

June 2026



VIEWS ON THE IRISH-MEDIUM
EDUCATION (WORKFORCE
PLAN) BILL

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Background

The Youth Assembly was established in June 2021. The current 90 Youth Assembly Members took their seats in November 2025. At the time of recruitment, they were in school years 9-12 which is approximately age 12-16. They are a diverse group. Membership includes young people from every constituency and recruitment was designed to ensure proportionate representation of Section 75 categories such as gender, religious background, race, care experience, sexuality, disability, and young people with caring responsibilities.

The Youth Assembly was established to perform three functions:

- To engage with the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly, specifically with Assembly Committees on legislation and inquiries relevant to young people;
- To undertake project work generated by the three Youth Assembly committees; and
- To enable consultation with government Departments and to participate in youth voice projects.

In May 2026, the Youth Assembly was invited to provide evidence to the Committee for Education on the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill.

Youth Assembly Members met online on 19 May 2026 to consider the Bill, and this report summarises the views of Youth Assembly Members. Members will give formal evidence to the Committee at their meeting on 24 June 2026.

The Youth Assembly wishes to express their thanks to the Committee for Education and officials for the opportunity to share their views on this issue.

Young People’s Views on the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill

Introduction

On Tuesday 19 May 2026, the Youth Assembly met online to discuss the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill, which is currently being scrutinised by the Committee for Education. There were 25 Youth Assembly Members on the call of which 4 Members currently attend (or have attended) an Irish-medium school.

Members were able to contribute their views in a number of ways: by speaking during the session, posting comments in the Microsoft Teams chat function, responding to a series of closed questions through a Mentimeter poll, or submitting additional comments by email after the meeting. This approach was designed to ensure that all Members had the opportunity to contribute in a way that suited them.

The map below shows that Youth Assembly Members joined the session from across Northern Ireland, reflecting a broad geographical spread. This distribution provided the session with perspectives from young people living in a variety of settings, including cities, towns, and rural communities across Northern Ireland.

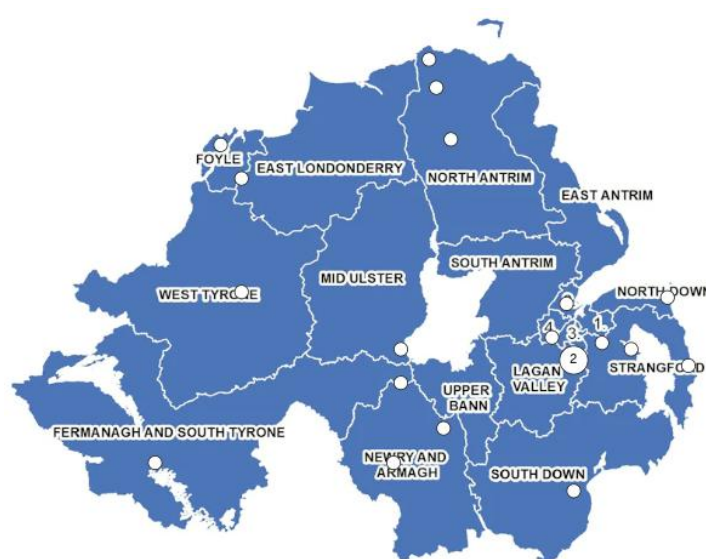


Figure 1: Where are you from? (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026)

Members had been provided with a short summary explaining the Bill in advance of the meeting. This summary is presented in Appendix One.

The session began with a number of Youth Assembly Members reflecting on their own experiences of Irish-medium education, providing valuable first-hand insight into how it differs from other types of schools. Those who had attended Irish-medium settings described it as a distinctive and immersive way of learning, where Irish is used not only in the classroom but also in everyday interactions with staff and peers. They highlighted the strong sense of community within the sector, with relationships between students and teachers often being more informal and collaborative. Members also spoke about how being educated through Irish deepened their connection to culture and identity, with some describing the language as central to their sense of belonging.

At the same time, participants outlined a number of practical challenges associated with Irish-medium education. These included limited access to learning resources, as well as more restricted subject choices at GCSE and A level due to smaller school sizes and staffing constraints. Members pointed to wider systemic issues, such as a shortage of trained teachers able to teach through Irish and the impact this can have on subject availability and educational quality. Despite these challenges, contributors emphasised the unique social and linguistic environment of Irish-medium education, where fluency is developed through constant use and where the language often extends beyond school into home and community life.

After the question and answer session, participants were invited to share their views based on what they had heard in the discussion, read in advance materials, and reflected on from their own lived experiences. This was facilitated through a Mentimeter quiz, which provided a structured way to gather feedback, capture anonymous opinions, and encourage participation from all young people. In addition to Youth Assembly discussions, supporting contextual information was drawn from Official reports¹ and the Research and Information Service (RaISe) briefing paper² to inform understanding of the Bill and the wider policy context. The questions

¹ Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education, *Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill: Department of Education*, Official Report (Hansard), 15 April 2026, 29 April 2026 and 6 May 2026, [Minutes of Evidence](#)

² Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, *Irish Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly, April 2026), NIAR 18-2026, [Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper - Irish Medium Education \(Workforce Plan\) Bill](#)

from the Mentimeter quiz are detailed below, followed by a summary of the responses provided by the Youth Assembly Members.

Do you have any experience of Irish-medium education?

