|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Glossary** | |
| During today’s event you will come across a range of technical terms. You may have heard of some of these terms before. Others may be completely new to you. You are not expected to memorise these terms and what they mean. This glossary allows you to look up any key terms if you can’t remember what they mean. If you have any further questions please inform your facilitator. | |
| **Assembly** | The democratically elected legislature (or parliament) of Northern Ireland. We elect 90 MLAs every 5 years to sit in the Assembly to represent our views. |
| **Executive** | The Executive is drawn from the Assembly. It is responsible for the day-to-day running of Northern Ireland in relation to devolved policy areas, for example Health, Education and the Economy. Policy is made by Executive ministers, with each minister running their own department. The Executive is led by the First Minister and deputy First Minister. ‘Executive’ and ‘Government’ essentially mean the same thing. |
| **Mandatory Coalition** | The current system of government in Northern Ireland. After an election, seats in the Executive are automatically divided amongst all of the major political parties in proportion to the number of seats they have in the Assembly. The more seats a party has in the Assembly, the more ministers it will have in the Executive. Any party which wins a certain number of seats, usually around 8-10, is guaranteed a place in the Executive. Parties are not *forced* to be in the Executive, they can decline this offer if they so wish. |
| **D'Hondt Formula** | The formula used to determine the number of ministers each party is entitled to in the Executive, and the order in which the parties get to choose their ministries. It avoids the need for negotiation among the political parties to determine which parties should form a government, how many ministries each should get, and which ministries each party should get. The formula is named after the Belgian lawyer, Victor D’Hondt, who developed it. |
| **Opposition** | Refers to members and parties who do not sit in the Executive. Traditionally, the role of the Opposition is to question and scrutinise the Executive, holding ministers to account. |
| **Power-sharing** | A framework for the distribution of political power in divided societies. Power is shared between different political and/or religious groups according to agreed rules. |
| **Devolution** | This is when a central government of a country passes down certain powers to a lower level of government, such as the government of a region within the country. In the case of Northern Ireland, devolution means that the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly at Stormont are able to take decisions in certain policy areas, such as health, education and the environment. Without devolution, these decisions would otherwise be taken by the UK Government and Parliament in London. |
| **Belfast/Good Friday Agreement** | Like Sunningdale, this agreement established a power-sharing government at Stormont. It was signed in Belfast on Good Friday in 1998. As well as a power-sharing government, it also set up institutions to promote relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (North-South) and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland (East-West). It was supported by the British and Irish governments as well as most of the main political parties in Northern Ireland, with the exception of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). It was supported by 71% of voters in a referendum in May 1998, with 29% of voters opposing it. |
| **Qualified Voluntary Coalition** | One option currently being discussed as an alternative to Mandatory Coalition. After an election, seats in the Executive would *not* automatically be divided between the political parties (as happens with Mandatory coalition). Instead, it would be up to the political parties to decide who forms the next Executive. Parties would negotiate with one another to try and make a coalition which commands a majority in the Assembly (which is 50% of the seats +1).  However, there would be some restrictions. There would be additional rules to ensure the continuation of power-sharing in some form. It would not be possible, for example, to have an Executive only of unionist ministers or an Executive only of nationalist ministers. There would need to be some form of cross-community representation. Not all major parties would be guaranteed a place in government (as happens with Mandatory Coalition), but there would be a guarantee of cross-community representation in some form. |
| **Voluntary Coalition** | Another option currently being discussed as an alternative to Mandatory Coalition. After an election, seats in the Executive would *not* automatically be divided between the political parties (as happens with Mandatory coalition). Instead, it would be up to the political parties to decide who forms the next Executive.  There would be no restrictions. Any arrangement which could command an Assembly majority (50% of the seats +1) would be able to govern Northern Ireland. Parties would have complete freedom to decide who forms the Executive, so power-sharing would not be guaranteed. |
|  |  |