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Title	Youth Debate
<p>Background</p> <p>The Junior Ministers, Jeffrey Donaldson and Gerry Kelly, the Speaker of the Assembly and The Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) in the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) sponsored a youth debate which took place on 23 October 2008 in the Assembly Chamber, Parliament Buildings.</p> <p>This was an exciting and unique opportunity for young people (12 – 17 year olds) to get involved in the democratic process; to take on the role of an MLA; and to express their views to Junior Ministers, MLAs and others involved in government policy making that directly relates to young people.</p> <p>The young people were ask to express their views on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do some young people get involved in antisocial behaviour, underage drinking and drug taking? • What would help reduce/prevent young people from doing this? 	
<p>Approach</p> <p>After completing Participation Proposal Form and circulating to members of The Participation Network a number of organisations expressed an interest in taking part in this event.</p> <p>Pre-meetings were held with the organisations and their young people to provide the young people with information on how the Assembly operates; videos clips of the real Assembly and a previous youth debate; as well as details on where to access information on the debate topic.</p> <p>The event was a full day's activity starting at 10 am with pre-debate discussion followed by lunch and then the debate itself taking place in the afternoon. The debate mirrored the real NI Assembly as closely as possible.</p> <p>The pre-meetings took place in the young people's normal environment. Young people attended the event with their support workers.</p> <p>Junior Ministers Gerry Kelly and Jeffrey Donaldson were in attendance throughout the day. MLAs including Danny Kennedy, Naomi Long, Dawn Purvis, Roy Beggs Jim Wells and Barry McIllduff, as well as government policy makers, were in attendance at the debate.</p> <p>There was some immediate feedback at the event. After the event (Jan 09) a letter was sent to all participants to thank them for their involvement and advise that a summary of the debate has been brought to the attention of the</p>	

sub-group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People. A summary was also sent to the Champions for Children and Young People to help inform them in developing their policies.

Outcomes

The young people had the opportunity to inform the development of government policy on this cross-cutting issue. Ministers were able to hear first hand of the experiences and views of a wide range of young people. This was the first time that an event of this nature was held in the Assembly Chamber. Feedback from the young people indicates that the opportunity to be in the Assembly Chamber made them feel special and they enjoyed the interaction with other groups and learned from the experience.

Lessons Learned

The pre-event workshops were very beneficial for all involved. It was clear that those who did avail of the workshops were not fully informed of all the necessary information. It would be worth making the pre-event workshops mandatory for any future event.

It is recommended that The Participation Network coordinate expressions of interest from their members, thus avoiding duplication and over-subscription.

Consider shortening the day by reducing the number of speakers or doing more prior to the event.

Summary of Key Features of Policy Process

This was an innovative and creative approach to seeking the thoughts and experiences of young people on a range of relevant issues, with a view to shaping future policies. The evidence provided was of the strongest and most relevant kind as it came directly from young people themselves.

The information gathered has already been distributed to policy makers and senior officials including the sub-group of the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Children and Young People which is looking specifically at the key actions that are needed to reduce risky behaviour. All participants and facilitators have also received a DVD and printed Hansard copy of the debate.