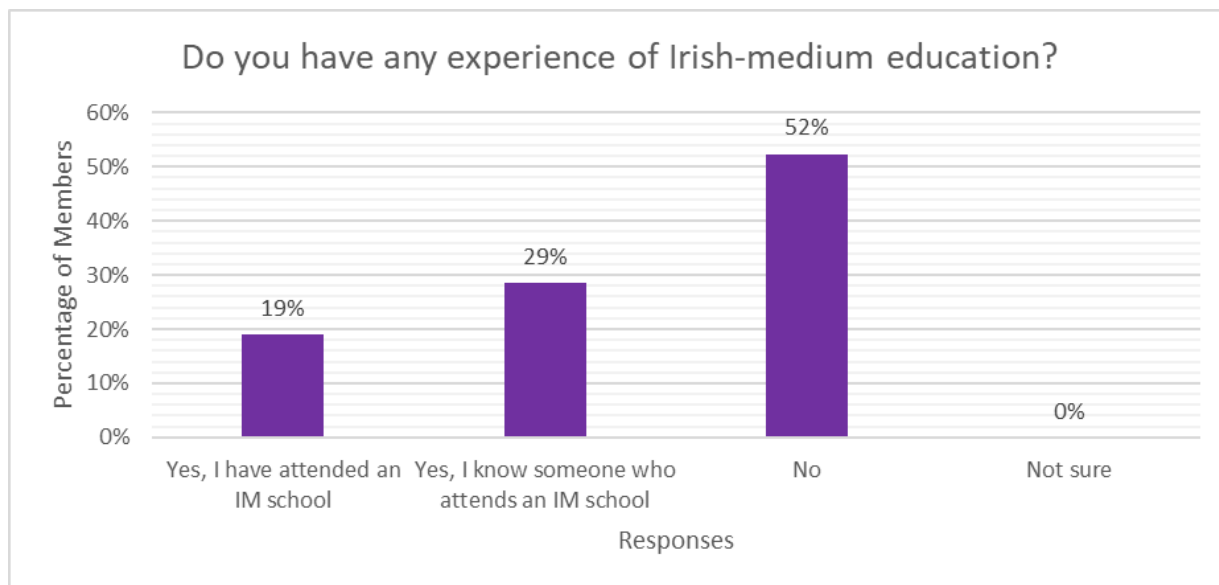


Figure 2: Do you have any experience of Irish-medium education? (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026)

Question 1 asked Members whether they had any experience of Irish-medium education. Responses indicated that a majority of Members do not have direct or indirect experience of Irish-medium education. Just over half of respondents (52%) reported having no experience of Irish-medium education, suggesting that for many Members, familiarity with the sector remains limited. However, a notable minority of respondents indicated some level of exposure. Nearly one in five respondents (19%) reported having personally attended an Irish-medium school, and a further 29% stated that they know someone who attends an Irish-medium school, highlighting a broader level of indirect awareness.

What do you think are the biggest issues in Irish-medium education right now?

Question 2 asked Members what they considered to be the biggest issues in Irish-medium education. Responses highlight several consistent and interconnected challenges facing Irish-medium education, with particular emphasis on staffing pressures, resource constraints, and funding limitations. These issues were reinforced strongly through both survey responses and discussion.

The most frequently raised issue relates to staff shortages across the sector. Many Members pointed to a lack of teachers and wider school staff as a critical barrier, with comments such as *“lack of staff at all levels in all schools,”* *“not enough teachers/staff,”* and simply *“lack of staff”* appearing repeatedly. This was echoed in discussion, where one Member noted that in their school *“there’s not enough funding, there’s not enough teachers, there’s not enough space,”* highlighting how staffing issues intersect with wider pressures. Concerns also extended to teacher preparedness and quality, with one survey response observing that *“some of the teachers are not as fluent in Irish as they’re meant to be... I have seen a teacher googling stuff in the class.”* This was reinforced by another Member, who commented that *“most of them think they’re fluent... then you see teachers not knowing specific Irish phrases and having to search it up.”*

A related issue is the pressure placed on existing teachers, with several Members noting increased workload. Comments such as *“double the work for teachers”* and *“extra workload for teachers”* suggest that staffing shortages and limited resources are placing additional strain on those currently working in the sector. This is reflected in the RalSe paper³, which identifies persistent shortages of Irish-speaking teachers, SEN staff and subject specialists across the sector, indicating that workforce pressures are long-standing and systemic rather than isolated issues.

Alongside staffing, funding and resources emerged as major themes. Youth Assembly Members frequently referenced *“lack of funding and lack of resources for subject content”* and

³ Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, *Irish Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly, April 2026), NIAR 18-2026, [Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper - Irish Medium Education \(Workforce Plan\) Bill](#)

“not enough funding and staff,” indicating that financial constraints are impacting both teaching quality and the availability of materials. This was strongly supported by lived experiences shared in the discussion. One Member explained that *“the main issue... is there’s a lack of funding and a lack of awareness,”* noting that even school infrastructure had relied on *“fundraisers by the school, the board of governors and all”* rather than sufficient public investment. Others highlighted the fragility of provision, with one Member stating that *“our school are saying they don’t have enough funding to keep the Irish wing going... [there is] talk of having to close it down.”* These concerns can also be viewed through a children’s rights lens, as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)⁴ emphasises the right of every child to access quality education, including the availability of adequate resources and learning environments to support it.

Members also raised concerns about infrastructure and capacity, including *“poor quality school buildings, temporary buildings.”* Another described the physical conditions of provision, recalling that *“we were doing it... in mobiles and it was always flooding and... the conditions were just really bad.”* These accounts reinforce the survey finding that *“we do not have enough resources and a good curriculum to help teach us Irish, lack of staff, not enough funding,”* illustrating the consequences of underinvestment. This reflects wider evidence presented to the Committee, which identified workforce pressures in Irish-medium education as long-standing and well recognised.

