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Take Charge of Change: Being Young and Irish 2012, Full Report

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“TAKE CHARGE OF CHANGE”

**BEING YOUNG
& IRISH 2012**

TAKE CHARGE OF CHANGE

‘Being Young and Irish’

A report on President Michael D. Higgins’
consultation ‘Being Young and Irish’ with
young people between May-November 2012



“I hope that once the seminar is over, people with power keep getting bombarded with these ideas”

“I believe that the idea of having young people involved in the future of Ireland is an ingenious idea, and I would love to see even more of it. I think it would be an incredible idea to have groups or clubs set up in schools to discuss our ideas for the future”

“We can stand up and fight until our voices are heard”

This document was produced for the Being Young and Irish Implementation Group at Áras an Uachtaráin by

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FOREWORD BY PRESIDENT MICHAEL D. HIGGINS

I initiated the 'Being Young and Irish' consultation with the young people of Ireland because of my belief that we are in a period of immense change. How that change is interpreted and how we as citizens respond is crucial to our present challenging circumstances. Our response will define our future.

In the change that takes place, the creativity, the imagination, the decencies, of young people must have an opportunity of being expressed. To be in charge of change is the challenge that faces all of us citizens in Ireland, in Europe, in our world.

'Being Young and Irish' is an opportunity for young people to build a vision of the Irishness which they see as best for all of us in our different generations, now and for the future.

In taking part in 'Being Young and Irish' our young people joined those fellow humans all over the world who believe that a new world with the stamp of humanity can be created.

This report sets out the results of a consultation which took place in Ireland between May 25th and Sept. 29th with young people aged 17 – 26. Young people were invited to share their views on the future of Ireland in writing, through prose or poetry, or through music, or video. In addition, four regional workshops were held in Dublin, Monaghan, Cork and Galway. I would like to say how genuinely impressed and moved I have been by all those I met at the regional workshops, and by the contributions received here in Áras an Uachtaráin.

I would like to thank the researchers at Dublin Institute of Technology for collating the findings of the consultation in the report which follows. I would also like to thank all those who volunteered their time, energy and skills to 'Being Young and Irish'. Most important of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the young people who joined workshops, or made contributions to the consultation. By so generously sharing of themselves - their hopes, their concerns, their vision and their vulnerabilities - and by reflecting with their peers on the future of Ireland, they demonstrate the active and inclusive citizenship necessary to transform and renew Ireland in this period of great challenge and change.

Michael D. Higgins
Uachtaráin na hÉireann
President of Ireland

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESULTS

In his inauguration speech on November 11 2011 President Michael D. Higgins said that as part of his Presidency he would host a number of seminars which would reflect and explore themes that went beyond immediate legislative demands but which were important to the shared life of the Irish people. He decided that the first of these Seminars would be built on the theme of 'Being Young and Irish.'

At the launch of a process of consultation to underpin the Seminar, President Higgins invited young people to think together about the way we wish to live with others; the way our institutions must work and serve their purpose for the welfare of all; the way we define what is valuable; and to reflect on the economy and its connection to society. In his invitation President Higgins encouraged young people to share in the shaping of a renewed Ireland:

"The transformation of Ireland needs the commitment and contribution of our young people. Now more than ever we need your energy, your ideas, your ideals, your creativity, your courage. Your country needs your passion, your innovation and your vision".

This report details the many suggestions, ideas and comments made by respondents to President Higgins' 'Being Young and Irish' consultation. A total of two hundred and ninety four people participated in the Regional Workshops. Four hundred and thirty nine individual submissions were received from 17-26 year olds. In addition, six group submissions were received representing the views of seventy four participants. Thirty two individuals engaged with both parts of the process. Thus a total of seven hundred and seventy five, 17 - 26 year olds contributed to the consultation.

Young people aged 17-26 years were asked to respond to three questions:

1. What is your vision for Ireland?
2. What needs to happen to make your vision possible?
3. What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

What Is Your Vision For Ireland?

