play in daily lives and activities; the impact of past events on young people's lives; which specific events have meaning to young people, and why; and how, and through what means and settings, they have learnt about the past. The majority of focus group discussions lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. Where possible, and with permission, focus groups were recorded, but where this was not possible notes were taken by hand. The recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed for emerging themes and issues. Twenty-eight focus groups were held in 12 locations across Northern Ireland. Table 1 denotes the numbers of young people who participated in the research in each location:

Table 1: Focus group: locations and participants

Location	Number of Participants
Ballycastle	31
Ballymena	6
Bangor	5
Belfast	87
Castledearg	8
Derry Londonderry	19
Downpatrick	13
Dungannon	6
Enniskillen	23
Larne	15
Lurgan	10
Omagh	15
Total	238

In relation to the gender balance of focus group participants, 102 (43%) were female and 136 (57%) were male. In terms of community background, 126 young people were from a Catholic community background (53%), while 100 were from a Protestant community background (42%). A further seven young people (3%) were of mixed community background and five young people did not specify a community background (2%).

The single identity groups tended to be more at ease discussing the research topic than groups with a mixed community background. This process was compounded if the group was dominated by one or two confident young people from one community background. This led to some young people from the 'Other' community background, and who were in a minority in the group, to be reluctant to speak.

We also found that getting young people to talk about 'history' often drew little response, but when we directed the focus group towards issues directly related to contemporary life, which had a relationship to the past (such as marching or demonstrations) there was a much greater willingness to discuss these issues. Although this may be a topic for elaboration elsewhere, it does have interesting repercussions regarding research methods utilised by those working with young people in Northern Ireland.

Additionally, young people whose family were involved in the Troubles or were seriously impacted by them were at times reluctant to talk in front of their peers. It is always important to acknowledge that in discussing 'controversial' historical events that some people will have more direct experience of such than others and this may impact upon their willingness to engage.

We tried to include the views of minority ethnic young people and discussed the feasibility of organising focus groups with several minority ethnic support organisations. However, there was little interest amongst the contacted organisations in the research. Similarly, a Travellers' support organisation was contacted about the possibility of organising a focus group but declined to participate due to lack of interest among the young people they worked with.

9. Demographics and National Identity

The statistics were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and are based on analysis of 958 returned questionnaires, with the sample of young people ranging from 12 to 29 years of age, although only 25 individuals in the study were aged 23 years and above. The logic for targeting such a wide age range was to gather information both from young people in the first few years of secondary school for whom history was still 'compulsory', as well as including 'older young people', in their 20s, who were either still in education or had been through the system relatively recently. It was hoped that such an approach would allow for some level of exploration to assess how age impacted upon an individual's knowledge and understanding of the past.

Four hundred and ninety nine respondents (52%) were female and 459 (48%) were male (Table 2). The greatest number of young people in a single age bracket in the total sample were those between the ages of 15 and 16 who made up 46% of respondents. Those young people aged between 17 and 18 years of age were the second largest age group, making up 28% of respondents. The fewest number of respondents were in the 12-14 age group (11%), while those aged 19 and over comprised 15% of the total sample. Thus almost three-quarters of the survey sample (73%) were between the ages of 15 and 18, still at school and studying for GCSEs and/or A/AS levels.

Table 2: Age of participants⁶⁰

Age-group	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
12-14	11	10	11
15-16	46	44	48
17-18	28	31	25
19+	15	15	16
Total	99	99	100
Missing	1	1	0

In terms of community background, 455 young people (48%) indicated that they were from a 'Catholic' community background, while 407 young people (43%) stated that they were from a 'Protestant' community background. Just under 10% of respondents referred to themselves as 'Other', of which the largest proportion (15%) referred to themselves as being from a 'Mixed' community background.

The largest proportion of respondents (43%) said they had attended, or were currently attending, a secondary school, while one quarter (26%) had attended, or currently were attending, a grammar school (Table 3). Almost one-quarter of the sample (23%) said they were, or had been, pupils at an integrated school. It should be noted at this juncture again that this is a much higher figure than the proportion of pupils who attend integrated schools (approximately 6%) and we recognise therefore that our sample is over represented in terms of pupils who attend(ed) integrated education.

⁶⁰ The percentages of males and females relates to the overall proportion of males and females who were within each age category, rather than the proportion within an age bracket who were either male or female.

Table 3: Type of school attended⁶¹

Type of school	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Secondary	43	44	44
Grammar	26	26	26
Integrated	23	25	21
FE College/Tech	7	5	9
Other	2	1	2
Irish language	0	0	0
Don't know	0	0	0
Missing	1	1	1

Almost half of the survey respondents (49%) described their school as 'mixed'; with 94% of respondents at integrated schools describing their school as 'mixed', compared to 56% of pupils in grammar schools and just 18% in secondary schools. Secondary school pupils were more likely to believe that their school was predominantly single-identity in terms of the composition of the student body compared to their counterparts who attended either integrated or grammar schools.⁶²

Table 4 highlights the statistics in relation to young people's perceptions of their national identity. The largest single nationality group indicated was 'Irish' (41%) which was followed by 'British' at 28%, although few young people noted their identity as 'Ulster' or 'Ulster-Scots', one-quarter of the sample (26%) referred to themselves as 'Northern Irish'. This figure is slightly higher than the statistic recorded by the Belfast Telegraph in their survey of 1020 adults prior to St. Patrick's Day in 2010 in which 18% of adults stated that they were 'Northern Irish'.⁶³ Five young people described themselves as of 'Other' nationalities which were Palestinian, Russian, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese.

It is worth noting that the majority of those young people describing themselves as 'Northern Irish' are young Protestants. Indeed, of the 216 individuals who identified themselves as Northern Irish, 70% were young Protestants and 30% young Catholics.⁶⁴ While 37% of young Protestants identified themselves as Northern Irish just 15% of young Catholics did so. More than half (55%) of Protestant young people who answered the question defined themselves as 'British', while only 3% stated that they were 'Irish', in contrast more than three-quarters (80%) of young Catholics who answered the question stated that they were 'Irish' and just 4% felt that they were 'British'.

61 The percentages of males and females relates to the overall proportion of males and females who attended each educational institution, rather than the proportion at each school/facility who were either male or female.

62 247 young people (26%) referred to their school/FE College as 'Mostly Catholic' and 227 young people (24%) referred to their school/FE College as 'Mostly Protestant'. 15 individuals (2%) 'Did not know'.

63 See the Belfast Telegraph News story, 'Belfast Telegraph Exclusive Poll on United Ireland'. Published March 15th 2010. Accessed April 15th 2010. Available online at: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/belfast-telegraph-exclusive-poll-on-united-ireland-14721124.html>

64 There was one individual from an 'Other' community background who stated that they were Northern Irish.

Table 4: National Identity

National identity	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Irish	41	3	80
British	28	55	4
Northern Irish	26	37	15
Ulster	2	4	-
Ulster-Scots	0	1	-

Further cross-tabulations in the data highlight some interesting distinctions in terms of how a young person defined their national identity depending on the type of school they went to and their community background (Table 5).

Table 5: National Identity, Type of school attended and community background

National identity	Grammar		Secondary		Integrated	
	P(%)	C(%)	P(%)	C(%)	P(%)	C(%)
Irish	3	78	2	84	9	80
British	44	4	63	4	36	4
Northern Irish	52	18	26	12	55	17
Ulster	-	-	8	-	-	-
Ulster-Scots	1	-	1	-	-	-

The figures above illustrate that Protestants who attend secondary schools are more likely to consider themselves 'British' than their counterparts at grammar or integrated schools (63% of Protestants at secondary school referred to themselves as British compared to 44% at grammar school and 36% at integrated school). Catholics who attended secondary school were slightly more likely to define themselves as 'Irish' than their counterparts at the other types of second-level education (84% compared to 78% of Catholics at grammar school and 80% at integrated school).

The Northern Irish identity was most popular with Protestant young people at integrated schools and grammar schools (55% and 52% respectively), while only 26% of young Protestants at secondary school considered themselves to be 'Northern Irish'. Furthermore, no young Protestants at a grammar or integrated school referred to their identity as 'Ulster', but 8% of young Protestants at secondary school referred to themselves as such. Young Catholics who attended grammar or integrated education were more likely to consider themselves to be 'Northern Irish' than their counterparts at secondary school (18% compared to 17% and 12% respectively).

A number of young people indicated more than one nationality on the questionnaire, that is they ticked more than one option.⁶⁵ The most common multiple national identity indicated

⁶⁵ The questionnaire did not indicate that multiple options could be selected.

included 'Northern Irish' with another option, for example 'British' and 'Northern Irish', or 'Irish' and 'Northern Irish'. For example, of the 32 young people who described themselves as 'British' and another nationality, 25 of these young people chose 'British' and 'Northern Irish'. Only three young people felt they were 'Irish' alongside another nationality. Of course under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement residents of Northern Ireland are entitled to define themselves as British or Irish or indeed both.

While the questionnaire data provided some useful baseline statistics, the focus groups allowed more in-depth discussion of how young people define national identity and what it means to them. For some young people one's national identity was in essence a legal term which was linked to citizenship and documentation:

they are Irish because they are from Ireland but they are British because of their passport right? (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

This view was a minority however and responses from young people highlighted varying degrees of understanding of identity and in particular national identity. A number of young people, regardless of age, gender or community background were confident in asserting their national identity, and often these identities corresponded with the ethno-national dichotomy (with Protestants tending to select British and Catholics tending to select Irish):

More Catholics would see themselves as Irish and Protestants as British, it's a bit of a stereotype like (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

I'm proud to be Irish (Female, Catholic, 12-14, Belfast).

A small number of young people within the focus groups (and more often than not, young females), expressed a national identity which diverged from this however:

I call myself Irish 'cos I am born on the island of Ireland, but I quite like being part of the UK and I'm from a Protestant family (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

For a number of young people, questions relating to national identity were interlinked with issues of religion and community background:

At the end of May last year we were all walking up towards (name of place) and they recognised us as Catholics and mouthed off about us being Catholics and I thought 'Hang on here, can I change what nationality I was born into?' (Male, Catholic, 19+, Belfast).

It is worth noting that a small number of young people within the focus groups struggled with the concepts of nationality and identity and were unsure as to 'what they were', with a number of young people asking the researchers what the terms meant.⁶⁶ This lack of understanding for some young people was not limited to questions around national identity, and a number of young people also found it difficult to understand the terms 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist'. One interviewee asked the researchers to clarify the issue:

Am I a Nationalist? (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

⁶⁶ It is possible that had the question been framed differently and had young people been given a blank space in which to write in their nationality there may have been a different response than selecting from a predetermined list, and certainly the questionnaire data does not reflect some of the difficulties a number of young people had in relation to these concepts.

In one predominantly Protestant area, young females were asked how they would describe their area, was it predominantly Unionist or Nationalist?

I don't know what does that mean? (Female, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast).

Again, for a number of young people, the terms Unionist and Nationalist were associated with the Protestant/Catholic dichotomy:

Isn't a Nationalist a Catholic? Republicans are Catholics aren't they? (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

Unionists and Nationalists? Protestant – The first thing I would think of is Protestant – Catholic (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

Despite this, there were a minority of young people who had more of an understanding as to the political connotations behind the terminology, and even how the terms originated:

They wanted one nation (Nationalist) – wanted one island. I learnt that in history in school. Unionists wanted to stay separate from Ireland and remain with Britain (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

The terms loyalist and republican were slightly better understood by young people and were often equated with the paramilitaries:

They are military groups, like the violent ones. This area would be Catholic because republican would be more like the IRA (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

Questions relating to differences in national identity, Unionist and Nationalist, loyalist and republican led to the young people being asked how they could 'tell' one area apart from another, or indeed, the people living within an area. A common theme throughout the focus groups was the presence of flags as demarcations of territory into 'safe' and 'unsafe' spaces, safe being 'our area' and unsafe being 'their area'. In line with this, flags associated with one's 'own' community background were viewed as indicating safety:⁶⁷

It makes you feel alright when I see the Union or the Red Hand – safe you know as a Protestant you are in a Protestant area (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).

You know you are in a Proddy area if you see a Union Jack, plus you feel safer if you see a Tricolour (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

The symbolism for some young people was inextricably linked with the religious/community background label:

It (seeing the flag) means that is your religion (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

In addition, at times young people felt that the visibility of what they believed to be their own flag heightened their sense of what it meant to be Irish or British in particular:

⁶⁷ Connolly et al. (2002) found that children as young as five or six years of age are beginning to identify themselves with one community or another.

You feel good, it's the flag of your country, it makes me feel more Irish (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Other young people criticised what they felt were the intimidatory purpose of the flying of flags:

Intimidated sometimes – that's when they are on every single lamppost you feel they should take into consideration other people. It's just marking out territory (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).⁶⁸

While flags (and murals which we discuss at greater length later), were believed to demarcate territory into 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' areas, one somewhat worrying trend was the tendency of some young people, and particularly those young people from predominantly single identity communities, to stereotype young people from the 'Other' community. At times young people in various focus groups spoke of ways in which you could 'tell' the difference between young Protestants and Catholics, these young people tended to be at the lower end of our age range:

Many young people from this area would say they could tell a Catholic from their hair (Female, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast).

Protestants, they can have dyed blond hair and their accent is different, like English kind of (Female, 13-14, Catholic, Belfast).

Regardless of levels of knowledge of political concepts such as Unionist and Nationalist or loyalist and republican, the vast majority of young people used the terms 'Protestants' and 'Catholics' to identify difference. National and political identity labels tended to be associated with one community background or another, but it was mainly through the terminology of 'Protestant' and Catholic' or more derogatory language such as 'huns' and 'fenians' that a number of young people spoke about the differences with young people from the 'Other' community. While the findings of the Young Life and Times Survey suggests that national identity is either quite important or very important for 65% of young people and 53% believe their religious identity is either quite or very important (ARK 2008), there appears to be a blurring of distinction, at least in the minds of many young people, between these concepts, and at times terminology relating to difference was used interchangeably.

Summary

Community background continues to influence a young person's perception of their national identity, with young Protestants more likely to refer to themselves as 'British' and young Catholics more likely to refer to themselves as 'Irish'. Although 26% of all young people considered themselves to be 'Northern Irish', 70% of these young people were Protestant. Young Protestants and Catholics at secondary schools were more likely than their counterparts at grammar or integrated schools to identify themselves as either 'British' or 'Irish', and as such the Northern Irish identity was lowest amongst secondary school pupils.

⁶⁸ The 2008 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey documented that 66% of respondents believe that Union flags are put up on lampposts by loyalist paramilitaries while 69% of respondents believed that republican paramilitaries put Irish Tricolours on lampposts (ARK 2008).

How do young people 'learn' about these concepts of nationality, about these 'markers of difference'? More generally, how do young people develop their understanding of their own identity and is this in any way linked to their understanding of history and the past in Northern Ireland? Do these trends relate to the inter-generational transmission of values from parents and family, talking with friends, the internet, by watching television, by reading books or newspapers? What do young people learn about the past in school? Is this information 'more neutral' and dispassionate than any of these other sources of information? It is to this issue which the report now turns with an initial exploration of the role of history teaching in schools as a source of knowledge on the past.

10. Education and Learning

The research explored the nature of young people's interest in and knowledge of history as an academic subject. In addition, we sought to explore why young people studied the subject or decided to drop history as an academic subject. These questions related to the importance (or not) of historical knowledge in a formal educational setting in contributing to how young people learn about the past and most specifically, how they learn about historical events in an Irish/Northern Irish context.

The largest number of young people in the survey (45%) were, or had, studied history as a subject to GCSE level (Table 6) while just over one quarter (28%) were or had studied the subject at Years 8, 9 and 10 only, when the subject is compulsory within the school curriculum. A further one-fifth of the sample (20%) were studying or had completed A-level/AS level History and 4% of respondents were studying for or had a University Degree in the subject.⁶⁹

When asked what best describes their experiences of studying history at school, participants tended to view the subject in a positive light. More than one-quarter (27%) found the subject 'useful', whereas just 8% of respondents found it 'not useful'. Similarly, more than half of the total sample of young people (53%) found history in school 'interesting' while 15% found it 'boring'. Fewer than one-third (31%) of respondents found history in school 'enjoyable' while 8% of respondents felt the subject in school was 'not enjoyable'.