In addition, Members pointed to limitations in curriculum and subject choice, with one noting a *“lack of choice for subjects if teachers not available.”* This was echoed in broader criticisms of the curriculum, including the view that *“the curriculum isn’t... good enough... it’s hard,”* suggesting that both content and delivery remain areas of concern. Others spoke about unequal access to opportunities to study Irish language itself, with one Member noting *“I had to push for mine”* in relation to accessing Irish GCSE provision and highlighting that some pupils *“never got the chance to do their Irish GCSE.”* This suggests that demand for Irish-medium education may be outpacing available provision, with implications for both access and equity.

⁴ [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), Article 28, 1989.

Beyond these practical challenges, there were also references to perception and awareness issues, including “*stigma or labelling*,” “*lack of awareness*,” and “*Irish is politicised*.” These perspectives were reinforced in discussion, where one Member argued that Irish-medium education is “*left in the dust*” compared to other sectors, and that there is insufficient “*emphasis put on what Irish-medium needs*.” Others emphasised the importance of wider societal support, noting that “*there’s not enough funding for the amount of people who want to learn it*.”

Overall, Members pointed to a system under significant pressure, with workforce shortages, insufficient funding, and limited resources forming the core challenges. As one participant put it, “*the hunger is pretty overwhelming right now*,” capturing the scale of unmet need. These issues are compounded by pressures on infrastructure, limitations in curriculum and subject choice, and wider perceptions of Irish-medium education, all of which contribute to a sense that the sector requires sustained and targeted support.

How much do you agree with this statement? Irish-medium education needs more support than it currently gets.

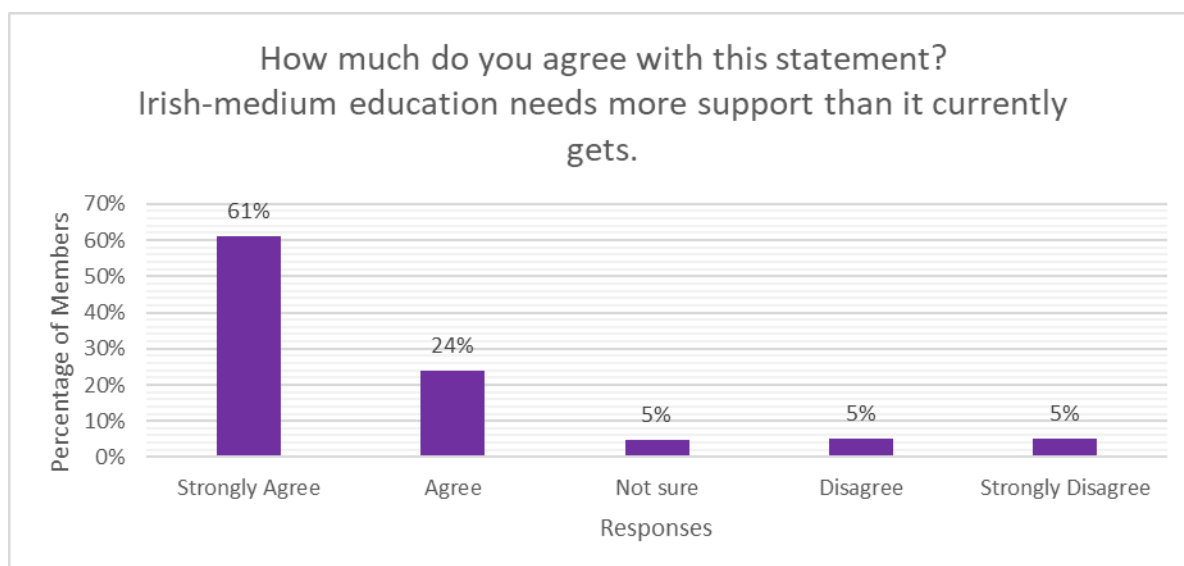


Figure 3: How much do you agree with this statement? Irish-medium education needs more support than it currently gets (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026).

Question 3 asked whether Members agreed with the statement: Irish-medium education needs more support than it currently gets. Responses to this question show a very strong consensus among Members that Irish-medium education requires greater support than it currently receives. A clear majority of respondents expressed firm agreement with the statement, with 61% selecting “Strongly agree” and a further 24% selecting “Agree.” Combined, this means that 85% of Members believe that the sector is not currently receiving sufficient support.

Only a small minority of respondents expressed dissenting or uncertain views. Five per cent (5%) selected “Not sure.” Similarly, 5% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed, indicating that opposition to the statement is relatively low.

Overall, the findings indicate a broad and emphatic consensus that Irish-medium education is currently under-supported, reinforcing the case for targeted policy interventions and increased resourcing across the sector.

Do you think this Bill would lead to real improvements in schools?