This report details the many components of young people's vision for a future Ireland. Young people's visions of an Ireland of the future were steeped in positive images, thoughts and feelings about Ireland, the Ireland that they want to see come back to take its central place in Europe and the world or to take a new place in the world of the future.

A socially conscious Ireland was some young people's vision, *"a country where the improvement of the living standard of the lowest in society is always a priority", "a country where everyone has an education, ample food, a warm house and freedom from tax slavery and fear of poverty", a country whose citizens fight "for human rights and against all kinds of prejudices and oppression", a caring society, "where those who are vulnerable are supported in every possible way".*

Some sought a *"better mental health system for young people"* while others emphasised the importance of community in charting our future:

"my vision for Ireland, is one that is built upon a foundation of community and a spirit of same. A place where people can rely on each other. An Ireland that supports the people on the ground working within and making a difference at community level. An Ireland that is not measured by financial success but by the progress of its people".

In short, *"an Ireland that looks after its own"*.

Our place on the world stage was also the vision of some. That Ireland would *"become a leading example of a progressive society who simply got on with it"* to a world:

"... that sees us become strong, confident and respected on the world stage. A nation that continues to produce the scholars and innovators that we have had in the past. In a national sense, I want to see Ireland be a country that gives everyone a chance to work; that gives youth a future, and old age a security".

What Needs To Happen To Make Your Vision Possible?

The consultation process generated a number of priority areas of concern, and hundreds of ideas and suggestions for concrete steps that can be taken to bring about positive change in Irish society. These are detailed throughout the report, especially in the section 'Suggestions [for change]'. Not surprisingly, the suggestions closely parallel the main elements of young people's vision for Ireland. The most common areas of concern which emerged across the online, postal and workshop contributions and which are thus discussed in this report are:

- Employment, enterprise, social security, concern with the economy
- Political Reform
- Education

- Equality
- Involve Young People
- Being Positive
- Health
- Community and Civil Society
- Identity as Irish

Employment, enterprise, social security, concern with economy

Young people called for the economy to be stimulated, with an emphasis on job creation and the need to integrate welfare and social protection more closely with inclusivity, enterprise culture and social solidarity. The considerable growth potential in the creative industries, including arts, drama, music, dance and film and the natural creativity of the Irish people was recognised along with the need to harness these strengths to create a global cultural hub. The role of social welfare was mentioned by many young people, who frequently questioned the fairness of its distribution.

Unsurprisingly, there is concern about the burden of private banking debt and its conversion into sovereign debt which reduces social and economic capacity. Furthermore there is concern about the overall economic situation and that the focus of public policy is on stabilising the shock from the banking crisis as opposed to stimulating enterprise and especially youth enterprise. On balance, young people have suggestions that involve mobilizing our social and creative potential. Moreover, a small number of young people emphasized the need for economic development to be driven by a collective sense of purpose; for the “welfare of the people”; that we as a society learn from the errors of the “Celtic Tiger” where private gain has ultimately delivered the “complete enslavement of generations”.



A significant level of concern is raised by young people in relation to the prospects for graduate employment and their perception that current labour market activation schemes are for jobseekers who have already been in the workforce, so excluding new graduates.

Critical here is the need to activate the State in relation to job creation and the creation of opportunities for graduates to gain experience in industries in which they are training / studying based upon meritocratic principles, as opposed to patronage:

“My parents are not highly educated. We do not have the links required for politics, collegiality or prestige. There is no way up the social ladder. I have the qualifications, results, aptitude, ability and will to be a primary teacher. I cannot secure such a position in this country. My sister is a secondary teacher and she faces the same reality. Enthusiastic graduates become despondent”.

The concern in some of the vision statements is to create a society that is greater than the economy which is driven by a strong sense of social solidarity:

“Employers want to use our energy and desperation, so we work all of the hours available and can't get minimum wage for it. However, every time we want to give up, we remember that our parents are getting older. Someone will have to take care of them, as they did for our grandparents. If we leave, we forsake that care that they have given us. The cycle is broken”.