Regarding the educational value of the studying of the subject, almost one-third of respondents (32%) believed history was 'educational' compared to just 2% who felt the subject was 'not educational'.⁷⁰ There was no major difference between participants who had attended/were attending integrated, grammar or secondary schools in their opinions of history in school. However young people who only studied history when it was compulsory (between the ages of 11 and 13) were less likely than those who studied the subject longer to find history useful, interesting or enjoyable. For example, while 88% of young people who studied history to A/AS level felt that the subject was useful, only 60% of young people who studied history at Years 8, 9 and 10 felt it was useful.⁷¹

The questionnaire also afforded young people the opportunity to document why they had decided to drop history as a subject. The questionnaire results coupled with focus group responses suggests three main reasons for not continuing to study history. Firstly, the young person found the subject in school a '*boring presentation of dates about dead people*', or secondly, they did not feel that the subject was relevant to what they wished to do in their career when they were older:

I didn't need it for the career path I wanted (Questionnaire response).

Finally, timetable clashes in school resulted in young people who were actually interested in the subject having to drop it to study something else. History as a subject appears to be 'losing out' to other subjects as some students could not study history alongside other classes which the young person perceived themselves to be academically strong in:

⁶⁹ This degree could be either undergraduate or postgraduate.

⁷⁰ It should be noted in relation to this set of questions however a large proportion of young people did not answer the question, and there is therefore a large amount of missing data.

⁷¹ Similarly, while 89% of young people who studied history to A/AS level found history interesting only 59% of young people who studied it to year 10 found history interesting.

In fourth year I was given a choice between history or geography, and geography was my stronger subject (Questionnaire response).

I wanted to do it but couldn't choose it with my other subjects (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

History and the 'Troubles'

For many young people the very term 'history' implied the academic sense of the word, studying books, learning dates, writing essays and passing exams. Perhaps more importantly, history was associated with events generally around the turn of the Twentieth century and earlier which was perceived as '*a long time in the past*'. When the researchers began to explore attitudes to history in the focus groups, aside from those young people with a liking and an aptitude for the subject, many young people associated it with '*boring, old stuff that happened ages ago*'. In this sense 'history' was not necessarily immediately equated with the local Irish or Northern Irish context:

The Troubles is history all right but it's different than all the other guff. When someone says history you think you are going to be talking about something else, like Egypt or something (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Larne).

In contrast, one aspect of the study was to assess knowledge relating to the past, which encompasses Northern Ireland's most recent past and particularly the events during the 'Troubles'. For some young people the 'excitement' of learning about the Troubles was contrasted with learning about history more generally:

I don't really want to learn about the old Irish stuff like the O'Neills. I would rather learn about the Troubles personally. I would rather learn about all the stuff that happened here rather than all the politics and all, it's real boring, but when you learn about actual stuff that happened in Belfast and Lurgan, bombs, it's interesting (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

The difference in response amongst young people when asked about the Troubles compared to 'history' was striking. In many instances the Troubles were not always viewed as part of history they were 'too recent', or if the Troubles were viewed as part of history it was one which was ongoing:

they are finished in some places but in some places it's still worse than it was (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Ballymoney).

Well, if you end up in a fight or anything, other than that they don't really want to talk about it 'cos you know ... like, everyone that's older than us are saying that the Troubles are over and doesn't happen anymore but they are still fighting every weekend with the younger ones, so most don't know what they are fighting over (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

Several young people linked the Troubles to ongoing segregation and sectarianism:

When you say Troubles the first thing in my head is Catholics and Protestants (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

I just think of Belfast, 'cos of all the Catholics and Protestants (Female, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

For another young person, the Troubles meant '*about the British, when you say the Troubles you just think about the Brits*'. A number also spoke of the personal impact of the effects of the Troubles on themselves and their families. This generally led to one of two responses: either a willingness to discuss the Troubles in the context of what happened 'in their area' or a personal or family involvement which led them to be reluctant to talk about issues which they believed to be the root cause of the problems in Northern Ireland in the first place:

...given my personal experience at the end of the Troubles, I don't want to know anything about Irish history because it's made everybody so bitter – it makes everyone horrible and brings out the worst in people like, why bother, just leave it (Female, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

Is it important to learn about the past?

Through the course of the research it became apparent that the vast majority of young people felt that it was beneficial to learn about history and the past given the particular situation which exists in Northern Ireland:

Aye, particularly in Northern Ireland, to learn about all the things that happened in the Troubles, it wasn't that long ago and our parents are telling us about it – it's only a generation back like (Male, Catholic, 19+, Omagh).

Indeed, when young people were asked whether or not it was important to learn about historical events in Northern Ireland (80%) felt that it was important or very important to learn about historical events in Irish and/or Northern Irish history.⁷² When taking into consideration community background, there were no significant differences, 46% of both young Protestants and Catholics felt that 'it was very important' to learn about historical events in Northern Ireland.

In contrast only 15% of young people believed it was 'not very important' and just 4% of respondents believed that it was 'not important at all' to learn about historical events in Northern Ireland. The qualitative evidence supported these findings, and while a small number of young people felt that learning about the past was 'pointless', most young people felt that it was important to learn about the past:

Yes, so you know how to treat people and what they have been through and you know everything about the past and things like that there, it is important you know where you came from (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Dungannon).

It was with these questions in mind, and having established that most young people believed it was important to learn about historical events in Irish and Northern Irish history, that young people were asked to identify which topics they felt should be taught in history classes in school.

72 In relation to this, the previous discussion of the statistics highlighting young people's views of history as useful, or interesting, or enjoyable are pertinent and highlight the difference which the report has already alluded to, that between school history and Northern Irish history, which often for many young people means the Troubles. The latter is perceived as much more 'exciting' than the former. It is also entirely possible to believe that something is important to learn about, but it is at the same time, '*boring, uninteresting and not enjoyable*'.

What should be taught in school?

While young people placed significant emphasis on the importance of Irish/Northern Irish issues, there were a significant number of young people who felt that local history should be taught with other topics. More than half of respondents (55%) felt that 'world history' should be taught in school, closely followed by 52% of respondents who believed that 'history directly relating to Northern Ireland' should be taught (Table 6).⁷³

Table 6: What should be taught in history classes in school?

Topic	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
World history	55	59	50
History directly related to Northern Ireland	52	60	48
Irish History	42	28	59
British History	30	44	20
Ancient History	30	27	28
European History	24	25	21

N.B. Total relates to the complete sample, including those young people who did not state their community background, young people who stated 'Other' as their community background and missing responses.

A number of young people noted that they no longer studied history in school due to the 'irrelevance' of studying topics relating to other parts of the world, and a number of students would have preferred to learn more about Irish and Northern Irish history in school:

I would have kept history on if they had done a more local approach, I think people are interested on finding out about where they are from and their own background, I was interested in learning more about that, but basically the course was on the Cold War and I had no interest in that (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

I find history slightly more interesting if it's Irish or Northern Irish, but it can still be kind of boring (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

There was a strong tendency for young people to believe that a combined approach of teaching world history with British or Irish history was the most useful. Community background clearly impacted upon which topics the young respondents felt should be covered in the curriculum. While 44% of young Protestants believed that British history should be taught, just 20% of young Catholics felt that British history should be part of the curriculum. Similarly, while 59% of young Catholics believed Irish history should be taught in school, only 28% of young Protestants did so.

⁷³ Note that the young people could tick as many or as few topics as they felt appropriate and therefore percentages do not total to 100%.

Throughout the focus group discussions, young people indicated a number of historical topics which they had studied in school which did not directly relate to Irish/Northern Irish History, at primary school level these included the Vikings and the Spanish Armada, while at secondary and grammar school topics included the Battle of Hastings, the European revolutions of the nineteenth Century, the two World Wars, and the Cold War among others:

I'm doing about the Nazis and the concentration camps (Female, Catholic 15-16, Belfast).

We'd learn about Nazis and then we would go onto Northern Ireland, and then the Cold War (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

Although a number of young people studied some Irish history in school, the degree to which the subject was covered and the events taught appeared to be dependent on a number of extraneous factors, including the type of school attended, the age at which the pupil stopped studying history, the location of the school and the attitudes and interests of the teacher. According to a number of young interviewees, the historical events they were taught about Northern Ireland were related to the type of school they went to and linked to whether the school was within the Controlled or Maintained sector. A number of pupils at Controlled schools felt that they learnt more in history at school regarding 'Protestant stuff' and similarly Catholic young people believed they had learnt more at school 'to do with us':⁷⁴

I learnt about the Easter Rising in first year (Male, Catholic, 14-15, Derry Londonderry).

I'm doing the 36th Ulster Division in third year (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast).

However, some young people were keen to point out that it was within the parameters of school that they studied the perspectives of others in relation to events in Irish history:

We learned about the build up to Bloody Sunday and the Battle of the Bogside, we learnt about, we sort of learned it from a Unionist point of view as well why some of them reacted bad against it and like the Catholics were joining up to the IRA after Bloody Sunday (Male, Catholic, 17-18, Ballycastle).

It was the Plantation, I learnt about that a couple of months ago in school that we were planted into Northern Ireland from England and Scotland, and the impact that had on Ireland generally (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

At times the location of the school appeared to impact upon the particular events young people were taught about more so than the type of school attended, for example, some young people from Derry Londonderry reported learning about the Battle of the Bogside in history class, while others in the same school referred to learning about the 'Siege of Derry' and:

The Apprentice Boys, aye the Lundy Boy who opened the gates (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

⁷⁴ It is entirely possible that pupils were taught about a range of subjects, but perhaps, selected events which they best remembered, which may have related to 'their' community background and supplementary knowledge on these events accrued from other sources such as their parents, wider family circle, friends, television and movies, the internet and so on.

Although a minority of young people highlighted that they had learnt about the Troubles in school '*about the bombings and all the paramilitaries*', other young interviewees felt that they had not learnt much at all about Irish history, that the subject had been somewhat '*ignored*':

I went to a Catholic maintained school ... so they like avoided it ... if you learn it too young you are going to become bitter or something but I actually think it would help if you learnt it younger (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

Most young people stated that they had learnt something about Irish history at school, and this usually covered events such as the Famine or the partition of Ireland:

We did partition, but we haven't really done anything on the Troubles (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

More recent history, particularly the period after 1921-1922, was reportedly not studied unless pupils continued with history at GCSE level or above:

Like, the way the schools work, sort of ... you learn all this stuff you don't really need to know up to third year ... and then most people drop history ... you don't actually learn Irish history until GCSE years ... if you drop it you don't learn anything about the Troubles at all (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

We did about Cromwell, there was a wee bit of Irish history, but we didn't learn anything about the Troubles until GCSE in coursework (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

Even in instances where GCSE History specifically dealt with the Troubles, one young person believed that the approach which was adopted aimed to minimise the amount of discussion within class on what could potentially be 'controversial' or sensitive subjects:

My school, we would only touch on Irish history in coursework – we have four prewritten questions, the first two don't touch it, the first one is the development of Ballymacarrett as a region and the shipyards and the growth of Belfast as a city from the beginning, the second is about Thomas Andrews and the Titanic. The next two questions, the first one was touching on Bloody Sunday and why the troops were sent in 1969, and because it's just coursework they give you the sources and you can go read about it yourself. It wasn't really taught as such, just coursework – you were given the sources. One of them was just a source exercise, the other was an essay it was really 'Go take these, go ask people, do it yourself and come up with your own answer' – that was GCSE. And at A level you don't do Irish history at all (Male, Mixed community background, 17-18, Belfast).

This young person felt that the Troubles was covered as a topic on coursework only because it involved little or no discussion required in the classroom. The teacher would provide the pupils with sources of information and the pupils would conduct their own research, write their essays and be assessed. Such an approach leaves little scope for debate. Of course as the literature review identified, one of the key issues affecting teaching of the past in Northern Irish schools relates to the fear of 'offending' someone and the difficulties associated with facilitating a discussion on topics about which pupils are likely to have differing and sometimes 'emotional' opinions. A number of pupils attending integrated schools spoke at length that these differences encouraged debate in the classroom, which although heated at times, proved useful in exploring the attitudes of individuals from a different community background to themselves:

We would have debates in our history class between people who really disagree, it's mostly based on their family experience and what has happened to them. My best friend and me are like that he has a very, very different opinion than me. We would talk about it, sometimes we argue and fall out for a while (in school), but we make up again (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

However, another young person who attended the same school warned of the difficulties inherent in teaching about the past when there are different perspectives about events:

When we were doing English at GCSE a lot of people got into arguments about religious stuff, really heated, people started tearing each other apart. Some people took it too far (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

Despite this, in general young people were of the opinion that controversial and sensitive subjects should be addressed in the classroom. Indeed, the final question in the education and learning section of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate whether or not they agreed or disagreed with six statements in relation to the purposes of learning about history. Table 7 illustrates both the combined responses of the young people, and also the responses of young Protestants and young Catholics separately.

The overwhelming majority of young people (89%) agreed with the statement 'History helps you understand the views of others', while similarly more than three-quarters of young people (77%) agreed with the statement 'It is important to teach even topics that might embarrass people in order to learn the truth'.

Table 7: Statements Young People 'Agreed' with

Statement	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
History helps you understand views of others	89	91	92
It is important to teach topics that might embarrass people in order to learn the truth	75	77	77
Learning history makes people tolerant of others	66	67	70
Teaching sensitive issues creates bitterness	24	26	27
It is wrong to teach sensitive issues in history in case you offend people	17	13	23
History has no relevance to my life	17	18	18

A number of young people in the focus groups also made a pertinent point that by having a greater knowledge of history and therefore more knowledge of *'what they did to us'* can in fact increase a sense of anger towards the 'Other' community. While this was only the view of a small number of young people, it also tied in with the use of films and television as 'visual representations' of the past and a number of young Catholics who identified themselves as Nationalists reported that watching films such as Steve McQueen's 'Hunger' or Ken Loach's 'Wind that Shakes the Barley', made them feel *'anger'* towards the 'Brits' or the 'Prods'. The report will address the influence of films and television on young people's knowledge and understanding of historical events in greater detail later.

There are a number of interesting differences regarding young people's views on the purpose of studying history and whether or not 'controversial' issues should be taught in the classroom. Table 8 highlights the percentages of young people who agreed with the following statements and the type of school they attend or previously attended.⁷⁵ The table shows that young people at secondary schools were less likely to agree with a number of these statements, and were less inclined to believe it to be important to teach potentially 'controversial' topics, less likely to feel learning about history can increase levels of tolerance towards 'Others', and more wary generally of teaching issues which could potentially cause offence or create bitterness. However, it is important to note that only one grammar school was involved in the research, and half of the pupils who participated in the grammar school were studying history and therefore may perhaps be more inclined to be more 'positive' towards the outcomes of learning history, so these statistics should be read with this in mind.

Table 8: Statements Young People 'Agreed' with and Type of School Attended

Statement	Grammar (%)	Secondary (%)	Integrated (%)
History helps you understand the views of others	95	89	94
It is important to teach topics that might embarrass people in order to learn the truth	85	74	76
Learning history makes people tolerant of others	72	65	73
Teaching sensitive issues creates bitterness	14	31	21
It is wrong to teach sensitive issues in history in case you offend people	6	24	16
History has no relevance to my life	10	21	18

⁷⁵ These percentages are based on the 858 young people who answered the question, 242 of whom attended/had attended a Grammar school, 404 a Secondary school and 212 an Integrated school.

The statistics in Table 9 reveal that young Protestants at secondary school were more likely to believe that 'Teaching sensitive issues in history creates bitterness' than their counterparts in grammar or integrated schools (32% of young Protestants in secondary education believed this to be the case compared to 16% of young Protestants in grammar school and 14% of young Protestants in integrated schools).