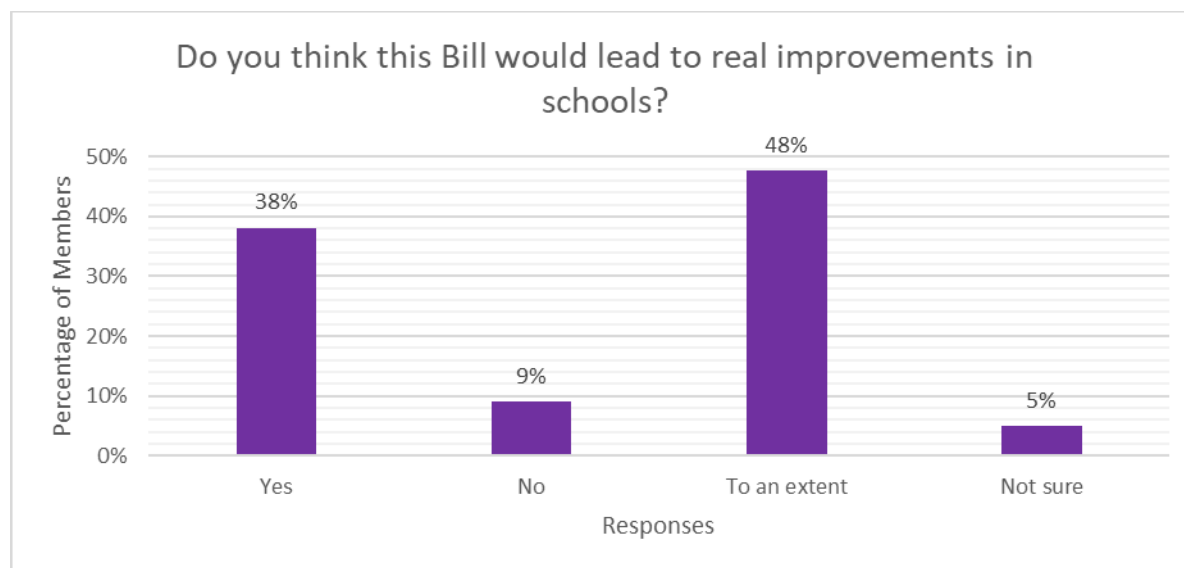


Figure 4: Do you think this Bill would lead to real improvements in schools? (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026).

Question 4 asked Members if they thought that the Bill would lead to real improvements in schools. The largest proportion of respondents (48%) selected “To an extent,” indicating that

while many Members believe the Bill could bring about improvements, there is a degree of reservation about how significant or far-reaching those changes would be. One Member explained that they chose “to an extent” because “*funding is the primary need... there isn’t enough funding,*” but added that if the Bill helps in “*legitimising the sector and legitimising the needs of the sector, then it’s a positive step.*” This highlights a view that the Bill may play an important symbolic and structural role, even if it does not fully resolve underlying issues. Similarly, another Member noted that “*it will help to an extent... but you’ve still got the issues of funding,*” reinforcing the idea that the Bill does not fully address the most pressing challenges. The Youth Assembly’s concerns about funding echo points already raised during the Committee for Education scrutiny, namely that the Bill itself would not guarantee additional funding, even if it introduced workforce planning and reporting requirements.

These reflections align with earlier findings, where significant structural issues, such as staffing shortages, funding constraints, and resource limitations, were identified. Members recognised that while the Bill may improve aspects of workforce planning, this alone may not be sufficient. As one participant put it, “*it’s good... having a big workforce, but if you still have teachers teaching in mobiles with stuff that’s about 20 years old,*” then the impact will be limited. Another added that even if the Bill leads to “*more resources for teachers, you won’t have the funding to put the teachers in good schools,*” underlining concerns about gaps between policy and implementation.

A further 38% of respondents answered “Yes,” demonstrating a substantial level of confidence that the Bill would lead to real improvements. Taken together with those who answered, “To an extent,” this means that 86% of Members believe the Bill would have at least some positive impact, reflecting an overall broadly supportive outlook. This is reinforced by comments suggesting that, after a long period without progress, Members are willing to view the Bill as an important step forward: “*Irish speakers haven’t gotten a big step in... 25 years, so we’ll take anything at this point.*”

However, a small minority expressed more sceptical views. Nine per cent (9%) responded “No,” indicating that a limited number of Members do not expect the Bill to deliver meaningful change. Meanwhile, 5% selected “Not sure.”

Overall, the findings suggest that Members see the Bill as a positive but partial measure, which may help to move Irish-medium education forward, but which will need to be accompanied by further action, particularly around funding, infrastructure, and resources, in order to achieve meaningful and lasting improvements.

Without a law like this, do you think the Department of Education would take enough action?

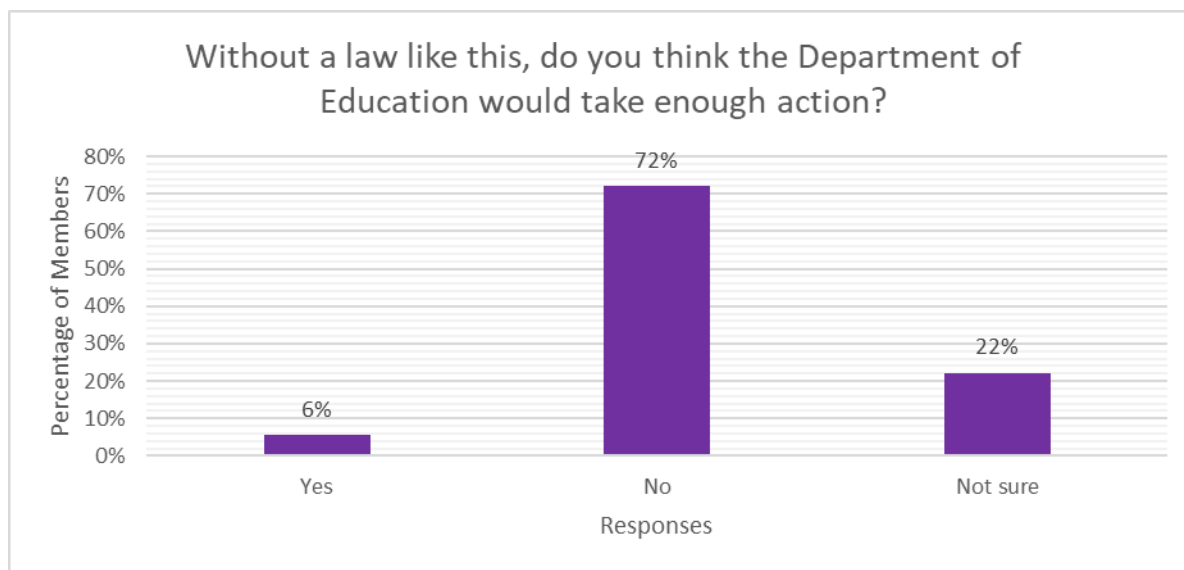


Figure 5: Without a law like this, do you think the Department of Education would take enough action? (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026).