Political reform

Demand for political reform was also a dominant and recurring theme of submissions. There was a sense that more needs to be done to encourage citizens to become active and engaged both in politics and in civil society. There is a perceived disconnect between young people and politicians and this needs to be addressed: “There is a massive void between the youth of Ireland and their elected representatives”. Young people feel that they are not being heard.

The need for young people to be better informed and more engaged in the political process was expressed by many. The State could facilitate this by, for example, holding elections on a Saturday but it was widely expressed that young people themselves have a responsibility to become involved, to make their voices heard. The need for better communication between politicians and young people was highlighted.

Education

The theme of education was prominent in a large number of submissions. A wide variety of topics were raised but a number of themes recurred repeatedly. Many young people emphasised the importance of education in their submissions and highlighted the need for reform as a priority. The second level system, in particular, was deemed by many not to be ‘fit for purpose’ as it does not prepare people for active citizenship and over-emphasises a narrow set of skills required to perform well in the current Leaving Certificate examination. Most evident was the sense that education needs

to be broader and to help citizens become open-minded, self-reliant, open to becoming involved in society and being active citizens:

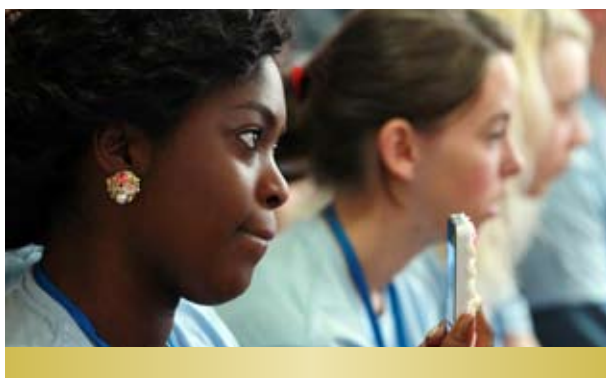
“at the moment our system does not encourage a broad view on life or an open mind. It suppresses creativity and independence and it does not educate them for life”.

There was harsh criticism of the rote learning that is perceived to be involved in preparing for the Leaving Certificate examination and repeatedly participants called for the system to foster more rounded, independent, creative and critical thinking.

Access and cost were the key issues raised regarding third level education. Access was mainly related to the points system, a system which is seen to be inequitable and hugely problematic. There was an overwhelming sense that access to third level should be free of cost:

“Colleges should be for everyone not just one who can afford the chosen luxury of gaining a university place. Those who haven’t reached their fullest potential academically or personally must be given extra help in order to make this so”.

In addition, as the above quote shows, there was a strong understanding that access is socially differentiated and this is not acceptable. The notion of introducing university fees was unanimously opposed. There were several calls for the grants system to be maintained and improved.



Equality

The theme of equality was one of the most prominent in both submissions and in the regional workshops. Young people emphasised the need for respect for individual rights and freedom of expression and many related a vision of Ireland that embraces multiculturalism.

The following quote crystallises the thoughts of many participants in the area of Equality:

“My vision for Ireland of the future is one where the intrinsic value of each individual is recognised and where those in power strive to fulfil the basic needs of every individual and to respect and protect their basic rights”.

Various structural issues are blamed for stifling Ireland’s move towards a more equal society:

“Ireland desperately needs a constitution which represents all members of our society regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation”.

Involve young people

Young people have identified that there needs to be a structured forum where the youth voice can be promoted, encouraged and fostered. Many participants praised the Being Young and Irish initiative, and called for further related initiatives to bring the process further. Young people have a deep desire to contribute to politics and society and are seeking to develop both a culture of civic participation and structures that support its implementation.

There is an overall sense that young people are not listened to:



“Young people need first to be given the opportunity to be listened to. It is near impossible to get your voice heard in our society ... there might be a lack of participation [which is] completely understandable ... they are not shown any respect”.