Table 9: Statements Young People 'Agreed' with, Type of School Attended and Community Background

Statement	Grammar		Secondary		Integrated	
	P (%)	C (%)	P (%)	C (%)	P (%)	C (%)
History helps you understand the views of others'	94	92	85	88	93	91
It is important to teach topics that might embarrass people in order to learn the truth	84	80	70	73	71	78
Learning history makes people tolerant of others	70	69	60	64	66	74
Teaching sensitive issues creates bitterness	16	13	32	29	14	27
It is wrong to teach sensitive issues in history in case you offend people	4	10	17	29	14	19
History has no relevance to my life	11	9	20	21	16	19

Young Catholics at secondary schools were much more likely than their counterparts at grammar or integrated schools to feel that 'It is wrong to teach sensitive issues in history in case you offend people' - 29% of young Catholics at secondary schools agreed with this statement compared with 19% of young Catholics at integrated school and just 10% of young Catholics at grammar school.

The questionnaire also asked young people whether or not they had ever felt uncomfortable being taught about a variety of topics as displayed in Table 10. The overwhelming majority of young respondents (84%) stated that they felt comfortable being taught all the topics listed. However, young Protestants were slightly more likely to feel uncomfortable being taught Irish history than their Catholic counterparts (6% of young Protestants and 3% of young Catholics), and similarly young Catholics were slightly more likely to feel uncomfortable being taught British history (6% of young Catholics compared to 3% of young Protestants), but overall the numbers of young people expressing a discomfort in learning about historical events associated with the 'Other' community were very small.

Table 10: Are you uncomfortable being taught any of the various subjects?

Topics	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
I am comfortable with all of these topics	84	84	81
'Unionist' history	5	2	8
Incidents/events during the 'Troubles'	5	5	5
'Nationalist' history	4	7	3
Irish history	4	6	3
British history	4	3	6
Peace process	2	3	2

It is important to note however that findings from the focus groups were at odds with the quantitative data. While the statistics suggest that young people are 'fine' with being taught about a variety of historical events, in a number of focus groups it was clear that some young people were reluctant to learn or talk about topics which could be perceived as 'sensitive'. For some this was related to their personal experience of the Troubles, but for others part of the issue relates to the group dynamics within which the topic is being discussed. In groups which were dominated by several confident and talkative members of one community, there was a reluctance to speak out and put one's views forward by members of the 'Other' community:

There are quite a few kids in my class that you know would have an awkwardness talking about these issues you know, they wouldn't want to offend anyone with what they say (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

In relation to this (un)willingness to talk about past events, the questionnaire asked if an individual's community background affected how comfortable they were in discussing Northern Ireland's recent past. Respondents were most likely to report that they were comfortable discussing such issues with members of the same religion and/or community background as themselves, (46%), although 44% of pupils stated that they were comfortable discussing Northern Ireland's recent past with a mixed group of individuals regardless of community background.

As Table 11 suggests, young Protestants were slightly less likely than their Catholic counterparts to feel comfortable talking about the recent past with members of a different community background (7% of young Protestants felt comfortable doing so compared with 14% of young Catholics). Young Protestants were also slightly more inclined to prefer discussing the past with other Protestants than Catholics, however it should be noted that any differences between young Catholics and Protestants in relation to who they felt comfortable discussing Northern Ireland's past with were relatively small.

Table 11: Who do you feel comfortable with talking about Northern Ireland's recent past?

	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Members of the same religion/ community background as myself	46	54	49
A mixed group with members of both community backgrounds	44	41	44
Members of a different community background	10	7	14
I don't feel comfortable talking about controversial issues	7	6	8

In relation to the impact the type of school a young person attended had on their willingness to discuss these issues, secondary school students were more likely to prefer talking about these issues with members of the same community as themselves (60% compared to 40% of grammar school pupils and 35% among pupils at integrated school) while grammar and integrated school pupils were more likely to prefer to talk with a 'mixed' group (59% and 54% respectively compared to 32% secondary pupils).

It is also worth noting that younger participants, aged 12-14, were less likely to wish to talk about these issues in a 'mixed' group than their older counterparts (34% compared to 55% of 19+ year olds) and they were more likely to not feel comfortable talking about these topics (11% compared to 6.4% of 19+ year olds).⁷⁶ Males were also more likely to prefer talking with members of the same community background (54% compared to 42%), while females were more inclined to prefer holding discussions in a 'mixed' group (50% compared to 39%):⁷⁷

Just us four and a group of Protestants? I'd sort of be nervous. I'd be nervous 'cos they are a different religion than us and we are sitting talking about history it might set them ones off. I'd be nervous 'cos they would have different ways of putting it than us (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Clearly some young people have difficulties in talking about issues which occurred during the Troubles, and more than one young person approached the researchers after a focus group to suggest that they had not spoken freely as they felt their views were in the 'minority'. It is important to bear this in mind when considering how to address potentially difficult and divisive subjects within the school environment and beyond, particularly when the class or group is mixed, and the role of the teacher or youth worker in this process is crucial as we shall now proceed to analyse in further detail.

Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is crucial within the context of the debate about what young people learn in school and we explored to what extent young people viewed the teacher as a 'neutral chairperson' merely imparting information based on fact, as opposed to a facilitator of

⁷⁶ This analysis is based on those 924 young people who indicated their age and answered the question, of which, 98 were aged 12-14, 426 were 15-16, 260 were 17-18 and 140 were aged 19 years old and above.

⁷⁷ This analysis is based on those 929 young people who indicated their gender and also answered the question, of which 444 were male and 485 female.

discussion in the classroom with their own views and opinions on history and politics. In addition, to what extent is what a young person learns in school any different to something they may learn outside of school, such as in the home? Many young people were inclined to accept as 'the truth' the information they learnt about historical events in school:

School history is kind of neutral, it doesn't say much, like differing viewpoints (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

Indeed, a number of young people noted the approaches adopted by their own teachers in trying to 'manage' any debate in the classroom on controversial topics:

At the start of my history class my teacher said in relation to Northern Ireland, don't be bringing up your personal views and the IRA etc, we are trying to learn about both sides of the community (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

In a similar vein, a number of other young interviewees suggested that the teacher in school attempted to present an array of differing perspectives on a variety of historical events in Northern Ireland:

I remember when I was at school our teacher always did try to explain their side as well as our side although I would say it depends on the teacher. There was another teacher in our school and he would have been very republican, the way he explained things and all (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

It should be noted however that there were diverging opinions amongst young people as to the perceived 'neutrality' of their teacher in terms of teaching history from a predominantly Unionist or Nationalist perspective. This appeared to particularly be the case for 'older' young people who attended secondary schools in particular (and in some cases grammar schools):

If you go to a school that is one side they always make the other side out to be bad – our history teacher was brutal for doing that, he was really bad (Female, Catholic, 19+, Enniskillen).

It was just one side's understanding – like we were taught all the events, I did GCSE History, but we were taught our side of it – and things that happened, it was because of the English and they had done all this stuff in Ireland and if they left then Ireland would be peaceful. Then when you leave school you realise there's more to it than that – when you have friends and stuff. I went to a Catholic school, in a really, really rough part of Fermanagh, and everyone just thought, the way we were taught in school not to like Protestants, but I wasn't brought up that way. But then I went to that school and it completely changed, but then when I came to Tech there was only me and one other Catholic person on my course so I just had to get along with them. Then I realised that all the stuff we had been taught had just been wrong like (Female, Catholic, 19+, Enniskillen).

We were only ever taught about one side – it was always made out that the other side were bad and that our side did nothing wrong, and when we left school and we met other people we just realised that it was a big load of crap (Female, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

While this was certainly the view of some young people in several locations, equally, there were those young people who felt that the knowledge they had learnt from their history teacher had helped to increase their understanding of others and reduce their own personal prejudice:

If I didn't know what my teacher told me I would have said the Prods and the Brits are all scum and did this and that (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

This presentation of a multitude of perspectives was favoured by many young people as the most appropriate way to learn about the past:

Schools need to teach both sides instead of just being one-sided because if you come out of school and be very one-sided you get a completely different outlook (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Dungannon).

A number of young people reported how attending an integrated school had impacted upon their understandings of others given the broad base of perspectives which were often discussed:

I went to an integrated school and in RE and History, you are taught about worldwide stuff, Irish history and current affairs in Iraq, there is a tendency to teach both sides (Female, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

However, another young interviewee noted that their cousins had attended an integrated school, yet this made little difference to their attitudes to individuals from a different community background, indeed, any influence was believed to have been a negative one. The young person was sceptical about the extent to which integrated education was a 'panacea' for dealing with sectarianism:

One of my cousins went to an integrated school and left more bitter than before, all three cousins left more prejudiced and bigoted than when they went in (Male, Mixed community background, 17-18, Belfast).

It also became clear that while some teachers were attempting to adopt the 'neutral chairperson' strategy with varying degrees of success, other teachers approached the teaching of history as a facilitator of discussion, and as such were open about their personal stories:

My teacher was a Protestant and he shared his personal stories of what happened to his family and all which made it interesting for us like (Male, Catholic, 17-18, Lurgan).

Aside from views about the teacher's ability to teach in a 'neutral' fashion or to facilitate debate, for some young people the significance was also in how the subject was taught in school, with the traditional book-based approach contrasted with more innovative methods, which some young people appeared to find more interesting:

If it was more relaxed (in school), I remember in fourth year we talked more and used pictures to associate with each community which was good – rather than this is what happened on that date, end of (Female, Mixed Community background, 17-18, Belfast).

In general, when compared to parents (whom we shall discuss in detail in section 11), the differences in learning from teachers and parents were believed to be that parents would be more inclined to impart views which were based upon their own experience in the past which are more likely to be biased than those of a teacher:

... in school you can get both sides of the story, Unionist, Nationalist, but with a relative it's their opinion (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

Your teacher will tell you what happened. If your parents are Protestants then they will tell you what they believe – like a biased thing (Female, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast).

Summary

Young people believe that it is important to study history in Northern Ireland and the research found that in general young people tended to view history in school in a positive light, and this was particularly the case for those young people who studied the subject for longer. The three main reasons cited for dropping history as a subject in school were because the subject was either 'boring', it did not fit in with the young person's career path, or they enjoyed the subject but could not continue to study it as it clashed with another subject on the school timetable.

Young people tended to view history and the Troubles as different in the sense that history was in the 'distant past' and the Troubles for some young people, were 'ongoing'. Studying the Troubles was also perceived to be more exciting than more 'boring' and 'drier' earlier periods in history. It also became apparent that unless one studied history to GCSE level, it was unlikely that the young person would learn much about the Troubles in school.

Young people believed that the best approach would be to teach a mixture of world history and history directly relating to Northern Ireland. However, young Protestants were more likely to want to study 'British' history than their Catholic counterparts (44% compared to 20%), while young Catholics were more inclined to want to study 'Irish' history than Protestants (59% compared to 28%).

When asked if learning about history and the past can help us to understand others, 89% of young people agreed that history could promote greater levels of understanding of others while 66% of all young people believed that a greater understanding of history could promote greater levels of tolerance towards others. However, young Protestants were slightly more likely to feel uncomfortable learning about 'Irish' and 'Nationalist' history, while young Catholics were more likely to feel uncomfortable learning about 'British' and 'Unionist' history, although the numbers of young people who felt uncomfortable learning about the history of the 'Other' were very small and in general young people appeared to be open to learning about a variety of topics. Young Protestants were also slightly less likely than young Catholics to feel comfortable talking about the recent past with members of the 'Other' community, while young people at secondary schools were also more inclined to prefer talking about these issues with members of the same community as themselves.

The role of the teacher is crucial in this respect, with some young people believing the history they learn in school to be more 'neutral' than that which they learn at home, although young people differed as to their views on what extent their teacher was a 'neutral chairperson' or rather a facilitator of discussion.

11. Other sources of knowledge about the past in school

Young people were asked to indicate other ways in school in which they had learnt about Irish/Northern Irish history apart from in school history classes. The most referred to way in which respondents had learnt about Irish/Northern Irish history was through school trips/museum visits, (43%) followed by RE classes (30%) and English Language or Irish Language class (28%). Table 12 below highlights the responses of the young people who completed the questionnaire.

Table 12: What other ways have you learnt about Irish/Northern Irish History?

Subject	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
School trips/museums	43	43	47
RE	30	27	34
English/Irish language	28	25	32
Local and Global Citizenship	21	26	18
Literature	19	19	18
Drama/Arts	14	10	19
Other ⁷⁸	11	6	7

The statistics do not indicate any major difference in relation to the ways and means in which young Catholics and Protestants learn about Irish/Northern Irish history, however, it would appear that young Catholics are more likely to learn about history from drama and the arts⁷⁹ than young Protestants while young Protestants appear more likely to learn about history through Local and Global Citizenship classes. Young Catholics were also more likely to learn about history through RE than young Protestants (34% compared to 27%) as well as through English or Irish Language classes (32% compared to 25%).

Evidence from the focus groups suggested that school trips were believed to be valuable in increasing levels of knowledge because they combined a practical link between what a young person may have read about in class with them actually being capable of relating to an event in a more personal sense. One pupil who had studied the Easter Rising in school stated that a trip to Kilmainham gaol had proved '*really useful*' and increased her understanding of the impact of the executions of the leaders of the Rising:

The leaders of the IRB were executed at Kilmainham Gaol – They have the exact spot marked where James Connolly was strapped to a chair and shot dead, it was really powerful just to see it nearly one hundred years on (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

Our school is going to Flanders this year. I want to learn more about the UVF (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).

⁷⁸ Listed in 'Other' were sources such as 'Politics', 'Sociology' and 'Family'.

⁷⁹ Indeed, of those young people who stated that they had learnt about the past through drama and the arts, 66% were young Catholics and 33% young Protestants.

This approach was at times contrasted with a purely classroom based approach which, it was perceived by some young people, was less effective in terms of increasing one's knowledge and understanding of the past:

If you sit and read out of a textbook it's not really interesting. If they just go on and on but if they let you, like take you on a trip or something or like activities and things like that there, make it more interesting (Male, Catholic, 17-18, Dungannon).

I'd rather learn from the cinema or museums than read about it. There's also school trips; we went to the Tower museum, I was there three weeks ago (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Visits to the Ulster Museum in Belfast and the Tower Museum in Derry Londonderry were viewed as important sources of information, although one young person was critical of the nature of the new Troubles display at the Ulster Museum for being 'too neutral':

They have that worry about upsetting people – in the Ulster museum they tried too hard to be impartial with their Troubles museum and people would like it better to get both sides of the argument instead of the bland statements. I think the history people would enjoy more finding out about 'real' people, stories and stuff (Male, Mixed community background, 17-18, Belfast).

Religious education was cited as the second most important way to learn about the past in school in questionnaire responses, but in the focus groups there was little mention made of RE playing such a prominent role. That said, during the course of the research, a number of schools and organisations were involved in programmes which appeared to be good practice in terms of teaching young people about the past through trips and discussion with individuals who experienced the Troubles to hear their 'side' of the story.

One such approach involved the Chaplaincy at an integrated school in Belfast who worked in partnership with YouthLink between September 2009 and April 2010 to devise a programme which sought to bring together young people with individuals with personal stories relating to the Troubles. Such a story telling approach appealed to academic and non-academic pupils alike, and also involved young people who no longer studied history in school and thus reached a broader spectrum of young people than would have been the case had the programme been restricted to history students. According to a number of participants the programme was invaluable in hearing the perspectives of others and increasing one's understanding of the 'many truths' in relation to the Troubles in Northern Ireland:

Like the residential we were on you heard (name of individual) and (name of individual) stories and that was really powerful, it was personal. Like the amount of times people have told me the politics behind it just dating back and it's pretty boring, but that was interesting. If it's personal you feel the need to listen because this person has gone through it. Because they were ex-prisoners, I just thought before they were just all hoods, but it was understanding where they came from. I might not agree with it but you couldn't have got that from reading a book or being told by anyone else (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

There was a common desire expressed by many young people to hear the stories of other young people from a different community background, and ask them why they participated in certain events and to explore what was important to them culturally and politically:

I want to hear their views on what we have been talking about, like what they think about their history the same way we were talking about ours (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).

