

Government And Politics

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2021 – 2022 proved to be an extremely busy year for the Government and Politics Department as we made the most of all opportunities offered to us and fully utilised the increasing willingness of politicians and outside agencies to meet remotely.

September saw us receive an unexpected invitation to the swearing in of Northern Ireland's first Lady Chief Justice, the Right Honourable Dame Siobhan Keegan. We were one of only 2 schools invited to the online event and our invitation came as a consequence of the Lady Chief Justice's mother being a past pupil of Banbridge Academy.

In October and November a number of events were organised around the COP26 Conference which was held in Glasgow. A group of Politics and Geography students met remotely

with the Assembly Committee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs and the Environment to discuss COP26, environmental priorities and the 2 proposed Climate Change Bills that were going through the Assembly. This gave students a great opportunity to question MLAs directly and find out what they were doing individually to combat climate change. Another group of 4 Year 13 Politics students travelled to Stormont to take part in the COP26 Simulation Negotiation event which was organised by the British Council, where they took on the role of the Chinese delegation and negotiated with other schools who were also representing other countries.

Over the Halloween holiday Mr Erskine travelled with a group of Year 13 and 14 Politics students to Dublin to attend the Good Summit 2021, which was organised around the theme 'An

Ireland for Good?' Students attended workshops and met with a range of public figures from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, including David Blevins from Sky News; the NI Chief Scientific Officer Professor Ian Young; Neale Richmond, Fine Gael TD; Mary Lou MacDonald, Sinn Féin leader; Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, DUP leader and Simon Coveney, the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs.

January and early February was a time to try and motivate the electorate within Banbridge Academy. We were attempting to get Lara Crothers from Year 13 elected to the UK Youth Parliament. An election team was assembled, a manifesto written, videos made and we then had a 2 week campaign within school to try to get as many people voting as possible. It was a mammoth effort and while Lara polled very strongly, unfortunately





she did not win the overall vote in Upper Bann. We had fun trying to get her elected however and the school was one of the top 3 polling centres in Northern Ireland. In February we joined with the Banbridge Academy Medical Society to welcome Colm Gildernew MLA who is Chair of the Stormont Health Committee. Mr Gildernew was willing to answer questions on all aspects of his role as an MLA and there were enlightening discussions about the Covid pandemic and the future direction of the NHS. Also in February Year 13 and 14 Politics students contributed to a consultation on new legislation that was planned to allow parents flexibility in deciding what age their child should start primary school. This later reached the Assembly as the School Age Bill.

In March, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we took part in a really informative link up which gave schools the opportunity to question the former BBC Russia Editor Bridget

Kendall. She provided a wealth of material on Russia's motivations and told us about the different interviews she had carried out with Vladimir Putin. We also participated in a session with the Stormont Education Service and had the opportunity to meet with Doug Beattie MLA, who spoke about his work as UUP leader, as an MLA and his knowledge of nuclear weapons and international relations. Also in March, we linked up with the Religious Studies Department to welcome the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, the Right Rev Dr David Bruce for a very enjoyable and enlightening talk.

Both the students and teachers enjoyed and appreciated the opportunities that we were able to avail of this year as they helped bring Politics to life and allowed the pupils involved to see the many different aspects of Politics and how the subject is intrinsic to our everyday world.