Question 5 asked Members whether they thought the Department of Education would take enough action without this Bill. Responses to this question demonstrate a strong belief among Members that, without specific legislation, sufficient action would not be taken.

The majority of respondents (72%) answered “No,” reflecting a significant lack of confidence in existing processes and suggesting that Members see legislation as a necessary driver of meaningful change. This perspective was reinforced in the discussion, where one Member stated plainly, “*I don’t think it’s taking enough action to this point,*” pointing to a perception that progress to date has been limited. This sense of frustration was linked to longer-term experiences, with the same participant noting they had seen “*a sort of disregard for the needs of Irish education since 2016, even with all of the... fighting.*”

In contrast, only a small minority (6%) responded “Yes,” suggesting that few Members believe adequate progress would be made without formal legal obligations in place. A further 22% selected “Not sure,” indicating that while some uncertainty exists, it is outweighed by the strength of opinion among those who feel action would fall short without legislative backing. Importantly, while Members were often sceptical about the extent of change the Bill could deliver on its own, there was a clear sense that it would still represent an improvement on the current situation. As one Member reflected, “*this isn’t enough... but it’s an affirmative action,*” suggesting that even partial progress is viewed positively. The same contribution captured this balance of scepticism and pragmatism, noting that “*while it may not force them to take enough action, it’ll be more than... which is always a positive step.*”

Opponents worry the Bill could be unfair to other schools. Do you think that’s a valid concern?

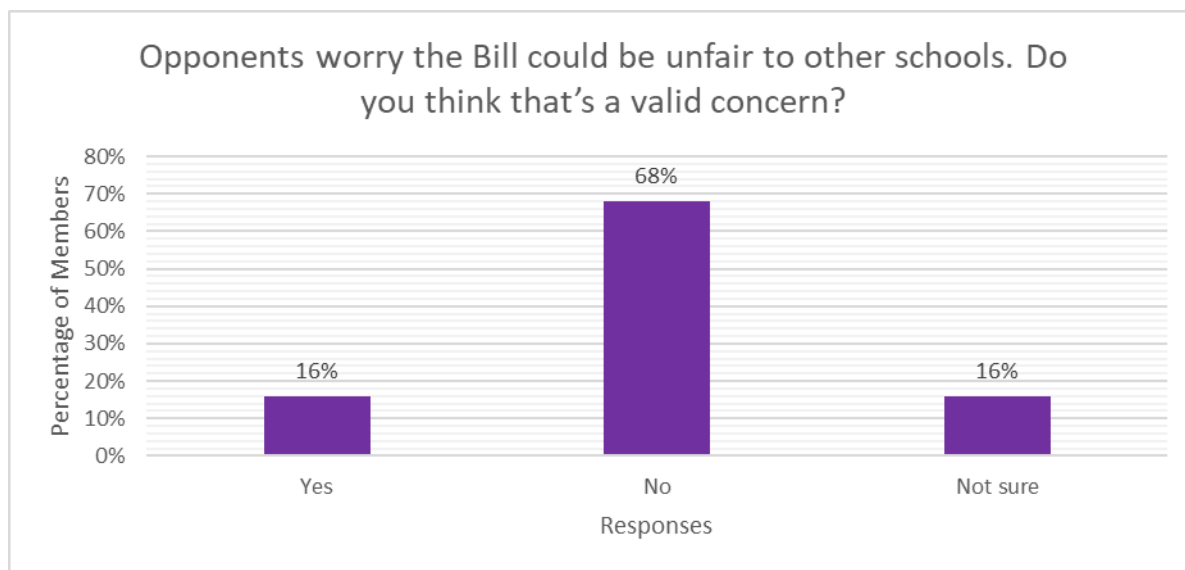


Figure 6: Opponents worry the Bill could be unfair to other schools. Do you think that’s a valid concern? (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026).

Question 6 asked Members whether they thought the Bill could be unfair to other schools. Responses indicate that most Members did not feel that this concern was valid, although the discussion revealed a more nuanced understanding of the issue.

A majority (68%) answered “No,” indicating a strong perception that the Bill is justified and that additional support for the sector is both necessary and appropriate. This view was reflected in the discussion, where Members emphasised that Irish-medium education has historically been under-supported. One participant noted that *“Irish-medium schools have fought for... I don’t know how long, to have more funding,”* contrasting this with investment elsewhere: *“there’s a new shared campus... they’re all getting brand new schools... [but] the only Irish-medium... has to close its Irish wing because it doesn’t have the funding.”* This highlights a perception that the Bill is addressing an existing imbalance, rather than creating a new one.

Importantly, many Members framed the Bill as a means of ensuring equality rather than advantage. One contribution emphasised that a legal framework would help ensure Irish-medium education is *“on the same level as... other schools, and that it’s not diminished.”* Others highlighted concerns that, without such protections, provision could be vulnerable, with one Member noting fears that funding could be deprioritised because it is *“not as important as the rest of the school.”*

At the same time, 16% of Members answered “Yes,” indicating that some do view fairness as a legitimate concern. This perspective was also acknowledged in the discussion, with one Member stating, *“I genuinely understand how people could see it as being unfair... it’s a valid concern.”* However, this was often accompanied by the view that such concerns may stem from misunderstandings about the purpose of Irish-medium provision. As one participant explained, *“it’s not about putting Irish ahead of English or Ulster Scots... it doesn’t seek to diminish other languages,”* but rather to ensure appropriate support.