Can I ask you? Were you brought up to think the same way of us? You know the way our families tell us about Protestants, would Protestants tell their kids similar things about Catholics? (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

Aye, and then they can tell us about theirs. We'd learn more. We'd find it interesting to learn more about what they are doing. I would like to know 'cos I don't know that much about the other side (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

Despite the lack of discussion of the role of RE in the focus groups, the role played by English Literature classes in contributing to a knowledge of Irish history was frequently referred to. Many young people talked about books they had read which dealt with issues specifically relating to Northern Ireland/Ireland on issues such as the Famine or contemporary issues relating to sectarianism and the Troubles:

I read a book, 'Under the Hawthorne Tree' about the Famine. In English too, we read a book, the 'Twelfth Day of July,'⁸⁰ I'm on the third book. It was about the Troubles in Ireland and a Catholic and Protestant falling in love (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

Poetry was also a means through which several young people contended that they had increased their knowledge of Irish history. One interviewee commented on the impact of the study of Anglo-Irish literature and texts on his own learning, in addition to the study of Northern Irish poets Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley:

We did Anglo-Irish literature, stuff written in English by Irish people, we did a lot of Heaney poetry and a module on war poetry, the Troubles and stuff like that. We did Anglo-Irish texts as well, and conflict was a big theme through them. I learnt a lot, probably more than I learnt from history (Male, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

Perhaps unsurprisingly drama and art were also a means through which interpretations of the past were displayed and (re) interpreted:

I do GCSE Drama and there is a component where you can make a play up on whatever you want and our class did Bloody Sunday (Male, Mixed community background, 17-18, Belfast).

In Art at GCSE, one of your projects at the end of it you can choose your own, whatever, you can paint whatever, I looked back on different artists who had painted murals in Irish history (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

Involvement in drama and arts was not restricted to school, and a small number of young people were involved in the arts outside of the school environment. However, there appeared to be a contrast in the focus of the drama in and outside school, with those young people who studied drama in school believing it to be 'more balanced' in terms of representing the past than those plays staged by outside agencies based within particular communities:

Before school, I just picked things up. I was in a play on that kind of stuff and through my family as well. The play was about the Troubles kind of, young people that died fighting as part of the Fianna Éireann⁸¹ here, it was a play round here in the community. But I am actually learning loads at the minute 'cos I am in another play which is on the super-grass trials (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

⁸⁰ The first in a trilogy of books by Joan Lingard. The second was entitled 'Across the Barricades', and the final book, 'Kevin and Sadie – the story continues'.

⁸¹ The youth wing of the IRA founded by Countess Marckievicz and Bulmer Hobson in 1909.

Citizenship and Learning for Life and Work classes were also cited as ways in which the related themes of diversity and rights and responsibilities were taught with the Troubles being used as a comparative tool to measure progress against these issues compared with thirty or forty years ago. Although a relatively new topic on the curriculum, Citizenship classes were viewed as useful in allowing young people to relate historical events with contemporary issues with an approach primarily focused on discussion and debate rather than text-based which differentiates it somewhat from the more academic base of school history or indeed English:

In Citizenship we learn about the Troubles and all, looking at different cultures and all. It's ten times more fun, the teacher tells you stories and all and you talk (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

Sometimes you do about the hunger strikes in Citizenship, but not all the time (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Summary

Outside of history classes, school trips were the most likely way in which young people learnt about Irish/Northern Irish history (43% of all young people did so through this method). The other more popular ways to learn about history was through RE, English or Irish Language classes (particularly through studying books on the Troubles or prose by local poets), Citizenship classes, Drama and Art. Young Catholics were more inclined to learn about history from drama and the arts and RE than were young Protestants although young Protestants were more likely to learn about history and past events in Local and Global Citizenship classes.

12. Influences on Perceptions

Our focus thus far has been on the knowledge of history and the understanding of the past that young people acquire in school. However, school is not the only influence on a young person's understanding of the past and the research also considered other influences on young people's understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland. Young people were asked to identify the most important influences on their knowledge and understanding of the past in Northern Ireland. The top three influences were parents (52%), school (47%) and relatives (25%). These findings are slightly different from those of Barton et al. (2003) who found school history classes to be the most important influence on young people's knowledge and understanding of the past, and this development will be elaborated upon later.

Parents were identified as an important influence by 54% of young Protestants and 55% of young Catholics. Young Protestants were more inclined to suggest that school was an important source of information (53% of young Protestants compared with 44% of young Catholics). Only 2% of young Protestants and 2% of young Catholics believed that a youth-worker was one of the two most important influences on their knowledge (Table 13).

Table 13: Important influences on knowledge/understanding of the history of Northern Ireland

Source	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholics (%)
Parents	52	54	55
School/college/university	47	53	44
Relatives	25	24	28
Television/film/cinema	24	22	25
Friends ⁸²	18	18	19
Newspapers	13	12	13
Internet	10	10	11
Books	8	7	9
Museums	8	5	9
Clubs/Associations	7	7	6
Youth worker	2	2	2

Cross-tabulations highlighted that males are more likely to learn about the past from friends, the internet and membership of clubs/associations, such as bands (9% of males compared to 5% of females), while young females were more likely to learn about the past in school (52% of females compared to 44% of males). Of the few individuals who used online forums to discuss history or political issues relating to Northern Ireland, 53% were male.

⁸² 19-29 year olds (12%) were less likely than younger age groups to refer to friends as an important influence while the statistics were almost identical for friends among young Catholics and Protestants (19% compared to 18%).

Parents and Family

The research indicates that parents and the wider family circle play a crucial role in imparting information upon which young people develop their views about Northern Ireland's past. During the course of the focus groups the role of parents and family was continually acknowledged:

I grew up in (name of area) and that's how I knew everything through my parents and the Troubles and all. I wouldn't know anything from school like, school never taught me anything about history. All these English people and fighting that's all I knew (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

There were two main ways in which young people discussed the past with their parents, firstly by asking questions related to specific events, their interest in which may have been triggered by something they learnt in school or something they had seen on television. Second, parents would talk about their own experience and 'bring it up' with their children. In relation to the former, recent events involving the CIRA, RIRA and Óglaigh na hÉireann also led some young people to ask their parents about the Troubles:⁸³

Well if an event like the Newry bomb there happened I'd ask them stuff (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

But it seems to be like now, I would ask more about it, like the stuff that's been happening recently with the IRA starting up again I have asked about what happened (Female, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

With regard to parents actively 'bringing it up' with young people, these discussions were often based around family experience of particular events during the Troubles:

Aye the UWC strike, my dad and uncle were in it, my dad told me about it (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).

Parents' and family members' interest in talking about the past varied, from those parents with little or no interest in the matter to those individuals who were very interested in sharing their stories with their children:

My parents never talk about it, but I am interested in it, the history, although I find a bit of it boring, the bits when it comes to the politicians, I like hearing people's stories more (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

Once you get my father started he would never stop (laughs). *If you ask him one question it might take him half an hour to answer and to get to the actual point* (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Dungannon).

Several young people mentioned that their parents' interest in the subject was influenced by the fact that some of their family members had been killed or injured during the Troubles:

My uncle was killed by the IRA (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

⁸³ All of these organisations are commonly referred to as 'dissident' republican groups. CIRA refers to the Continuity IRA which was established in 1986 over disagreement amongst some republicans about ending the policy of abstentionism to the Dail and Leinster House. The Real IRA (RIRA) was established in the late 1990s again in disputes over the strategy of the mainstream republican movement and its involvement in the peace process. Óglaigh na hÉireann are a small organisation believed to be an off-shoot of the CIRA.

My granny would talk about it with me, about what they done to us and all and my granddad was killed, he was in the UVF (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).

For some young people male relatives were more inclined to discuss the past with them than their female relatives:

Like the men of the family. My mum or aunts wouldn't talk about it, but my dad and my uncles would talk about it more (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Larne).

My dad and my mummy and all, because they were so involved with it won't talk about it because they think I am going to get involved with it and all. So they just try and avoid it and all as much as possible. But my uncles and my cousins and all, they are still involved with it so they would try and talk to me about it. I don't really care. But they would talk to me about it (Male, Catholic, 19+, Lurgan).

For some young people the nature of the discussions with their parents and family members were rather innocuous and related to 'how bad it was' during the Troubles compared to the present day in terms of the impact of the conflict on their daily lives:

I don't really talk about it with my parents, but they would say once in a while 'Oh the Troubles, we were afraid to go out in case you got shot down the street' (Male, Catholic, 19+, Lurgan).

Boring, you hear your parents going on about it 'Back in my day I remember I was in a bus shelter and a bomb went off'. Then your grandparents as well and I have an uncle works in Sinn Féin as well and he goes on about it (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

This personal experience and aspect of 'story-telling' by parents and relatives was contrasted by more than one young person with the approach adopted in school to teaching about the past:

My grandparents from the Unionist side take offence that I don't 'pick' one side, they try and thrust it on me almost like they want me to take their viewpoint but I think all sides can be wrong and at the end of the day I'm entitled to my own opinion. I keep school and family history separate – school history is really good for the base facts but if you want something on a more personal level, that my mum and dad experienced like bomb scares, getting searched going to the shops, you would ask your parents (Male, Mixed community background, 17-18, Belfast).

It's different (learning from school and parents), my parents don't really talk about it but my cousins are from a very strong Protestant background and every time they come over they always talk about history actually and they say stuff that I know is wrong and it's really biased and it's not true. Sometimes I tell them it's wrong but most times I just keep my mouth shut for peace (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

For some young people however, the difference between learning about the past in school or from parents and family was linked to the fact that one could not learn the 'full story' from school, this could only be heard by listening to the personal stories of parents and family members who had 'lived through' the Troubles:

It's different from what you learn in school – if you have a family member that's actually been in it and experienced it you can learn more from them than you can in school (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

School doesn't tell you the full story – they are not allowed to say 'Them Brits used to attack us'; they have to show both (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

While for some young people the discussions with their parents involved comparing the Troubles to the present day, others believed that their parents or family members talked about the past in a more active attempt to influence their views and opinions:

My parents didn't really talk about it. My granda, he was a real republican and he worked in Sinn Féin and all before he died. He would have told me a lot about it from that side and nothing from the other side, and saying 'The other ones are evil'; he taught me all Protestants are evil, so I didn't really know any better so I sort of went along with it. He was the only person I ever knew to hang a flag outside the house. He would teach me all this, then I went to secondary school and was taught about both sides, and one wasn't better than the other - and coming here sort of changed my perspective on stuff – before I came here I was very narrow minded I didn't talk to Protestants that much, but now some of them are my best friends (Male, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

Parents can be a bit biased – I know definitely from my dad like he can really be against one side at times. In school they try and give you both opinions (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

Some young people said that their parents never really discussed anything to do with Irish history or the Troubles at all, and several believed that their parents deliberately did not talk about the past as they did not want to 'burden' them with their own issues:

My family, like parents wouldn't talk about it, like 'cos the stuff that happened when they grew up and all ... and they don't want me getting involved and stuff so they are saying things like 'you shouldn't be doing this 'cos it has happened to so and so' but then other than that they won't talk about it (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

One young person felt that while her own father was aware of his own views, he wanted his daughter to mix with young people from the 'Other' community background:

My daddy hates Protestants and he would find it hard to move on, but he likes the fact that I am in the (name of cross-community group) and that I mix with Protestants. He doesn't like them but I think he thinks it's good that I am listening to more than one side of the story and making my own opinions (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

A number of other young people noted that discussions with their parents or wider family were mainly around issues to do with safety, for example, family members may tell the young person to avoid a particular area because they felt it was not safe for them and the area in question was often an area associated with the 'Other' community:

My auntie told me not to go near (name of area) in case you got jumped (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

Many young people were very much aware that the views and opinions of their parents and family were grounded in their own experience and were potentially therefore reflecting either a predominantly 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' narrative. This is somewhat contrary to Wertsch's (2002) findings, which would suggest that young people may uncritically accept narratives from their parents and family with little awareness or critical analysis of their potential to be 'biased' or selective:

All the bitterness that teenagers have is all due to family ... because you are brought up in a certain way ... and then you socialise with friends who are also brought up that way (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

Or you get some kids whose parents would be very biased if they don't hear what other people think and even if they are not talking about it it's always going to be there – that sectarian view – and if you don't talk about it you can't challenge it. You need to hear other views and not just base your opinion on 'This is what my parents told me' (Female, Mixed Community background, 17-18, Belfast).

They (parents and family) are holding a grudge and passing it on – we need to hear two sides of the story and make our own views and opinion on it (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

In this sense the role of parents and the wider family was believed to be very influential in influencing what many young people believed about past events:

... it depends what your parents think, 'cos generally if you have grown up with your parents telling you their beliefs you are going to believe that (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

Your family can talk about their experience but it does affect your opinion on it, 'cos if your family is like you can't go with a Protestant, you grow up believing that Protestants don't belong in this country (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

While young people listed their parents and relatives as two of the most important three sources of information about the past, they were also most likely to state that they discussed politics and current events with their family (50%), followed by their friends in school (35%) and more than one-quarter of respondents (28%) said they discussed these issues with teachers/youth workers. Just over one-quarter of young people (26%) stated they did not discuss these issues as they had no interest in them (Table 14).

Table 14: With whom do you discuss politics/current events with?

Who discuss with?	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Family	50	47	54
Friends in school	35	40	32
Teachers/Youth workers	28	29	28
Friends outside school	27	33	23
Do not discuss issues	26	26	27
On-line forums	8	7	2
Neighbours where I live	3	4	3

In terms of gender, males were slightly more likely to discuss issues with friends both in school and outside school (40% of males and 32% of females talked to friends in school, while 33% of males compared to 23% of females talked to friends outside school). Young females were more likely to talk about these issues with their family (54% compared to 47%) while almost one quarter of both males and females did not discuss politics or current events because they had no interest in the subject.

When analysed by community background there was little variation between young Catholics and Protestants other than the fact that young Protestants were slightly more inclined to discuss issues with their family (55% of young Protestants compared to 47% of young Catholics) while young Catholics were more likely to say they did not discuss these issues at all (29% compared to 23%).⁸⁴

In relation to the age of respondents it became apparent that young people aged 19 and above were more likely to discuss these issues with their family.⁸⁵ Young people between the ages of 12-14 were also almost three times as likely not to discuss any of these issues compared to those respondents aged 19 and older (32% compared to 12%).⁸⁶

Films and Television

While we have previously examined the role of school in teaching young people about the past and again in this section we have highlighted some of the perceived differences between learning about the past from family and from school, other sources through which young people learnt about past events were films and television. During the focus groups a significant number of young people discussed the impact that films about the Troubles had on their knowledge of events, and some of the most referenced films in particular included 'Mickeybo and Me', 'Hunger', 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley', 'Fifty Dead Men Walking', 'Michael Collins', 'In the Name of the Father' and 'Five Minutes of Heaven'. Films were often a way for young people to find out some information about a historical event or individuals involved in the Troubles, after which they would subsequently go through other channels to 'find out more' about them:

And the one about the IRA informer who went to Canada, the recent one 'Fifty Dead Men Walking'. I watched that and then went on the internet to find out about the guy (Male, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

In a number of cases young people asserted that their only source of knowledge about particular events came from television and film. Discussing the impact of the Daniel Day Lewis film 'In the Name of the Father' one young person commented:

That was about the Catholics who were wrongly convicted of blowing up, was it in Birmingham or London, the Guildford Six? I only know that 'cos I watched the film (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Ballycastle).

There were a number of differing views of the impact a film could have on a young person, and at times community background appeared to impact upon the attitudes towards a film. For example a number of young Protestants felt that at times films could '*not be believed*' due to their '*propaganda value*':

'Hunger' is a load of propaganda for them ones, 'Fifty Dead Men' is about battalions in the IRA and 'The Boxer' is about an ex-IRA member (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast).

