



DEMOCRACY ACTION

Participate in a mock referendum

Materials

- ▶ Slide show
- ▶ Referendum ballot paper template
- ▶ Referendum results table
- ▶ Worksheet: Referendums in Ireland
- ▶ Job descriptions

Assessment for learning/Key skills

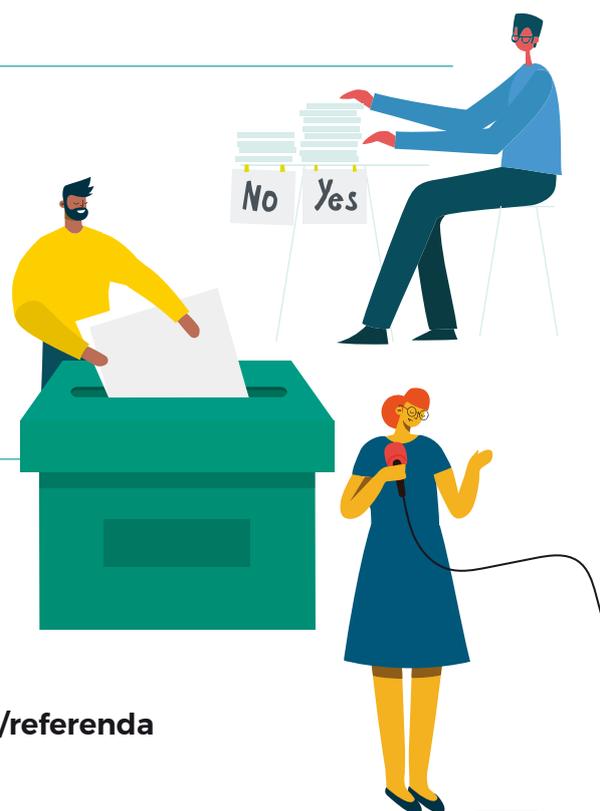
- ▶ Communicating
- ▶ Being creative
- ▶ Working with others
- ▶ Managing information and thinking

References

Video: Referendums in Ireland
https://youtu.be/_cDGjPMmVs

Referendum Commission
www.refcom.ie

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/voting/referenda/referenda



Introduction

Use this lesson pack to run a mock referendum in your class or school. You could select a national issue or a proposal to amend one of your school's policy documents, such as the admissions policy, uniform policy or code of conduct.

You could run a small, simple referendum within your class or you could hold the referendum across the whole school.

You could run the referendum as a class or assign different roles to teams of students. Give each student a copy of the job description for their role. Teams should work together and they might consider choosing a team leader. Each team should keep a record of what the team does so they can present a report to the class after the referendum.

The roles are:

- ▶ Referendum Commission
- ▶ Presiding officer
- ▶ Returning officer
- ▶ Campaigner
- ▶ Journalist

Development

1 Before the referendum

SLIDE 2

Use the slide show to show how these tasks are done in a real referendum.

Decide the proposal on which people will be asked to vote

SLIDES 3 AND 4

- ▶ Identify the document you would like to amend and whether you want to delete some words from it or insert new text.
- ▶ Agree on the wording of the proposal.
- ▶ Design the ballot paper using the **Referendum ballot paper template** (see page 5).

Decide who will be the electorate

SLIDE 5

- ▶ The students in your class?
- ▶ The students in your year?
- ▶ All the students in school?
- ▶ The whole school including staff?

Decide how you will ensure everybody votes only once

SLIDE 6

- ▶ Compile a list of everyone who has a vote and tick them off when they vote?
- ▶ Put a distinctive mark on the hand of every person when they vote?

Set a polling day, time and location

SLIDE 7

You should make sure as many voters as possible have the opportunity to vote.

Advertise the referendum

SLIDE 8

The Referendum Commission is responsible for communicating factual information about the referendum.

Full instructions are in the **Referendum Commission job description** (see page 8).



Prepare the ballot papers

SLIDE 9

- ▶ Calculate the number of people in the electorate.
- ▶ Print enough ballot papers for everyone who is entitled to vote and make a note of this number.
- ▶ Keep them in a safe place until polling day.

Assign roles

SLIDE 10

If you are assigning roles, distribute job descriptions to students and allocate time for them to work on their tasks.

2 Polling

The presiding officer is responsible for the polling station.

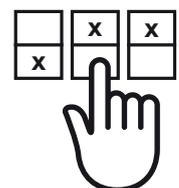
Full instructions are in the **presiding officer job description** (see page 9).



3 The count

The returning officer is responsible for the count.

Full instructions are in the **returning officer job description** (see page 10).



Conclusion

Worksheet

Assign the worksheet **Referendums in Ireland** (see page 7) as homework or in class.

Presentations

If you assigned roles to students using the job descriptions, ask each team to make a presentation to the class outlining what they did in the referendum.

Discussion

Discuss the referendum with the class using the following questions.

POLLING

- ▶ Did voters understand what they were voting on?
- ▶ What was the turnout?
- ▶ Were there many spoiled votes?