A further 16% selected “Not sure,” highlighting a moderate level of uncertainty among some Members. This reflects the complexity of balancing resources across the education system, particularly where funding pressures are already widely felt.

Overall, while a small number of Members expressed concerns about fairness, the prevailing view is that the Bill represents a necessary and proportionate response to longstanding inequalities. Rather than disadvantaging other schools, most Members see it as a way of safeguarding and strengthening Irish-medium education within the wider system.

This Bill focuses on planning and reporting. Do you think that's enough to fix real problems in Irish-medium schools?

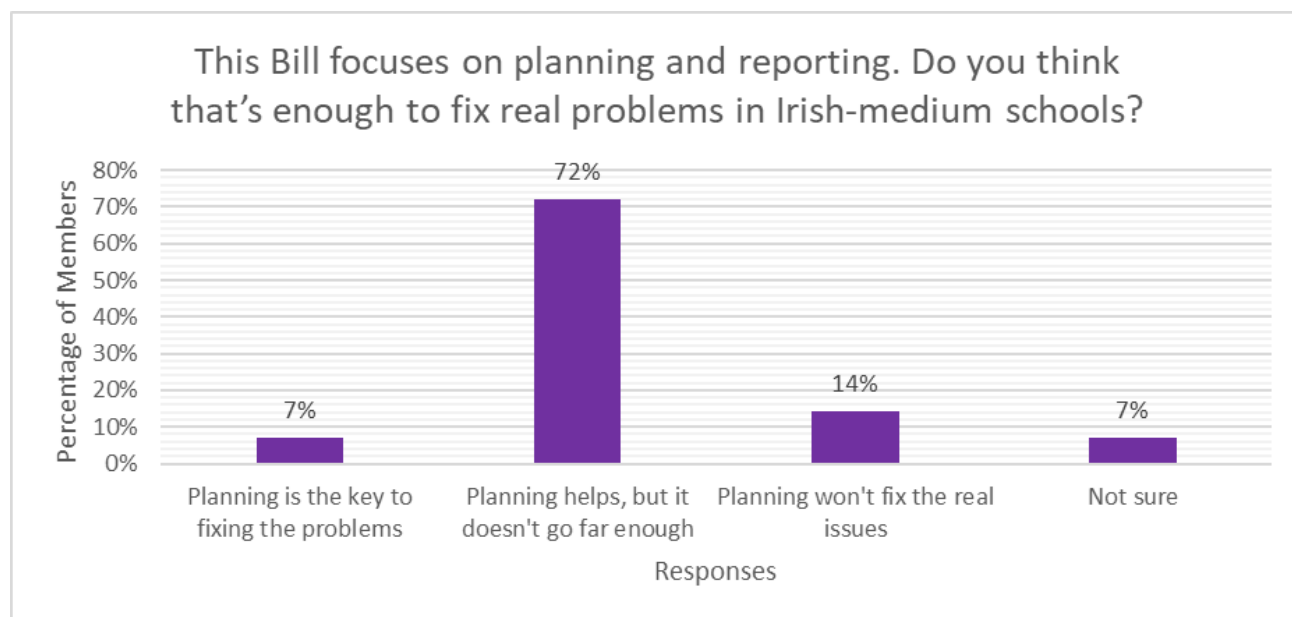


Figure 7: This Bill focuses on planning and reporting. Do you think that's enough to fix real problems in Irish-medium schools? (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026).

Question 7 asked Members whether a focus on planning and reporting would be enough to address the real problems facing Irish-medium schools. Responses indicate a clear view that, while such measures may have some value, they are unlikely to be sufficient on their own. The majority of Members (72%) selected “*Planning helps, but it doesn't go far enough.*” This response highlights a widespread belief that although planning and reporting are useful tools, they do not address the deeper structural challenges identified elsewhere in the survey, such as staffing shortages, limited resources, and funding constraints. This perspective was strongly reflected in the discussion, where one Member stated plainly, “*I don't think planning will fix the real issues... I think action needs to be taken instead of planning. There's been enough time for planning,*” emphasising frustration with a perceived gap between strategy and delivery. Similar concerns are reflected in the Bill paper⁵ by the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe), where non-statutory approaches in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland have not

⁵ [Assembly Research and Information Service Briefing Paper - Irish Medium Education \(Workforce Plan\) Bill](#)

resolved workforce shortages, suggesting limits to policy approaches without formal planning obligations.

A smaller proportion of Members (14%) felt more strongly, stating that “*Planning won’t fix the real issues.*” This suggests that some Members see the Bill’s focus as fundamentally misaligned with the practical needs of schools, reinforcing concerns that more direct intervention and investment may be required. Only 7% of Members believed that “*Planning is the key to fixing the problems,*” and a further 7% selected “*Not sure,*” suggesting a small degree of uncertainty among respondents.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while Members recognise the role of planning and accountability mechanisms, there is a general consensus that these measures must be accompanied by more substantive action. In particular, the emphasis placed by Members on workforce, resources, and infrastructure challenges suggests that meaningful improvements in Irish-medium education will require targeted investment and practical support beyond administrative processes alone.

If you could change one thing in this Bill to make it better for young people, what would it be?

Question 8 asked Members what one change they would make to the Bill to improve outcomes for young people. Responses show a consistent emphasis on the need for greater investment, stronger implementation, and increased prioritisation of Irish-medium education. The most prominent theme across responses was the call for increased funding. Many Members highlighted this directly, with repeated suggestions such as “*more funding,*” “*more money for IM schools,*” and simply “*funding.*” This reflects a strong view that financial investment underpins many of the other challenges identified throughout the survey, including staffing, resources, and infrastructure.