⁸⁴ This analysis is based on those 845 young people who were either from a Protestant or Catholic community background and who answered the question, of which, 403 were young Protestants and 442 were young Catholics.

⁸⁵ 72% compared to 41% of 12-14 year olds, 45% of 15-16 year olds and 52% of 17-18 year olds.

⁸⁶ This analysis is based on the 830 young people who indicated their age and also answered the question, of which 99 were 12-14, 427 were 15-16, 263 were 17-18 and 141 were 19 years old and above.

They never tell the full truth, like the stuff you find on the internet is ... always different ... they make it more dramatic or something for the movie itself. When I watched 'Hunger' I knew kind of what happened and stuff but actually seeing it kind of brought it up that it was worse than you actually think it was and that it probably was ... the way they made it in the movie, it was like, when they were cutting their hair and that, it was like blood everywhere ... and you are thinking like, did that actually happen? (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Lurgan).

Again, the actions of individuals in a movie could be interpreted very differently depending on the community background of the viewer:

'Hunger'; it's just about the Maze prison and the IRA men in the Maze – but the shit on the walls, they were dirty people like doing that (Male, Protestant, 17-18, Larne).

'Hunger'; they were so proud about Ireland they didn't want to give up and all – like the 'Wind that Shakes the Barley' – it just made you mad like, the things they were showing you that they had done (Female, Catholic, 19+, Omagh).

Other young people however felt that a film could indeed give them information about the 'Other' side that they had not previously been aware of:

I think it was a disgrace to treat people like that ... it made me feel like, because I am a Protestant, really angry, how people could do that (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Dungannon).

When I watched that film ('Hunger'), I felt the other way, I said ... they were kind of right in what they did say because they were not prisoners of war, so I kind of saw it from the other side instead of my own (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Dungannon).

One Protestant female recalled watching 'Hunger' with her Catholic boyfriend:

My boyfriend is a Catholic and I watched it with him and his aunt I think it was, and I didn't really understand it cause I had never really heard the story in detail so I just asked them a lot of questions and stuff about it ... and they were not really biased about it and kind of talked from an overall point of view and it was all really matter of fact like (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Dungannon).

Some young people believed that films were a useful way in which to explore how the Troubles impacted on people from different backgrounds, and one person believed that Steve McQueen's 'Hunger' was particularly effective as it gave him some insight of what it was like to be a police officer at the time of the Hunger Strikes:

Bobby Sands goes into jail and gets beat and this Protestant cop, he totally annihilates him every day, but it shows his end, he has to live with every day checking under his car etc (Male, Catholic, 19+, Lurgan).

For other young people, and particularly for young Catholics watching the films, such as 'Hunger' and the 'Wind that Shakes the Barley', had the potential to make them angry at the treatment of some of the film's characters at the hands of the 'Brits' or the 'Prods':

It made me feel wile bitter like, aye, really bad tempered when you watch it (Female, Catholic, 19+, Omagh).

... my mate was saying the other day that she watched 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley' and she started getting a wee bit angry because they kept calling them 'Fenians' and then she was like they're calling me 'Fenian' and you know getting really angry by watching it (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

Murals as Visual Reminders of the Past

Murals were also cited as a source of information and 'visual recordings' of history, although young people tended to have an ambivalent attitude towards murals. For some the murals were '*always there*' and while many young people lived in areas with several murals, they dismissed their impact in terms of sources of information about the past – they did not notice them because they were so used to them:

It's actually weird 'cos I am kind of used to it now. There's one down the street from me, it's unpleasant, it's very ugly, but I don't think about it that much. When I do think about it I know I don't like it. If it's someone that's died or something, or a football player it's ok. That's better than someone in a balaclava (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

However, other young people cited murals as a source of historical information in which they can learn about the past, and particularly events which happened in their local area. In this sense the murals provided a source of information linked to territory and locality:

I find them interesting but because you see the past and what way it was back then. It has mostly changed now but I like to see how it was back then and how it has changed now (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

For example, in Derry Londonderry murals depicting the events of Bloody Sunday were believed to convey information about that event which had an impact on the city itself, in other areas murals were painted in dedication to 'fallen volunteers' from the local area:

Up here the murals tell you what happened on Bloody Sunday, it lets you know the history and all. There's one for Marty McCann I think too. They are good like, the one there of a coffin shape with all the names on it, class (Male Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

It's tells you history, aye, what happened and what it was like. Aye there's the mural with some boy with a gas mask on – then there's one about a school girl, I don't get that one, what's that about? (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

For some young people, this reinforced the 'us and them' mentality because the '*murals only remember our ones, not theirs*'. More specifically the murals were at times the primary source of information for young people about particular events or individuals involved in the Troubles:

Young Person One *There's all signs and posters everywhere round here about that. What do you call the boy that died on the murals?* (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person Two *Something Devine?* (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person One *Mickey Devine, that's the one! It's part of history and the murals are good to learn from* (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

The sense of locality was at times supplemented by the role of murals in 'remembering' family members of some young people interviewed during the course of the research:

I would support them, I come from a really big republican background and most of my family were affected by the Troubles, like in jail, some were shot, some of the murals will have the names of some of my family members (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

My granda's name is on the mural (Female, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast)

The murals (along with flags etc) were also an indicator for many young people that they were either in a 'safe' or an 'unsafe' area depending on their community background:

It's like if we go into (name of area), if we go into a Protestant area and we see all those murals you're just you're almost it's like a warning to you, you know you're so scared and its probably the same for, like Protestants seeing Catholic murals like, it's scary and then like (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Ballycastle).

It was interesting to note that as markers of difference the murals tended to be referred to in 'Protestant-Catholic' terms, and murals were felt by some of the young respondents to demarcate territory into 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' areas:

I don't think they are particularly a good idea because they can intimidate a lot of people, if I was bringing people where I live which is quite mixed I have to take them through some pretty graphic murals to get there and sometimes that can even intimidate me, and some of my friends it would definitely intimidate. They are a symbol of 'If you are this religion you are maybe not wanted here' - this is a very enclosed space if you are not from here, stay away (Male, Mixed community background, 17-18, Belfast).

Some young people appeared to unquestioningly accept the 'stories' depicted on murals, while others actively challenged the messages and even on occasion pointed to their inaccuracy to suggest that they may not be overly reliable as sources of historical information (for example, several grammatical errors on the 'Freedom Corner' murals on the Newtownards Road, or occasions when dates were factually incorrect).

One interesting project designed by the Nerve Centre in Derry Londonderry, involves workshops with young people and uses slides of murals to ask the young people their opinion on the mural and to explore understandings of the message being conveyed and whether or not the protagonist depicted is a 'hero' or a 'villain'. Such programmes are useful in at least encouraging young people to consider that the information on murals is based on a positioned narrative and presents a selective reading of events from the past.

The Internet

Although only 10% of young people stated that the internet was one of the most important influences on their knowledge and understanding of the past, it was consistently referred to as a means through which young people could carry out their own research, and in particular, where they could find more information about an event or a historical figure they had heard about elsewhere. The fact that young people could also carry out their own research, and at a time of their own choosing, was also felt by one young interviewee to be advantageous over talking about the past with his parents:

It's better using the internet, it's more fun than listening to your parents you don't have to hear them yap at you – they keep going on and on, you ask one wee thing and then my dad starts going on about when and where it happened and all. The best thing about a computer is you can turn it off when you don't want to hear about it! (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

Young people were asked to indicate which specific internet sites they used to research historical events. Interestingly, school online resources were only used by 11% of young respondents. Indeed, the most popular sites proved to be search engines such as Google and Yahoo (64% of respondents referred to these sites), while Wikipedia also proved to be a useful source of information as 53% of young respondents used Wikipedia as a means to learn about the past. Table 15 indicates the primary internet sources young people would use to research historical events.

Table 15: Sites used to research historical events

Site	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
Google/Yahoo	64	67	66
Wikipedia	53	60	49
BBC/News sites	32	35	30
School resources online	11	9	13
CAIN	4	4	4

Further analysis by gender highlighted that females were more inclined to use Google/Yahoo search engines (57% of young people who did so were female and 43% male). It was also evident that young people would rather simply 'Google' an event rather than use sites such as CAIN, which are specifically designed as historical resources. Wikipedia was also felt to be useful as the website provides links to other sources which the young people can go to and read more on in relation to their specific topic.⁸⁷

The internet - I'd probably go to Wikipedia it's probably more reliable than Google 'cos if you go to Google you can get anybody's side. Wikipedia gives you links to other pages so it's not just one point of view (Female, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

One perhaps surprising aspect of the research was that internet forums and chat-rooms did not seem to be used to any great extent by young people to learn about, or at least talk about the past. On occasion, a number of young people discussed using YouTube to find videos relating to the Troubles, in particular relating to 'petrol bombs and all', and at times young people reported partaking in some sectarian 'banter' in the comments section of You Tube:

YouTube, that's where you can see riots and stuff – it brings up videos if you type in petrol bomb or something (Male, Protestant, 17-18, Larne).

At the same time, the Xbox Live service for the Xbox 360 was also an arena in which some young people discussed becoming involved in sectarian 'banter' with other young people

⁸⁷ Other online ways in which to learn about the past included Wapedia and Ask Jeeves.

from a different community background, as they could at times 'tell' another young person's community background by their username.⁸⁸

While many young people would use the internet to search for information on historical events, there were differing attitudes as to the reliability of the information available online on particular websites, although in general most young people considered sites such as Wikipedia to be a relatively reliable resource. However young people were unlikely to rely on internet research alone to learn about the past, rather the internet tended to be used to support what the young person had learnt from elsewhere.

Summary

The research illustrates that according to young people themselves, the three most important sources of information on their knowledge of (Northern) Irish history and the past are parents (52%) school (47%) and relatives (25%). Young people suggested that their parents often spoke to them about their own experiences of the Troubles in particular, either to relate what it was like to live in the 'bad old days', or alternatively some young people believed that their parents attempted to influence their views about the 'Other' community in a negative manner. As such young people were more likely to believe that they learnt about the Troubles from their parents, and about history more generally in school.

Many young people were however very aware of the potential of their parents' views and experiences to be 'biased', or at least more grounded within the perspective of one community background or another. However, other young people noted that their parents deliberately did not talk to them about the past as they did not want to burden them with their 'own issues'. Indeed, while 50% of young people discussed the past with their family in general, 26% of young people said that they did not discuss the past at all with anyone.

Films were another way in which young people could learn about the past and people referred to films such as 'Mickeybo and Me', 'Hunger', 'Five Minutes of Heaven' and 'Fifty Dead Men Walking'. While for some young people such films were a useful means of learning about the past, others were reluctant to believe what they saw on television. Community background impacted upon this view, with a number of young Protestants tending to view films about Northern Ireland with more scepticism than young Catholics as they perceived some films to have a 'Nationalist bias', while a small number of young Catholics reported feeling 'angry' after watching a film which they believed highlighted injustices against 'their' community. In some ways this ties in with Hanratty and Taggart's (2004) findings which suggested that young people tended to see poems reflecting their 'own' side as more neutral than those depicting the 'Other' which they tended to believe were more biased.

Young people also used the internet to supplement their learning from other sources, with the most popular website being the Google/Yahoo search engines, which 64% of young people suggested they had used at one stage or another to conduct their own research about historical events in Northern Ireland.

⁸⁸ This particularly appeared to be the case with games such as FIFA or Call of Duty which have a significant online component.

13. Knowledge of Historical Events

Although a young person may feel that a historical event is important, how much do they actually know about the event? Do Protestants feel they know more about events 'traditionally' associated with the Unionist community, and similarly, do young Catholics believe they have a greater knowledge of events traditionally important within the psyche of the Nationalist community?

In order to explore these questions, respondents were asked to rate their knowledge of a range of historical events. The event which the largest number of young people felt they knew 'A lot' was the Famine (50% of young people felt they knew 'a lot'), followed by the Omagh Bomb and the Hunger Strikes (37% of young people knew 'a lot'), and then Bloody Sunday and the Easter Rising (36% and 35% respectively). Table 16 documents the results relating to young people's views of their levels of knowledge on the various historical events.

Table 16: Knowledge of historical events

Event	A lot (%)	Some (%)	Nothing (%)
The Famine	50	39	8
Omagh Bomb	37	41	19
Hunger Strikes	37	46	15
Bloody Sunday	36	42	20
Easter Rising	35	41	19
Good Friday/Belfast Agreement	34	42	21
Battle of the Somme	29	42	24
IRA/Loyalist ceasefires	28	42	27
Partition	28	37	33
Battle of the Boyne	26	54	18
Siege of Derry	25	44	28
New Northern Ireland Assembly	23	31	42
Bloody Friday	22	39	36
RUC replaced by PSNI	22	34	41
Civil Rights Movement	20	37	29
Anglo-Irish Agreement	19	33	45
1798 Rebellion	15	33	49
Internment	13	24	59
Cromwell invades Ireland	10	48	39
Flight of the Earls	3	30	63

Four of the five historical events which young people believe they know most about are events which could be classified as most associated as narratives emanating from within the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community,⁸⁹ while four of the six events which young people believed they had most knowledge of are associated with the Troubles or the peace process. Perhaps surprisingly Internment is rated low in terms of self-ascribed knowledge (59% claimed to know 'nothing' about Internment) and many young people did not appear to be very aware of the term, even though they were aware of the August bonfires and commemorations (and some took part in them) in Nationalist/republican areas. When asked in focus groups what Internment was a relatively common response was silence, followed by a comment linking the August bonfire to Guy Fawkes:

Is it not Guy Fawkes at the end of August and when he blew up Parliament and that's why we had our bonfire in August? (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

Another young person was aware that Internment was significant for members of the 'Catholic' community (and in particular in certain areas), but was unsure as to why this was the case:

It's some remembrance day, like a Catholic thing, isn't it? The Rising maybe? (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

A group of young Catholic males also debated the reasoning behind holding a bonfire in August every year as follows:

Young Person One *It's an excuse to get monkied!* (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person Two *I don't know like, do you?* (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person Three *I haven't a clue* (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person Two *To get drunk and have fun?* (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person Three *No, I know it's for someone, to celebrate something, but I don't know what it is* (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

Similarly, although the Easter Rising was the fifth event young people felt they had the most knowledge about, in-depth discussions about the extent of this knowledge revealed that specific knowledge of the event was patchy at best:

Young Person Two *The Easter Rising was years ago, they don't really celebrate that here?* (Male, Catholic 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person One *What's the Easter Rising?* (Male, Catholic 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person Four *Jesus?* (Male, Catholic 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

Young Person One *What?* (Male, Catholic 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

⁸⁹ The authors realise that this is an arbitrary classification with regards to the complexity of multiple identities both within and between the two main ethno-political groupings in Northern Ireland. However, for the purposes of clarity and simplicity this terminology has been used in this report.

Young Person Two *No, there is a difference between the Easter Rising and Jesus Rising (Male, Catholic 15-16, Derry Londonderry).*

In other focus groups of young Catholics the conversation followed similar lines with some interviewees believing that the main reason behind the August bonfires was the chance to 'stick two fingers up to the Prods':

Young Person One *Because know the way Protestants have the Twelfth of July - right they only do it to wind the Protestants up (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).*

Young Person Two *Aye, they put a Union Jack and all on it. Yeah, there's a lot of Union Jacks on it, it gets a big cheer. They put an effigy or a mannequin on it and that got a huge cheer when it went up (in flames). It had like a Rangers top on and a Union Jack round it, I don't know who it was (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).*

Young Protestants similarly displayed fluctuating levels of knowledge in relation to historical events. In relation to the Easter Rising, one young Protestant commented:

Aye during the world war and the taigs thought they would be funny and try and attack us cos we were distracted, but we still sorted them out (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast,).

A number of young Protestants also suggested they knew nothing about the Battle of the Boyne, despite often selecting it as their most important historical event, the response usually being that the event was part of 'our culture' without any further explanation of what exactly was meant by this:

I know nothing about the Boyne (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).