THE COUNT

- ▶ Was it easy to understand?
- ▶ Was the result what you expected?

THE SYSTEM

- ▶ What are the advantages and disadvantages of deciding issues by referendum?

Referendum ballot paper template

An bhfuil tú ag toiliú leis an togra seo a leanas _____?

Do you approve of the following proposal to _____?

--

Ná cuir marc **ach san aon chearnóg amháin**

Place a mark in **one square only**

Má thoilíonn tú, cuir X sa chearnóg seo

If you approve, mark X in this square

	Tá Yes
--	-------------------------

Mura dtoilíonn tú, cuir X sa chearnóg seo

If you do not approve, mark X in this square

	Níl No
--	-------------------------

An bhfuil tú ag toiliú leis an togra seo a leanas _____?

Do you approve of the following proposal to _____?

--

Ná cuir marc **ach san aon chearnóg amháin**

Place a mark in **one square only**

Má thoilíonn tú, cuir X sa chearnóg seo

If you approve, mark X in this square

	Tá Yes
--	-------------------------

Mura dtoilíonn tú, cuir X sa chearnóg seo

If you do not approve, mark X in this square

	Níl No
--	-------------------------

Referendum results table

Title of Referendum		Verdict (Yes/No)	
Date of Referendum			
Electorate		Turnout %	
Total poll			
Invalid ballots			
Valid poll			
Votes Yes		% Yes	
Votes No		% No	

Glossary

Electorate Number of people entitled to vote

Total poll Number of ballot papers counted

Turnout % of electorate who voted $\frac{\text{Total Poll}}{\text{Electorate}} \times 100$

Invalid ballots Ballot papers not filled out correctly or not filled out at all

Valid poll Total poll minus invalid ballot papers

%Yes $\frac{\text{Votes Yes}}{\text{Valid Poll}} \times 100$

%No $\frac{\text{Votes No}}{\text{Valid Poll}} \times 100$



Worksheet

Referendums in Ireland

Find the answers to these questions using the online resources below.

1. What was the topic of the most recent referendum?

2. When did polling take place?

3. What was the turnout (the percentage of the electorate who voted) in the referendum?

4. What percentage of the votes were in favour of and against the proposal?

5. In your constituency, what percentage of votes were in favour of and against the proposal?

6. Name one proposal to amend the Constitution that was rejected at referendum.

Resources

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/voting/referenda/referenda

Referendum Results published by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/referendum_results_1937-2019.pdf

The Referendum Commission

www.refcom.ie

The Irish Times

www.irishtimes.com/news/elections

Job description:

Referendum Commission



Run an information campaign to:

- ▶ Explain to people what the referendum proposal means
- ▶ Make sure people know a referendum is being held
- ▶ Encourage people to vote

Consider the methods you could use, such as:

- ▶ Announcement in assembly
- ▶ Printed guide to the referendum given to each voter
- ▶ Information kiosk in school to allow people to ask questions
- ▶ Website
- ▶ Video explainer

After the referendum

After the referendum, write a report detailing your information campaign and voter turnout in the referendum.



Resources

Referendum Commission www.refcom.ie

Job description:

Presiding officer

The presiding officer is responsible for the polling station.



Set up the polling station

You will need:

- ▶ Tables and chairs for people to hand out ballot papers
- ▶ Ballot papers
- ▶ Something to put an official mark on each ballot paper, such as an ink stamp or orienteering punch
- ▶ Tables where people can mark their ballot papers in secret
- ▶ Pencils for voters to mark their ballot papers
- ▶ Ballot box for collecting the completed ballot papers

Supervise polling

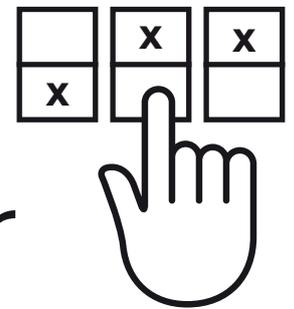
When a person comes to vote:

- ▶ Put the official mark on a ballot paper and hand it to them.
- ▶ If you have a register of voters, mark the person's name off.
- ▶ Direct them to the tables where they can mark their ballot paper privately.
- ▶ Ask them to put their ballot paper in the ballot box.

When the polling time is over:

- ▶ Seal the ballot box.
- ▶ Gather up any unused ballot papers, count them and note this number.
- ▶ Subtract this number from the total number of ballot papers printed and note the answer on a sticky note on the ballot box. It should match the number of ballot papers in the ballot box.
- ▶ Deliver the ballot box and unused ballot papers to the returning officer.

Job description:



Returning officer

The returning officer is responsible for the count.

The count is a public process. Members of the public should be able to come in and observe, but they may not handle the ballot papers.

1. Set up the count centre

You will need:

- ▶ A big table for counting ballot papers
- ▶ Three letter trays or similar
- ▶ Elastic bands for binding the ballot papers into bundles
- ▶ Sticky notes
- ▶ A copy of the **Referendum results table** to record the results
- ▶ Pencils and paper for any notes you need to take

Label the three trays “Yes”, “No” and “Invalid”.