Closely linked to this was the need for more staff and better workforce support. Members called “*a stronger focus on hiring more staff and more funding for Irish-medium education.*” In addition, there were suggestions to improve conditions for teachers, including “*better wages,*” highlighting concerns about recruitment and retention within the sector.

A number of responses emphasised the importance of translating policy into meaningful action. For example, one Member suggested the Bill should “*lead into action for Irish-medium schools,*” indicating a desire to move beyond planning and reporting towards tangible improvements on the ground.

Beyond core funding and staffing issues, some Members proposed broader changes aimed at improving the visibility and status of the Irish language. Suggestions included “*encourage visibility of Irish language*” and “*possibly making it more mainstream,*” alongside calls for “*the language being taken more serious.*” Others pointed to the importance of cross-community understanding, with one response noting that “*more cross community understanding would lead to more support.*”

A small number of Members expressed uncertainty (“*not sure*”) or felt no changes were necessary (“*nothing*”), though these were in the minority.

Overall, responses to this question reinforce earlier findings, with Members overwhelmingly prioritising practical, resourced, and action-focused changes. The consistent emphasis on funding, staffing, and implementation suggests that Members want the Bill to deliver tangible improvements rather than remaining at the level of policy intent.

Overall, should the Assembly pass the Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill?

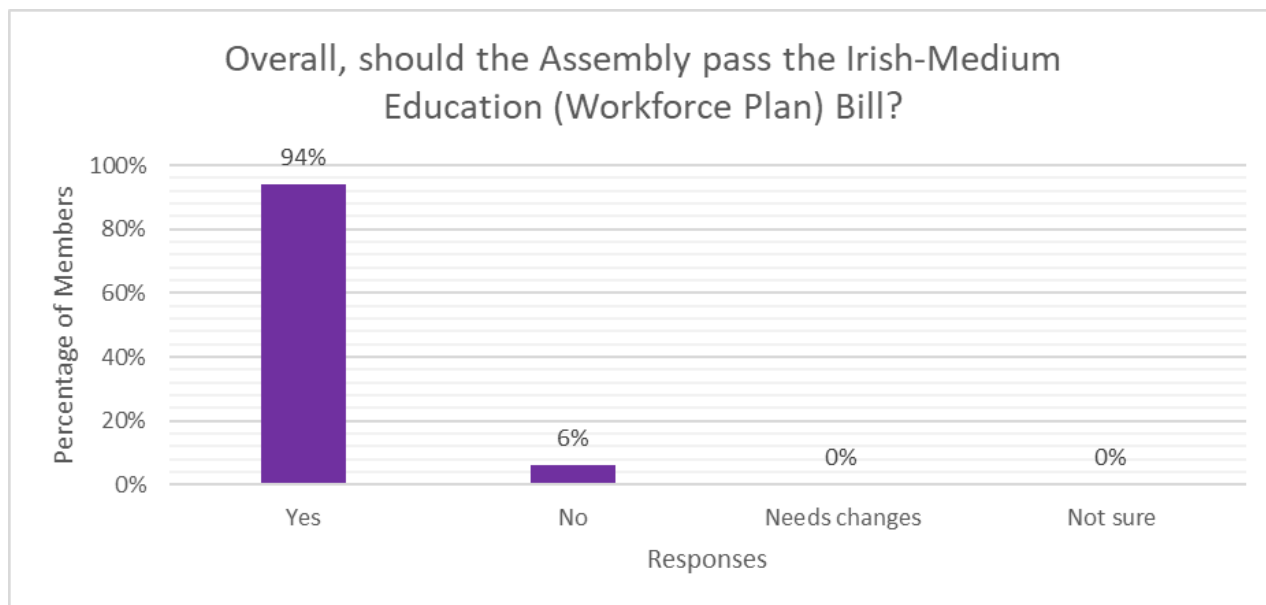


Figure 8: Overall, should the Assembly pass the Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill? (Youth Assembly Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill Online Consultation, May 2026).

Question 9 asked Members whether they thought the Assembly should pass the Irish-medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill. Responses indicate overwhelming support among Members for the Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill, with the majority (94%) of Members answering “Yes.” This demonstrates a strong endorsement of the Bill in its current form. Only a small minority (6%) responded “No,” indicating limited opposition. No Members selected “Needs changes” or “Not sure,” suggesting a high level of clarity and confidence in overall views on the Bill. This strong level of support is particularly significant when considered alongside earlier responses. While Members expressed reservations about whether planning and reporting alone would be sufficient, and highlighted the need for greater investment and action, the findings suggest that the Bill is still seen as a valuable mechanism for progress. In particular, the widespread view that legislative action is necessary to drive change appears to underpin this support.

Overall, the results demonstrate a clear consensus: Members are generally in favour of the Assembly passing the Bill, viewing it as an important opportunity to address longstanding challenges within Irish-medium education, even if further measures may be required in the future to support the sector.

Conclusion

This report sets out the views of Youth Assembly Members on the Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill, drawing on both quantitative responses and qualitative discussion. Overall, Members engaged with the Bill, bringing a mix of lived experience, informed opinion, and wider reflections on the state of Irish-medium in Northern Ireland.