I haven't a clue why we have the Twelfth (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

At times a number of young people appeared somewhat confused as to what exactly they had learnt in relation to Irish history. One such case occurred amongst one group of young people in Belfast when there was some debate between the young people themselves over whether they had learnt about Wolfe Tone or The Wolfe Tones, and, whether or not the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland was James Craig or Daniel Craig.

While the levels of self-ascribed knowledge displayed in Table 16 relate to the overall sample of all young people, it is useful to break this down somewhat further and look at any differences in how young Protestants and young Catholics rated their own knowledge of the various events, and in particular whether young people believe that they know more about historic events which are significant to their 'own' community background? The results (Table 17) are interesting, if perhaps not overly surprising.

Table 17: Knowledge of Historical Events by Community Background

Event	Protestant		Catholic	
	A lot (%)	Nothing (%)	A lot (%)	Nothing (%)
The Famine	51	6	55	8
Omagh Bomb	42	15	37	23
Hunger Strikes	32	16	46	11
Bloody Sunday	31	24	46	15
Easter Rising	33	19	43	18
Good Friday/Belfast Agreement	37	17	34	25
Battle of the Somme	40	14	22	32
IRA/Loyalist ceasefires	27	25	31	28
Partition	28	28	29	39
Battle of the Boyne	40	9	16	25
Siege of Derry	28	26	25	31
New Northern Ireland Assembly	26	37	20	49
Bloody Friday	20	35	27	37
RUC replaced by PSNI	23	38	21	47
Civil Rights Movement	16	47	25	35
Anglo-Irish Agreement	21	44	19	47
1798 Rebellion	11	58	20	41
Internment	8	67	18	57
Cromwell invades Ireland	11	34	11	46
Flight of the Earls	2	68	4	63

In relation to the Battle of the Boyne, an event which has been a powerful unifying ritual within the 'Protestant psyche' through the annual commemorations of the marching season, 40% of young Protestants felt they knew 'a lot' about the battle. This figure contrasts with the 16% of young Catholic respondents who also felt they knew 'a lot' about the event. Similarly, the figures for those young people who believed they knew 'nothing' about the Battle of the Boyne exhibited the same trend – while 9% of young Protestants said they knew 'nothing' about the Battle of the Boyne, three times as many young Catholics (25%) said they knew 'nothing' about it.

In a similar vein knowledge of the Battle of the Somme was related to community background, with 40% of Protestants professing to know 'a lot' about the Somme compared to 22% of Catholics, while Catholics were more inclined to believe that they knew 'nothing' about the Somme compared to Protestants (32% compared to 15%).

Although the 1798 Rebellion involved radical Presbyterians such as Henry Joy McCracken and Anglicans such as Theobald Wolfe Tone,⁹⁰ the event has tended to have been appropriated into the consciousness of Irish Republicanism as is most visibly evident by the annual Republican orations at Tone's grave in Bodenstown in County Kildare. As such, knowledge about the 1798 rebellion was higher amongst young Catholics (20% knew 'a lot' about the event) compared to 11% among young Protestants.⁹¹ Young Catholics were also twice as likely as their young Protestant counterparts to indicate that they knew 'a lot' about Internment (18% compared to 8%),⁹² and to believe they had 'a lot' of knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement compared to young Protestants (25% compared to 16%).

It is also important to stress that there were a number of historical events which one may have expected young people from one particular community background to feel they had more knowledge of than those from the other, but the differences were not so great. For example, while 43% of young Catholics felt they knew a lot about the Easter Rising, one third of young Protestants (33%) did so. Similarly, 55% of young Catholics believed themselves to know 'a lot' about the Famine but so did 51% of young Protestants. This may be a reflection on topics that are taught as part of the school curriculum, rather than being events which young people learn about mostly through their parents, friends or wider family circle.

Further analysis of the results highlights that the situation is more complex than it would perhaps first appear and there were a number of events which are traditionally associated with one community, but which young people from the 'Other' community claimed a reasonably high level of knowledge. For example, while 46% of young Catholics stated that they knew 'a lot' about Bloody Sunday, so too did 31% of young Protestants, and similarly 46% of young Catholics knew 'a lot' about the Hunger Strikes compared to almost one third of young Protestants (32%). While community background appears to be an influence on awareness of events selected, in these two cases levels of knowledge are also likely to be associated with media coverage, for example the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, or recent high profile films, such as 'Hunger' which increase young people's awareness of a particular event.

In relation to the formal education setting, there was in every case a higher number of respondents in GCSE, A-Level and a University setting who believed they knew 'a lot' compared to participants with only year 8, 9 and 10 level history. There were some interesting findings in this context, for example, in relation to events like Cromwell invading Ireland, the Battle of the Boyne, the Siege of Derry, the 1798 rebellion and the Famine, the differences were small, whereas in relation to the Easter Rising and more recent events the 'gap' increased significantly with those young people who studied to a higher level believing themselves to know more about them. This perhaps reflects the range of earlier historical events, which are more likely to be covered in the first three years of secondary and grammar school when history is compulsory.

This point was reinforced by the fact that there were no major differences in levels of knowledge about different events among pupils in different types of school. For example, while knowledge about the Flight of the Earls was limited among all young people, approximately 50% of young people attending each of the three main types of school felt

90 Other notable radical Presbyterians included William Drennan.

91 We do not wish to over emphasise this point given that in general the levels of knowledge of the 1798 Rebellion are generally low compared to the other historical events.

92 Again however, overall levels of knowledge of internment as an event were very low so the significance of this finding should not be overstated.

they knew 'a lot' about the Famine. Overall young people attending grammar schools were more likely to indicate that they knew 'a lot' about the events than pupils at other schools, with the largest differences being in relation to the Easter Rising, Partition and Internment.⁹³ The exception was the Battle of the Boyne, with secondary school pupils more likely to indicate that they knew 'a lot' about the event (33% compared to 26% at grammar school and 16% at integrated school).

There thus appeared to be a difference between 'educational' knowledge of particular historical events, which was learnt through school and the formal curriculum and which include earlier historical events, and 'social' knowledge of the recent contemporary past which tended to come from other sources such as the home, the local community, media and television etc.

Summary

The three historical events about which young people felt they had the most knowledge were the Famine (50% knew 'a lot'), the Omagh bomb and the Hunger Strikes (37% knew 'a lot'). While young people claimed to know 'a lot' about a number of Troubles related and recent events, there were also inconsistencies, as 59% claimed to know 'nothing' about Internment. At times, community background strongly influenced which events a young person had knowledge about. For example, 40% of young Protestants believed they knew 'a lot' about the Battle of the Boyne, but only 16% of young Catholics knew 'a lot' about the event. In other cases this was less evident as 46% of young Catholics felt they knew 'a lot' about Bloody Sunday, but 31% of young Protestants also knew 'a lot' about this event.

Young people who studied history for longer in school believed that they knew 'more' about most of the specified historical events than those who dropped the subject at the first opportunity. This was particularly the case in relation to events dating since the Easter Rising, but this is perhaps not surprising given that young people suggested that the longer one studies history in school the more likely one is to study events associated with the Troubles. Young people's 'educational' knowledge of events acquired in school thus tended to be different from their 'social' knowledge of events which are more firmly rooted within their community background and other sources of information beyond school.

⁹³ More grammar school pupils felt they knew 'A lot' about the Easter Rising (47%), compared to 37% of secondary pupils and 30% of pupils at integrated schools. The figures for Partition were 42%, 24% and 26% respectively, and similarly for Internment the figures were 29%, 9% and 8%.

14. Most Important Events in Northern Irish/Irish history

The research has established that parents, school and relatives were the three most influential sources on how a young person understands the past, and in particular the Troubles, but how does this 'influence' manifest itself? In order to assess this the questionnaire asked young people to identify the three most important events in Northern Irish/Irish history. The responses highlighted varying degrees of knowledge amongst young people and even a differing use of terminology to describe the same events. For example, in relation to partition, some young people described 'England separating from Ireland', 'Northern Ireland getting independence' or 'Ireland breaking with Britain', with the responses influenced by the community background of the young person. In addition, while some young people displayed an excellent grasp of historical events and actually went into some detail to record some rather less well-known events such as the 'Government of Ireland Act of 1920', or 'Terence O'Neill's cross-roads speech', others clearly struggled to identify events and in all likelihood used the list of events in a later question over the page as a guide. Indeed evidence of this appears to be that some young respondents had indicated an answer, which they subsequently had 'scored out' before writing an answer from the list on the other page of the questionnaire. It is possible had there been no list at all the young people may have struggled even more to name historical events which they felt were important.

Table 18: Most important events in Northern Irish/Irish history⁹⁴

Event	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
The 'Troubles'	38	45	32
The Famine	28	27	31
Good Friday/Belfast Agreement	23	23	22
Partition of Ireland	18	23	11
Easter Rising	15	8	21
Bloody Sunday	14	8	22
Twelfth of July/ Boyne	14	26	7
Hunger Strikes	10	3	18
Omagh bomb	9	9	8
Ceasefires	5	6	3
Peace-process	4	5	3
Plantation	4	5	3

'Other' events selected but which have not been included in the table for spatial reasons include 'Home Rule', 'World War One', 'Ulster Day 1912' the 'Titanic' and the 'Belfast Blitz', among others. It should be noted however that the numbers of young people selecting these events were very low, with the largest 'other' event not included in the table being the 'Titanic' which was selected by 20 young people.

⁹⁴ These frequencies refer to the total number of young people who selected an event as one of their 'three most important' events.

At first glance the statistical findings appear to suggest that the most important events to young people are those which are not traditionally associated with one community or the other in Northern Ireland, i.e. they are 'neutral'. For example, the Troubles, the Good Friday Agreement and Partition are historical events which tend not to be overtly associated with either the Protestant or Catholic communities, unlike the Twelfth of July or the Hunger Strikes. Indeed, the Troubles was the most selected overall 'event' by young people, and a large proportion of both young Catholics and young Protestants selected the Troubles as one of the most important historical 'events' in Irish history (45% of young Protestants and 32% of young Catholics).⁹⁵

However, as Table 18 indicates, there were a number of events which Protestants or Catholics were more likely to 'pick' based on their community background. While 21% of young Catholics selected the Easter Rising as one of their three most important events, only 8% of young Protestants did likewise. In a similar manner, 26% of young Protestants selected the Twelfth of July/Battle of the Boyne as one of the most important events in Irish history, but only 7% of young Catholics selected the Twelfth.⁹⁶ While 18% of young Catholics felt that the Hunger Strikes were one of the most important events, only 3% of young Protestants believed likewise and similarly although just 8% of young Protestants selected Bloody Sunday as one of the most important events in Irish history, 22% of young Catholics selected Bloody Sunday as an important event.

It is worth noting however that although there were a number of events which young Protestants were more likely to select than young Catholics and vice versa, the overall numbers within each community are not as large as we may initially assume. As noted, the majority of those young people who selected the Twelfth were young Protestants, but only one in four (26%) young Protestants selected the Twelfth as one of their most important events in Irish history. Similarly, while 75% of young people who selected the Easter Rising were Catholics, only one in five (21%) young Catholics selected this event. It is important therefore not to overestimate the levels of conformity with decisions made regarding important historical events and their potential relation to community background. Despite recognising this complexity however, whenever a group of predominantly young Protestants or young Catholics were asked to identify the most important event to them, the responses followed a familiar pattern.

The qualitative research supports the findings of the survey and points to two key findings to the selection of important historical events – namely that community background was an influence on the event selected, while having covered the event in school was a secondary influencing factor. Even in mixed groups the trends were relatively similar, young people tended to select events based upon their community background:

I like some history, like the Battle of the Boyne is good – it's your culture (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

The Twelfth is class, it's our culture. The Catholics have the fleadh and we have the Twelfth (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).

The IRA is the main thing I know about like (Male, Catholic, 12-14, Derry Londonderry).

⁹⁵ The fact that the Famine was also the fifth most selected first event by young Protestants suggests that the Famine may be a topic covered in schools.

⁹⁶ 78% of young people who selected the Twelfth of July were young Protestants.

In one focus group of young Protestants, the Somme was cited as the most important event, especially given the role of the 36th Ulster Division and its association with the UVF, the modern incarnation of which has a very visible presence in the area in which the focus group was held. In fact, a number of young people presented a UVF flag during the focus group and at one point actually donned a balaclava to answer questions (although one should note that one young person in the group said that he would be 'embarrassed' if such a flag was unfurled in front of any young Catholics if the group had been doing cross-community work). The importance of the Somme in this sense was felt to be linked to the '*sacrifice made by our soldiers who were killed, you have to remember them*'. The Somme was also particularly significant for a number of these young Protestants as a number of the young people reported having family members involved who fought at the Somme.

In another focus group of predominantly Catholic young people in Belfast, a number of young people immediately responded '*the Easter Rising*' when asked about the most important event in Irish history, but when asked further about what they knew of the event itself there was a long silence before a number of young people began talking amongst themselves to establish what exactly the Rising was. Other discussions followed similar trends, young Protestants tended to select events such as the Twelfth of July or the Somme and young Catholics tended to select the Easter Rising, the Hunger Strikes or Bloody Sunday. These tendencies were also more pronounced in predominantly single-identity areas.

This was relatively common in focus group discussions and is an important distinction which will be drawn out at greater length later in the report. Simply put, although a young person may select an event which is important to them they may not know anything of substance or detail beyond the fact that it occurred. It is also clear that a number of young people selected the Troubles as important while at the same time noting an event which occurred during the Troubles, such as Bloody Sunday, as important. Further analysis highlights that secondary school pupils were more likely than grammar school pupils to select the Troubles as their first event, while grammar school pupils were more inclined to select the Famine. The fact that young people attending both secondary and grammar schools selected the Famine within their top two most important events also suggests that they have learnt something about the subject in the school environment and the following section which focuses on establishing 'levels' of knowledge supports this conclusion.

It would be disingenuous to suggest that all young people selected an event as a result of their community background. The Good Friday Agreement, for example, was the third most selected event overall and when such an event was selected it was either a result of the perceived significance of the event or secondly as a result of the young person having greater levels of knowledge of the event having studied the subject in school. One young person commented upon the impact the Omagh bomb had on him as a child:

I remember as a kid hearing it over the radio and thinking 'Is this real' I found it hard to believe. You look back and it in a strange way helped develop Northern Ireland because of the massive repercussions and I think the outcome was that people really wanted to move on (Male, Mixed community background, 17-18, Belfast).

Similarly, the locality in which the focus group occurred influenced the events that young people selected as important. In one focus group involving young Catholic males in Derry Londonderry the most important historical event was viewed to be Bloody Sunday '*cos it happened here, in the Bog*', while for one young person in Enniskillen '*The Remembrance Day*

bomb was massive' and similarly, one or two respondents in Omagh selected the Omagh bomb as the most important event in Irish history. Similarly:

The Larne Gun Running, the guns came into Larne and stayed for a bit and then went to Belfast - loads of cars they filled them with guns – I learnt that it school (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Larne).

In this sense locality was not impacted upon by community background, rather young people identified an event which they felt had an impact upon their area specifically rather than on the perceived impact on their 'community' per se.⁹⁷

Summary

The three most important events selected by young people were the Troubles (38%), the Famine (28%) and the Good Friday Agreement (23%). Both the quantitative and qualitative research indicated that community background could influence which particular historical event a young person selected. Indeed, of those young people who believed the Easter Rising was one of the three most important events in Irish history, 75% were young Catholics and 25% young Protestants. Similarly, of those young people who felt that the Twelfth of July/Battle of the Boyne was one of the most important events, 78% were young Protestants and 22% were young Catholics. Focus group discussions also revealed that community background can impact on the event selected, as can the locality in which the discussion takes place. For example, in Derry Londonderry Bloody Sunday was a significant event for many young people, while in Larne the 1914 gun running was an important event for a number of young participants.

However, while community background at times influenced which events were selected, the overall numbers of young people selecting events such as the Twelfth or the Easter Rising based on their community background were perhaps not as high as might be expected. For example, only 21% of young Catholics selected the Easter Rising as one of the three most important events while only 26% of young Protestants chose the Twelfth of July/Battle of the Boyne.