The invalid tray is for ballot papers that have been filled incorrectly or not filled in at all. These are usually called “spoiled votes”.

2. Count the votes

Open the ballot box.

Count the ballot papers and write this number in the results table in the Total poll box. (The total poll should match the number of ballot papers used that was noted at the close of polling. This is to ensure nobody has removed or added any ballot papers.)

Divide the ballot papers between the three trays based on how they are filled out.

Count the votes in each tray. Depending on how many ballot papers you have you could stack them in piles of 10 or 100, bind them with elastic bands and label them with sticky notes.

Record the results in the referendum results table.

3. Announce the results

Use this wording to announce the result.



I have received the results of the referendum on _____ and I will now make the announcement.

The total number of ballot papers counted was: _____

Invalid ballot papers: _____

Total valid poll: _____

Votes in favour of the proposal: _____

Votes against the proposal: _____

The majority of votes in favour of/against the proposal: _____

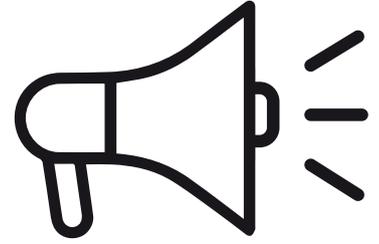


Resources

Video of the Returning Officer announcing the results of the 2019 divorce referendum: www.rte.ie/news/2019/0526/1051741-divorce-referendum/

Job description:

Campaigner



Run a campaign to get people to vote either yes or no in the referendum.

You could start by researching voters' opinions to find out which way they are likely to vote and why. This will tell you how big a job you have to do, how many people you have to convince and what might change their minds.

Consider the methods you could use, such as:

- ▶ Hold an event to launch your campaign
- ▶ Design a strong identity for your campaign such as a slogan, logo and distinctive colours
- ▶ Print leaflets, posters or stickers
- ▶ Use digital and social media
- ▶ Take part in a public debate
- ▶ Speak to people in person

Note: You cannot put up posters within 50 metres of the polling station on polling day.



Resources

Case study of the Yes Equality digital and social media campaign:
www.forachange.org/case-study-yes-equality/

Designing your digital strategy resource:
www.forachange.org/digital-strategy/

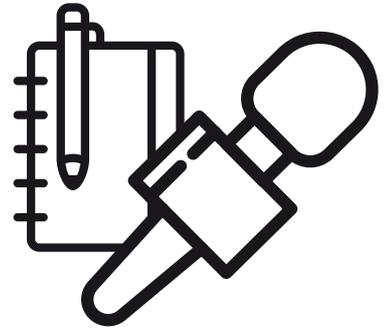
How the Yes was won: the inside story of the marriage referendum: www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/how-the-yes-was-won-the-inside-story-of-the-marriage-referendum-1.2418302

Lessons from the Yes and No campaigns:
www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/marriage-referendum/jane-suiter-lessons-from-the-yes-and-no-campaigns-1.2226705

Complaints made about campaign posters located too close to polling stations:
www.thejournal.ie/posters-close-to-polling-stations-4033843-May2018/

Job description:

Journalist



Write a newspaper story or blog post, or record a podcast or video, about the referendum.

You could print the stories in a booklet, publish them on your school's website or create a website specially to host them.

Ideas for stories:

- ▶ Feature about the referendum discussing the pros and cons of the proposal
- ▶ Interview with campaigners on either side
- ▶ Opinion piece in favour of or against the proposal
- ▶ Story predicting the result of the referendum
- ▶ News story about the result of the referendum
- ▶ Analysis piece about the result of the referendum and what it means for the future



Resources

A Guide to the issues in the Divorce Referendum:
www.rte.ie/news/2019/0510/1048744-divorce-referendum/

Inside Politics podcast: <https://podcasts.google.com/?feed=aHR0cDovL2ZlZWRzLnNvdW5kY2xvdWQuY29tL3VzZXJzL3NvdW5kY2xvdWQ6dXNlcnM6NzAxNDIyNDgvc291bmRzLnJzcw%3D%3D>

No: Why we should vote against lowering the age of candidates eligible to become President: www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/marriage-referendum/no-why-we-should-vote-against-lowering-the-age-of-candidates-eligible-to-become-president-1.2091003

The Irish Times view on the divorce referendum: No room for complacency: www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/the-irish-times-view-on-the-divorce-referendum-no-room-for-complacency-1.3881723

Referendum on divorce passes with 82.1% voting 'Yes': www.rte.ie/news/2019/0526/1051741-divorce-referendum/

It's a Yes: Ireland has voted resoundingly to pass the divorce referendum: www.thejournal.ie/divorce-referendum-yes-4653084-May2019/

Gay lives should no longer be a matter for 'public debate': www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/gay-lives-should-no-longer-be-a-matter-for-public-debate-1.2227911

Ireland votes to abolish "medieval" blasphemy law: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NZRX6Y6n_c