From the perspective of the Youth Assembly Members, Irish-medium education is generally perceived as under-supported and facing significant challenges. Members highlighted issues including staff shortages, insufficient funding, limited resources, and pressures on infrastructure and curriculum provision. These challenges were not described in abstract terms, but grounded in lived experience, ranging from limited subject choice and difficulty accessing Irish language qualifications, to schools operating in temporary accommodation or lacking the resources needed to deliver high-quality education. These findings reflect wider evidence highlighting the structural challenges facing Irish-medium education and underline the importance of aligning future action with children's rights principles under the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)⁶, including the right to quality education and the right of young people to be heard.

At the same time, Members expressed a strong appreciation for the unique value of Irish-medium education, particularly in fostering language development, cultural identity, and a sense of community. For those with direct experience, Irish-medium education was described as immersive and meaningful, reinforcing the importance of protecting and developing the sector. In this context, there is strong support for increased action. A significant majority of Members agreed that Irish Medium education needs more support than it currently receives, and most believe that, without legislation, sufficient progress would not be made. The Bill is

⁶ [Convention on the Rights of the Child | OHCHR](#)

therefore widely viewed as a necessary intervention to drive change, particularly in ensuring accountability and sustained attention to the sector.

However, the Members felt that the Bill in its current form may not go far enough. While there is broad recognition that planning and reporting mechanisms have a role to play, most Members do not see these as sufficient on their own to address the scale of the challenges identified. Instead, there is a strong emphasis on the need for practical, resourced action, particularly in relation to funding, staffing, infrastructure, and the overall delivery of provision.

Importantly, despite these reservations, there is overwhelming support for the Bill to be passed. Members appear to view it as an important step forward, which can help to legitimise and strengthen Irish-medium education, even if further measures will be required. The Bill is therefore understood not as a complete solution, but as part of a broader process of reform and investment.

In conclusion, Youth Assembly Members are strongly in favour of progress on Irish-medium education and see this Bill as a valuable opportunity to address longstanding challenges. However, while the Bill represents a positive and necessary step, they generally indicated that it must be accompanied by meaningful action, adequate funding, and sustained commitment if it is to deliver real and lasting improvements for young people.

Appendix

Appendix One: Youth Friendly Summary – Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill

Tell me more about the...

**YOUTH
ASSEMBLY**
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Irish-Medium Education (Workforce Plan) Bill

This Bill is about making sure there are enough teachers and staff in Irish-medium education (IME).

Irish-medium education is growing, but **there aren't enough staff to keep up**. Some of the main issues include a **lack of teachers** who are fluent in Irish, along with staff feeling overworked and under pressure. There is also a **shortage of subject teachers**, particularly at secondary school level, as well as **gaps in support for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)**. In addition, there are **not enough training places available for new teachers**, and schools can face challenges when trying to recruit teachers from outside Northern Ireland.

How would it work?

This Bill requires the Department of Education (DE) to **create and regularly update a workforce plan** that looks at staffing needs, recruitment, training, and retention across all types of Irish-medium schools. The plan must include clear targets and be shaped by input from teachers, pupils, parents, and organisations. It also places a duty on DE to publish the plan **within one year**, review it at least **every five years**, and report back to the Assembly on progress, helping to ensure accountability and ongoing action.

With around **8,000 pupils already in Irish-medium education**, the aim is to plan ahead and ensure the sector has the staff it needs to continue delivering quality education in Irish.

The cost of creating and maintaining the workforce plan is expected to be between **£26,000 and £44,000 per year**. Any additional spending on actions like training more teachers would be decided separately in the future.

The Bill doesn't set out specific solutions, but instead creates a legal framework to make sure long-term, evidence-based planning happens consistently.

What do MLAs think about the Bill?

Supporters argue that the Bill is needed because Irish-medium education is growing, but **planning for staff has not kept up**. They say the current system isn't working well enough. Although DE already has a duty to support Irish-medium education, there isn't a clear workforce plan or consistent action. Supporters believe the Bill would improve things by requiring proper planning, setting targets, and making DE accountable through regular reports. They also argue it is an **equality issue**, because pupils learning through Irish should have the same access to support as those learning in English.

Opponents argued that the Bill is **unnecessary** because the DE already has a legal duty to support Irish-medium education and is already working on a strategy to address workforce issues. They also said that staffing shortages are **not unique to Irish-medium schools**, and were concerned that creating a legal requirement for one sector could be unfair. Another concern was that making the plan a legal requirement could reduce flexibility, because workforce needs can change quickly, and a fixed plan might not adapt fast enough. They also warned it could **duplicate work** already being done through DE's upcoming strategy.

Should all parts of the education system have equal rules, or is it okay to give extra support to sectors that need it more?

Do you think creating a formal workforce plan would actually solve the problems, or just add more paperwork?

Would your opinion change if this affected your own school?

What are the biggest problems facing schools right now, and are these the same everywhere?

If all schools have staffing problems, should only one type of school get a special legal plan?

Is it fair that Irish-medium pupils might not always have the same access to support (like SEN services) as other pupils?

Do you think Irish-medium education faces unique challenges compared to other schools?

Fairness

Planning

Challenges

HAVE YOUR SAY...

Improvements

Some people think this is the best way to create long-term change, while others think it could lead to more paperwork without real action.

Should governments use laws to make sure things improve, or should they rely on plans and promises instead?

If you could improve the Bill, what would you add (e.g. funding, training, SEN support)?

Big Picture

This Bill doesn't directly fix problems like teacher shortages. Instead, it creates a legal system to make sure the DE plans properly and is held accountable

Should the government be legally required to act in certain areas, or should it have flexibility to respond as needed?

Should similar workforce plans be created for other types of schools too?

What would success look like in 5-10 years if the Bill works well?

One key issue is fairness. Some people believe Irish-medium education needs extra support because it has unique challenges. Others think all schools face similar problems, so one sector should not be treated differently.