⁹⁷ Similarly, young people in Castlederg talked about a bomb in Spamount nearby while young people in Lurgan referred to how the town had been subject to various bombings during the Troubles.

15. Historical Commemorations

The significance of historical commemorations have tended to correspond with the ethno-political divide in Northern Ireland and diverging attitudes towards parades and parade related protests have at times resulted in increased levels of tension between members of the two main communities in Northern Ireland. Such disputes over public processions and commemorations have dated from the 1820s, perhaps reaching a climax in the late 1990s with the Drumcree parade dispute, which also occurred at a time of political transition (Jarman 1997). Historical anniversaries and commemorations, because they often represent a public affirmation of one particular communal identity in Northern Ireland, remain a 'marker of difference' in relation to the predominantly Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist and Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities, which is highlighted by the plethora of annual commemorations of events or individuals who tend to be symbolically significant for one particular section of the community.

In line with this, we asked to what extent do young people participate in commemorating historical events and why? Young people were therefore asked if they had ever taken part in an historical anniversary and/or commemoration. The largest proportion of respondents, 42%, said they had not taken part in any event, and while only one in five young Protestants (21%) had never taken part in a commemorative event, almost three in five young Catholics (59%) had not done so. Of those young people who had taken part in a commemoration, more than one third of respondents (35%) referred to having taken part in Remembrance Sunday followed by almost one-quarter of young people (23%) who had taken part in the Battle of the Boyne/Twelfth of July celebrations (Table 19).

Young females were more likely than young males to have not taken part in any commemoration (55% compared to 45%). It is likely that the slightly higher numbers of males attending most commemorative events is related to events such as the Twelfth in which the band culture is overwhelmingly male in composition. Males were therefore more likely to partake in commemorations, with the exception of the Easter Rising, where 56% of attendees were female compared to 44% male. In terms of Remembrance Sunday events there were no discernible differences between males and females, attendees were 50% male and 50% female.

Only 9% of young people had attended an event to commemorate the Battle of the Somme on the 1st July, and Internment commemorations were the least attended event, with only 1% of young people having actually attended an Internment commemoration. It is worth bearing in mind however that as referred to previously, significant numbers of young people were unaware of Internment, but had attended Nationalist bonfires in August. It is more likely therefore that many young people do not know the purpose of the bonfire in August; they may be at the event but they don't know the specific purpose behind the ritual and have therefore failed to indicate their participation on the questionnaire.

In contrast with the most important historical events identified by young people, while four of the top five events were associated more with the Nationalist community, in terms of participation the two most attended events are associated with the Unionist community – Remembrance Sunday and the Twelfth.

Table 19: Have you ever taken part in historical anniversaries/commemorations?

Event	Total (%)	Protestants (%)	Catholics (%)
Not taken part in any	42	21	59
Remembrance Sunday	35	66	11
Boyne/Twelfth of July	23	51	3
Battle of the Somme	9	18	2
Bloody Sunday	9	3	16
Hunger Strikes	8	0	17
Easter Rising	7	3	13
Relief/Siege of Derry	6	13	1
Closing of the Gates	3	7	1
Internment	1	0	3

Community background is a key factor in determining whether or not a young person would attend a specific event: 51% of young Protestants had taken part in Twelfth of July commemorations compared to just 3% of young Catholics. And while 17% of young Catholics had attended a Hunger Strike commemoration, only one young Protestant had done so. The single most well attended commemoration is Remembrance Sunday which 42% of respondents said they had commemorated, but while 66% of young Protestants had attended a Remembrance Day commemoration only 11% of young Catholics had done so. However, while community background does influence which events young people will attend it is worth noting that 42% of young people overall had never participated in any commemorative event and almost half of young Protestants (49%) had never participated in the Twelfth commemorations, while just around one in six young Catholics had attended Bloody Sunday (16%) or Hunger Strike (17%) events.

Analysis of the data by gender illustrates that 13% of young males had taken part in Somme commemorations compared to 6% of young females. In a similar manner, 9% of young males had partaken in the Relief/Siege of Derry commemorations compared to 4% of young females. Females were slightly more inclined than males to participate in Easter Rising commemorations (8% of young females had attended Easter Rising commemorations compared to 7% of young males). However, as Table 19 would suggest the overall numbers of young people actually participating in commemorative events are low.

The location of an event appeared to impact upon whether or not young people would be more likely to participate. At times there was an emphasis on the significance of local commemorations, for example young Protestants in South Belfast noted the importance of the John Hanna memorial parade every year while one young Catholic participant believed that an annual commemoration for three dead IRA volunteers from her local area was an important occasion for the town:

The John Hanna parade is about the conflict that happened in South Belfast, he tried to stand up for the area (Female, Protestant, 19+, Belfast).⁹⁸

⁹⁸ In *Lost Lives*, John Hanna is listed as a civilian who was killed by the IRA on September 10th 1991 (McKittrick et al. 1999). These particular young people referred to Hanna as an important 'defender' of the area and Hanna's name can subsequently be found on UVF memorials to 'fallen volunteers' in South Belfast.

There's one commemoration to the Harte brothers, every year. It's definitely important to my community where I live (Female, Catholic, 19+, Omagh).⁹⁹

In addition, young people in Enniskillen discussed the significance of Remembrance Day in the town (given the bomb in November 1988 at the cenotaph), while young people in Omagh referred to attending the local memorial to those people killed in the RIRA bomb on 15 August 1998. The symbols of historical commemorations were also referred to with particular reference to the significance of the poppy. While a number of young Catholics said they would wear the poppy, the emblem was worn more by young Protestants as it denoted an element of 'Britishness' which some young Catholics were uncomfortable with. In a similar vein, young Protestants were reluctant to wear an Easter Lily which was a symbol associated with the Catholic community:

Protestants wear poppies in my school. We wouldn't really wear one here like. Some Catholics wear them too like (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

More specifically religious events (as well as those more political events) such as Ash Wednesday were also felt by some young people to be events which could indicate one's own community background and potentially lead to conflict with other young people:

... my friend got slabbered to on Ash Wednesday 'cos she had a cross on her head (Female, Catholic, 14-15, Belfast).

Throughout the focus groups it was clear that if young people attended a historical event or commemoration, young Protestants would tend to go to events associated with 'their' community while young Catholics tended to go to events associated with 'their' community. In one focus group of young Catholics in Belfast the young people were asked why they attended commemorations for the Hunger Strikers to which the reply was:

Because they starved themselves to fight for our freedom (Female, Catholic, 13-14, Belfast).

While this answer displayed a level of political awareness which linked the Hunger Strikes as an important historical event for one particular community, many young people struggled to indicate the historical significance of many commemorative events and indeed many were somewhat unsure as to why they took part in them. In another focus group in Belfast a group of young Protestants were asked why they took part in the Twelfth every year, the response to which was:

Young Person One *'Cos it's a tradition (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).*

Young Person Two *It's fun (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).*

Young Person One *You get free drink like (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).*

Young Person Three *Cos we won the Battle of the Boyne. The English wanted King William to be King, and James was the king so they had a battle to sort it out (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Belfast).*

In another group, the reasons given for why the Twelfth occurs every year were similar:

⁹⁹ The annual commemoration to the Harte brothers in County Tyrone relates to the killing of three IRA members, Gerard Harte, Martin Harte and Brian Mullin by the SAS at Drumnakilly on 30th August 1988.

Young Person One *It's a laugh 'cos everyone you know is going* (Male, Protestant, 15-16, Larne).

Young Person Two *It's for the Battle of the Boyne isn't it? But you don't really think about that there, nobody ever talks about it, like why they are there and stuff* (Male, Protestant, 17-18, Larne).

In another focus group again, when asked why they went to the Eleventh night bonfire the responses were again 'Cos of King Billy' and rather more pragmatically 'Cos it's going to get built no matter what so we may as well help'. One young person in this group however displayed a greater level of knowledge in that:

It's historical – when Billy was there beacons were lit to guide his way over here (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast).

While there was generally a limited knowledge as to the historical reasoning behind taking part in 'their own' commemorations, a number of young people were also unsure as to why the 'Other' side participated in such commemorations which several young people felt were designed to be purely 'provocative' and 'dragged up the past' every year:

You see the way on the Ormeau Road you will get them marching, sometimes they do it but it's for no real occasion, they've just decided to go out for a march. My granda and granny live round there and you would hear all the drums and people walking behind – I remember my mum bringing me out and I was like why are they doing this? (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

What do they like about the Twelfth? Why do they do it? (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

Oh aye, Battle of the Boyne and the Twelfth of July, but at the end of the day it makes me bitter – but they say it's their culture but they are basically parading about killing a load of Irish people just (Female, Catholic, 19+, Omagh).

However, at times individual young people were aware of some of the historical background as to why the 'Other' community held particular events:

The Apprentice Boys march is something to do with the gate here and they have something later in the year to do with your man Lundy (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Derry Londonderry).

In one focus group in Belfast it became apparent that a small number of young Catholics had attended the Eleventh night bonfire, and had collected wood for it, however they participated as friends of the young Protestants responsible for organising and building the bonfire rather than as 'Catholics' as such. In this sense the young Catholics were very reluctant that anyone at the bonfire found out their community background:

Aye – parades- you go to support them. You go with friends, go to the bonfires. But you'd feel uncomfortable saying whether you were Protestant or Catholic. Catholics would go to bonfires, but you'd have to be careful. People have been stabbed in Larne even though they're not there to cause trouble (Female, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

I had Catholic friends coming with me to the 1st July parade and they were just treated as if they were Protestants and they would go to the same (Male, Protestant, 19+, Enniskillen).

Despite a very small number of Catholic young people having attended an Eleventh night bonfire or the Twelfth, there was a general perception amongst many young Protestants that

the Eleventh was 'their' night and the event would not appeal to many young Catholics. For some young males in particular, the very fact that they believed Catholics 'did not like' the event was an incentive to take part in it:

No, not the people of (name of area), they're really Catholic like, why would they go? Sure they burn the Pope and the Irish flag on the bonfire and all the Catholics try and come up and light the boney early. They stole our pallets last year (Male, Protestant, 12-14, Larne).

Indeed, one young Protestant female spoke at length about the difference in how she believed her Catholic friends and partner would be received:

... would be different here, his family don't like my boyfriend to come around here in case he gets threatened and people in my estate would shout at him and stuff (Female, Protestant, 19+, Dungannon).

Discussions in the focus groups highlighted that St. Patrick's Day was an important day for many young Catholics but there was disagreement over whether participation should be open to all young people. While some young people believed that the day should be 'for everyone' other young people felt that the day should be for young Catholics as young Protestants 'have the Twelfth and all'. Some young Protestants said that their parents had told them not to go to the parade in case there was violence, which may reinforce the belief in commemorations being 'for them':

I wouldn't really watch the St. Patrick's Day parade, I just know not to go near the town that day. I was told to stay away, my parents told me there might be trouble (Female, Protestant, 12-14, Belfast).

Protestants celebrate it too. Sure they all go into town too. It should only be for us because it's St Patrick's Day, it's ours, they get loads, they should just celebrate theirs not ours (Female, Catholic, 17-18, Belfast).

One element which increased the sense of St. Patrick's Day being 'more for Catholics' was the fact that many Controlled or 'Protestant' schools are not off on holiday for the day itself, unlike the vast majority of Maintained or 'Catholic' schools. Those young Protestants who did wish to participate in St. Patrick's Day were therefore unable to do so given the requirement to attend school:

I don't know, most Protestant schools wouldn't get off for it. We do, I have always been off as it's an event, but my friends go to state schools and can't go – Catholic schools all get off for the day or half day (Female, Protestant, 17-18, Belfast).

In Lurgan, there was a distinct sense of anger amongst young Catholics at what they felt was a denial of 'their culture' by the local council and the PSNI in relation to 'not allowing' them to put up flags in the main street of the town in preparation for St. Patrick's Day:

See for St. Paddy's Day, we aren't allowed to put any flags up round the town, and like we are not allowed to march past the town, but on the Twelfth of July the whole town, even the Catholic bit, is covered in Union Jacks (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

Participation in commemorative events tended to relate to watching the event rather than actively being involved, although a small number of young people noted that they had

actively been involved as band members or had been involved in some role in a parade or commemoration:

I carried a flag in the parade, a Tricolour and then Oliver Plunkett's flag (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

I tried to join the eirígí band but my mum and dad made me leave, I was only in it for like a week. It was in my community centre and everyone was joining it, and you were able to wear the uniforms etc, I wanted to do it, my mum thought it was all republican and all, but I just wanted to learn how to play the flute and march with them (Female, Catholic, 15-16, Lurgan).

This last quote illustrates that many young people attended particular events because their friends and other people in their community were attending, including their parents and wider family circle. While for some young people participation in a commemoration or event was a signifier of their identity whatever the label, be it Protestant, British, Catholic, Irish etc, many attended events because it was the 'done thing' in their communities and they often had little knowledge of the history behind the event.

Summary

This section highlights that for some young people, community background was a factor which influenced the historical commemorations they had attended, although in general there appeared to be a relatively limited awareness as to why certain historical commemorations took place.

In relation to the Twelfth of July, 93% of young people who had attended the event were Protestants while just 6% were Catholic. Similarly, practically all of those young people who had taken part in Hunger Strike commemorations were young Catholics. However, it is important to note that a significant number of young people do not take part in any historical commemorations, and 42% of young people had never taken part in any event. Only half (51%) of young Protestants had attended the Twelfth of July/Boyne commemorations, while just 17% of young Catholics had ever taken part in Hunger Strike commemorations. The most popularly attended commemoration was Remembrance Sunday, which 35% of all young people had attended, although 84% of these young people were young Protestants and just 15% young Catholics. In line with this it appeared to be the case that symbols such as the poppy and the Easter Lily remained divided along community background.

Before we move on to provide some summary and discussion around the main findings of the research it is necessary to assess the impact of all of these sources of information about history and the past on whether or not the young people themselves feel that their knowledge of history in that sense comes from a predominantly 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' perspective or do young people themselves feel that they have a 'balanced' knowledge of the past in Northern Ireland?

16. Perspectives on Irish/Northern Irish history

The questionnaire asked young people to indicate what perspective they felt their knowledge of history came from and if there was a perspective they would like to know more about. Interestingly, the two categories with the largest number of respondents were those young people who felt their knowledge of history was balanced and those young people who felt they knew very little about either 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' history. In line with this, 30% of young people felt they were equally knowledgeable about 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' history and historical events, while one-fifth of respondents (20%) stated that they felt they knew very little about history from either a 'Nationalist' or 'Unionist' perspective.¹⁰⁰ Table 20 highlights from which community background young people perceive their historical knowledge to come from.

Table 20: Perspectives Influencing Knowledge of Irish/Northern Irish History

Statement	Total (%)	Protestant (%)	Catholic (%)
I am equally knowledgeable about Unionist and Nationalist history	30	34	27
I know very little about Unionist or Nationalist history	20	17	21
I have most knowledge about history from a Unionist perspective	19	38	5
I have most knowledge about history from a Nationalist perspective	18	3	35
I would like to learn more about events from Unionist perspective	19	22	17
I would like to learn more about events from a Nationalist perspective	16	13	21
I am not interested in learning local history	18	15	21

Throughout both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the research, a number of young people suggested that their knowledge of history in Northern Ireland could be rooted in their family/community background, i.e. they have a perspective of history from a Unionist or a Nationalist perspective. Of the 179 young people who believed that their knowledge of history was mostly from a Unionist perspective, 88% of these young people were Protestants, while of the 165 young people who felt that their knowledge about Irish history was mostly based upon a Nationalist perspective, 93% were young Catholics:¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ It should also be noted, as referred to earlier in the report, that some young people struggled with the terminology 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' and therefore these results should be viewed with this in mind.

¹⁰¹ Overall, 38% of young Protestants felt they had most knowledge of history from a 'Unionist' perspective while 35% of young Catholics felt they had most knowledge about history from a 'Nationalist' perspective.

I would know more on the Nationalist side, I couldn't really tell you anything much from the Protestant side 'cos I haven't really went into that in detail (Male, Catholic, 15-16, Belfast).

Further analysis of the statistics by gender shows that of those young people who felt they knew very little about either 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' history, 66% were female while 34% were male. Young females were also more likely to indicate that they were not interested in learning about local history than males. Young males were also more inclined to state that they had more knowledge about history from a 'Unionist' perspective (68% of young people who indicated this were male and 32% female).

Despite this, it is also the case that those young people who believe that their knowledge about history is from either a Unionist or a Nationalist perspective are in the minority given that only 38% of young Protestants felt their knowledge was from a Unionist perspective and 35% of young Catholics felt their knowledge was from a Nationalist perspective. Therefore the majority of young respondents did not believe that they had more knowledge of historical events from within the parameters of their own community background.

Furthermore, among the 256 young people who felt they were equally knowledgeable about Unionist and Nationalist history, 53% were Protestant and 47% were Catholic, a relatively even demographic split. Similarly, of the 164 respondents who stated that they knew very little about Unionist or Nationalist history, 42% were young Protestants and 57% were young Catholics.

When asked if they wanted to learn more about key historical events from a 'Unionist' perspective, 164 young people stated that they did. Of those young people, 55% were Protestant and 45% were Catholic. Of those 143 young respondents who said they wanted to learn more about events from a 'Nationalist' perspective, 36% were Protestant and 64% were Catholic. It would appear that while both Protestant and Catholic young people were more likely to wish to learn more about 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' history respectively, a lower proportion of Protestant young people expressed a desire to learn about 'Nationalist' history when compared to young Catholics who wished to learn about 'Unionist' historical events.¹⁰²

Young people who attended or who had attended grammar school were more inclined to believe they were 'equally knowledgeable' about 'Unionist' and 'Nationalist' history (42% compared to young people at secondary school (27%) or an integrated school (29%). Young people at secondary school were more likely to state that their knowledge of history was more grounded in a 'Unionist' perspective than those at other types of school (28% of secondary school pupils felt this to be the case compared to 15% of pupils at grammar schools and just 6% of pupils at integrated schools). Indeed, young people at integrated schools were also more likely to suggest that they knew very little about history than their counterparts at grammar or secondary school (30% of young people at secondary schools believed this to be the case compared to 17% of pupils at grammar schools and 18% at integrated schools).¹⁰³

Throughout the course of the research, many young people were aware that their views on the 'Other' community and their understanding of the history of Northern Ireland had the potential to be biased, and most particularly, when familial influence was deemed to be the most important source of knowledge for the young person. At the same time however, many

¹⁰² Young Catholics were also more inclined to state that they were 'not interested' in local history at all (59% compared to 39%).

¹⁰³ These statistics are based upon analysis of 856 young people who answered the question, 242 of these young people attended grammar schools, 411 secondary schools and 203 Integrated schools.

young people, both Protestant and Catholic, male and female and regardless of age expressed a desire to not only learn more about historical events associated with 'their' community, but to also explore the attitudes and opinions of other young people from a different background from themselves.

While some examples of good practice in terms of programmes out there already exist such as YouthLink's work in three integrated schools, one possible avenue which could be further explored in terms of youth community relations work could be to bring young people together to talk about issues relating to identity and history and why particular historical events are important to them and why?

The following section provides a summary of the main findings of the research and an element of discussion linking some of these themes with some of the previous research which was outlined in the literature review.

17. Summary and Conclusions

The evidence from this research project clearly shows that there is no single source from which young people develop their knowledge of past events in Northern Ireland, rather young people develop their understanding about historical events from a variety of differing sources including their parents, school, their wider family, movies and television, the internet, murals, historical commemorations and so on. As Barton and McCully (2006) indeed suggest, young people navigate between these various sources of information to refine and extend their knowledge of the past.

While there are a number of differing sources from which young people develop their understanding about the past, some are more influential than others, and our research found that parents and school are the two most important sources of information about the past for young people. While young people may also read a book, search the internet or watch a film about the Troubles for example, these means of finding out about the past tend to be supplementary and are used to find out additional information on various events while family and school appear to form the primary 'building-blocks' from which historical knowledge is developed upon.

In general young people tended to differentiate between what they understood to be 'history' in the Irish/Northern Irish context and the Troubles. It was generally believed that history was 'more distant' and as such referred to events such as the Plantation, the Battle of Boyne and the Easter Rising which tended to be 'drier' than the 'excitement' of learning about the Troubles. For some young people the Troubles have not finished and ongoing segregation and sectarianism were visible examples of the legacy of the Troubles for a number of young people who lived in particular locations and in particular communities.

Although parents were felt to be the most important source of information on the past, school came a close second, and history classes in school were often referred to as teaching young people a more 'neutral' and dispassionate form of history than they would hear at home. However perhaps this is not to such a great extent as some educationalists would suggest (Barton and McCully 2006). It also remains the case that unless young people decide to study GCSE History they will learn little specifically about the Troubles in school, the cut-off point many schools use when history is compulsory in the first three years of secondary school appears to be the partition of Ireland. The majority of young people do not study history as a GCSE subject and it is therefore not surprising that many young people reported learning little about the Troubles within the formal educational setting after the age of 14.

Even for young people who studied GCSE History, there were still those occasions where they felt that their teachers were struggling to deal with 'controversial' issues. This included having Troubles related work being given as coursework, which involved the pupil undertaking their own research but with no open discussion of the topic in class. Although most young people who had studied GCSE History believed that their teacher attempted to be neutral in presenting the topic, there were still a number who felt that given the type of school they went to they still learn a very selective 'version' of Northern Irish history. This is perhaps something which the future Education and Skills Authority needs to work on to address, and to provide further support and training for teachers and school staff on the most appropriate way of teaching such controversial issues without letting their own personal bias influence the direction of the lesson. However, it must be stated that as long as the school system remains predominantly segregated between the Controlled and Maintained sectors this will

likely remain a persistent difficulty. The fact as well that schools receive 'different' holidays, such as for St. Patrick's Day, does nothing to help move beyond communal division in terms of symbolic events.

One key finding from the research was that general trends suggest that young people did select the most important historical event to them on the basis of their community background, young people were more likely to rate their knowledge of historical events more associated with 'their' community as higher than other events, and participation in historical commemorations and particular events were influenced by community background. It is certainly the case that 'stories, murals and commemorations' are important sources of knowledge about the past as Barton and McCully (2006) suggest, however there was also evidence within this study of some young people moving beyond this to select events which were important based on what they had learnt in school.

It was also the case that while attendance at historical commemorations tended to be influenced by community background, 42% of young people did not attend any historical commemorations at all. It is also important to note that although young people often selected particular events in part on the basis of their community background, many young people were less aware of the actual historical significance of these events and took part in them because it was 'fun', or it was what their friends in their local community were doing, which in some ways reinforces the perception of particular events being commemorated by one side of the community or the other.

In relation to terminology as well there existed a degree of confusion amongst some young people as to the concepts of Unionist and Nationalist, which is particularly pertinent for our purposes given that this terminology is often employed within the community relations sector. Rather, young people defined 'difference' as such in terms of the Protestant/Catholic dichotomy. While in countries such as France and the USA ideals of active citizenship are more likely to help shape the identity of young people, (Andrews et al. 2009; Frazer 2000) in Northern Ireland as our research suggests the ethno-political labels 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' still tend to be the most referred to way in which young people talk about their own and others identity. It also remains the case that this division tended to correspond with those young people who saw themselves as British and those who saw themselves as Irish. Although 26% of respondents saw themselves as Northern Irish, 70% of these young people were young Protestants and it is therefore premature to talk about a growing 'middle ground' and a general move away from young Protestants describing themselves as British and young Catholics describing themselves as Irish.

Our study would appear to support the conclusions of Barton et al. (2003) who suggest that young people are very much aware that the narratives they learn from their parents and family can be partisan, rather than the work of Wertsch (2002), who suggests that young people uncritically accept these narratives without challenging them in any sense. While narrative and community background and important historical events often do provide the 'schematic narrative templates' from which young people develop their understanding of the past, most young people are very much aware of the potential of these narratives to be biased.

Indeed, throughout the research young people consistently asserted that they were aware that their parents and other sources of information could be 'biased' given their experience and many young people were very much interested in exploring ways in which they could find out stories from 'Other' perspectives, and in particular what young people from a different

background have learnt about the past, what events and individuals are important to them, and why? This approach may be in line somewhat with previous work by Liu and Hilton (2005) which found that in the New Zealand context, the members of a majority ethno-national group who knew the most about the 'minority' group's historical perspective(s) were the most likely to favour conciliatory policies towards members of the 'Other' group. Liu and Hilton suggest that educating group members on the historical perspectives of 'Others' can be a powerful tool to promote reconciliation in the longer-term.

In this sense as well such an approach may also help to circumnavigate some of the difficulties which remain with dealing with the 'controversy' of attempting to teach 'two national narratives', such a story-telling approach presents an array of perspectives to young people without arbitrarily telling them which narrative of history is the 'correct one'. This development in working with young people would also be in line with the calls from the Consultative Group on the Past for an approach to dealing with the past with young people which incorporates this story telling element.

It is also important to consider the best location to explore the Troubles with young people. The research suggests that it is perhaps best to do so in a multitude of locations, in school through History, Politics, English Literature and Drama, plus also through cross-community and youth projects. However, the impending Department of Education cuts on cross-community youth work by up to 70% will no doubt have a significant impact in reducing the amount of effective work that can be done with limited resources.

The forthcoming CSI strategy from OFMdFM should include a strategy on how we should address teaching history and the past with young people, a lack of such a vision will mean that the hotch-potch of approaches currently adopted will continue and programmes of good practice such as the work carried out by organisations such as YouthLink, The Base and the Nerve Centre will have minimal effect because they are operating in isolation.

There has clearly been progress within the formal educational sector with regards to teaching young people about the past in such a way that they can learn a number of differing perspectives and opinions on past events and develop their critical interpretative and reasoning skills in doing so. It may also be appropriate to question whether teaching in a formal educational setting and utilising practices from established youth work techniques should always be mutually exclusive, or are there opportunities when it may be useful to adopt the practices of one or the other in the non-traditional setting?

However, it is important that as OFMdFM update their strategy for children and young people they are mindful of the fact that young people themselves will play a crucial role in developing their own understandings about the past, and indeed they are already doing so. The primary focus should be on providing young people with the opportunities to look at different perspectives and hear different stories about the Troubles in particular and in such a way that young people are given the recognition they deserve. Many fully understand that the narratives and information they learn about the past has the potential to be biased, but they need to be given the opportunity to hear the perspective of the 'Other', be they individuals who have lived through the Troubles, or indeed other young people such as themselves.

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Appendix - Understanding of the Past

1. How old are you? _____
2. Are you? Male Female
3. In terms of the two main communities in Northern Ireland are you considered to be **(tick one)**
 A member of the Protestant community
 A member of the Catholic community
 Other **(Please specify)** _____
4. How would you describe the area in which you live?
 Mostly Protestant
 Mostly Catholic
 Mixed
 Don't know
5. Would you describe yourself as?
 British
 Irish
 Northern Irish
 Ulster-Scots
 Ulster
 Other **(please specify)**: _____

Education and Learning

6. What type of school do you attend/did you attend?
 Grammar
 Secondary
 Integrated
 Irish language
 FE College/Tech
 Other **(Please specify)** _____
 Don't know
7. How would you describe your school/FE College?
 Mostly Protestant
 Mostly Catholic
 Mixed
 Don't know
8. At what level are you studying or have you studied history?
 GCSE Level
 A-level/AS-level
 University Degree
 Year 8, 9 10 (Age 11, 12 13 years)
 Other **(Please specify)** _____

9. What would best describe your experiences of doing history in school? **(Please tick the box that matches your experience)**

- 1. Useful Not useful
- 2. Interesting Boring
- 3. Enjoyable Not enjoyable
- 4. Educational Not educational

10. If you are not studying history, why did you decide to drop the subject?

11. Which of the following do you think should be taught in history classes in schools? **(Please tick all that apply)**

- History directly related to Northern Ireland
- Irish History
- British History
- European History
- World History
- Ancient History

12. In school what other ways have you learnt about Irish/Northern Irish History?

- Drama/Arts
- Literature
- English/Irish language
- Local and Global citizenship
- RE
- School trips/museums
- Other **(Please specify)** _____

13. How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Agree	Disagree
It is wrong to teach sensitive issues in history in case you offend people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is important to teach even topics that might embarrass people in order to learn the truth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teaching sensitive issues in history creates bitterness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning history makes people tolerant of others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History helps you understand the views of others'	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
History has no relevance to my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Northern Irish/Irish History

14. List what you think are the **THREE** most important events in Northern Irish/Irish history?

15. Do you think it is important to learn about historical events in Northern Ireland?

- Yes, very important
- Not very important
- Yes, quite important
- Not important at all

16. Do you/did you feel uncomfortable being taught about any of the following topics?

- Incidents/events during the Troubles
- Nationalist history
- Unionist history
- Irish history
- British history
- Peace Process
- Other (**Please specify**) _____
- No – I feel comfortable learning about all of these topics

17. How much do you know about the following events?

	A lot	Some	Nothing
Flight of the Earls	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cromwell invades Ireland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Battle of the Boyne	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Siege of Derry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
United Irishmen 1798 rebellion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Great Famine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easter Rising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Battle of the Somme	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Partition of Ireland	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civil Rights Movement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bloody Sunday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bloody Friday	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hunger-Strikes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anglo-Irish Agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
IRA/Loyalist ceasefires	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Good Friday/Belfast Agreement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Omagh Bomb	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RUC replaced by PSNI	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New Northern Ireland Assembly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please specify) _____			

18. Tick whichever of the following statements apply:

- I feel I have most knowledge about history from a Unionist perspective
- I feel I have most knowledge about history from a Nationalist perspective
- I feel I am equally knowledgeable about Unionist and Nationalist history
- I feel I know very little about Unionist or Nationalist history
- I would like to learn more about key historical events from a Unionist perspective
- I would like to learn more about events from a Nationalist perspective
- I am not interested in learning local history

19. What are the **TWO** most important influences on your knowledge/understanding of the history of Northern Ireland?

- Parents
- Relatives
- Friends
- Clubs/Associations
- Youthworker
- Books
- Other (**Please specify**) _____
- Newspapers
- Internet
- School/College/Uni
- Museums
- Television/Film/Cinema

20. Have you ever taken part in historical anniversaries/commemorations?

- Bloody Sunday
- Easter Rising
- Hunger-Strikes
- Battle of the Somme
- Battle of the Boyne/12th July
- Internment
- Relief/Siege of Derry
- Remembrance Sunday
- Closing of the Gates
- Other (**Please specify**) _____
- I have not taken part in any of these events

21. Would you ever use the internet to research historical events? If so what sites?

- Wikipedia
- School resources online
- Google/Yahoo search engines

- BBC/News sites
- Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN)
- Other (**Please specify**) _____

22. Who do you discuss politics/current events in Northern Ireland with? (**Please tick all that apply**)

- Friends in school
- Friends outside school
- Family
- Teachers/Youth workers
- Neighbours where I live
- On-line forums
- Do not discuss – not interested

23. Who do you feel more comfortable with in talking about Northern Ireland's recent past? (**Tick all that apply**)

- Members of the same religion/community background as myself
- Members of a different community background
- A mixed group with members of both community backgrounds
- I don't feel comfortable talking about controversial issues
- Other (**Please specify**) _____

In a society like Northern Ireland emerging from a generation of conflict the events of both the recent and the historical past will have a heightened significance. The way we think and talk about the past will impact on the way we think and talk about our future. We can emphasise our similarities or we can emphasise our differences.

This publication reports on research conducted on how and where young people in Northern Ireland learn about the past and explores what they know of both recent and historical events. Almost 1000 young people were involved in the surveys and discussions. The conclusions make essential reading for education providers. The future challenge for them will be to broaden young people's knowledge of the past in a way that does not simply reinforce a perception of parallel histories that only intersect through acts of violence.

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