The suggestion is that many opportunities are missed by leaders who ignore the youth: “People always assume we are young and immature, yet we have more bright ideas than they think”. This goes beyond creativity, to encompass practical solutions: “I believe that the youth of this country are an underused tool in establishing our stability”.

There was a confident tone of defiance in many young people’s submissions: “The government needs to be willing and ready to listen to the young people of their country”.

The following submission highlights the need for young people to see an opportunity to participate:

“Samhlaím ar tír ina dtuigeann daoine óga go bhfuil ról le n-imirt acu sa shochaí. Breathnaím timpeall orm féin gach lá agus feicim daoine le cumas agus muinín. An fhadhb atá ann ná ní fheiceann na daoine seo dótháin deiseanna rannphairtíochta ann. Cloiseann siad na dróch-scéalta ar fad faoi stad reatha na tíre agus mothaíonn siad díspregtha i leith an ról atá acu ann. [I imagine a country where young people understand that they have a role to play in society. Around me every day I see people with ability and confidence. The problem is these people do not see enough opportunities for participation. They hear all the bad stories and this deters them from participating]”.

Being Positive

The importance of being positive was repeatedly highlighted by the young people. Young people expressed a strong need for optimism in envisaging an Ireland of the future and a sense of disillusionment with the negativity they experience around them.

Most references to our heritage however were in the form of expressing a deep awareness of our country as a great nation and our people as resourceful, competent, well educated and owning a strong sense of community spirit.

“We have an amazing willingness to make the very best out of a situation that so often seems impossible. That is why today I know that we are not only going to take on the difficulties we face but do so in such a way that ensures Ireland will once more be a strong, vibrant and truly brilliant place to live”.

Many young people asked us to recall events in the country that evoked a feeling of pride in our country:

“... the carnival atmosphere when Ireland qualified for soccer championships, or the feeling each county gets when they win an All-Ireland or each parish’s swagger when they win the county – even at Junior ... every year without fail, we have an opportunity to celebrate Ireland’s birth”.

Health

Submissions on health included mental health and suicide and mental health services. In addition issues of alcohol, smoking and drug use were raised under the broad theme of health.

Mental health and suicide were raised and many of the comments made were made in the first person. Reflecting this one participant points out:

“Too many people are dying because they aren’t aware of the help that’s there and too often, they can’t get the help they need when they look. I am a young person whose mental health service does not help their mental health. I do not want to end up as another number among the hundreds who take their lives each year. We need change and we need it now”.

Overall regarding healthcare, respondents suggested that “the system is wrong”:

“We need to have a broader discussion on disability, health and mental health than simply how much they get in the budget (which of course is important!)”. Also, “We need to have broader discourse as a society as to how we view people with disabilities and mental health problems and work to challenge misconceptions through education”.

There were a range of submissions related to various aspects of alcohol, covering themes such as alcohol abuse, binge drinking and underage drinking.

The following submission summarises a range of views:

“Alcohol is the drug of choice among youth. Many young people are experiencing the consequences of drinking too much, at too early an age. As a result, underage drinking is a leading public health problem in this country”.

Community and civil society

The young people strongly believe in active citizenship, volunteering and helping others and see these values as a strong part of their understanding of being Irish.

There is a strong sense in the submissions that the sense of community is something that has been lost during the boom years. Here, submissions point out that while individuals need to be valued within a shared sense of solidarity, individualism is an insufficient basis for the providing the spirit and energy towards recovery and social progress. It is this spirit of togetherness in community that

appears to give meaning and belonging to individual lives in a variety of settings, from the cradle to the grave:

“Importance is the very thing we crave in life we want to look into the eyes of our fellow countrymen/women and see that they want us to work for them (employment/colleague), socialise with them (friends), share our lives with them (loved ones) and why not money comes and goes but that feeling remains right to our very last breath”.

Identity as Irish

Contributions on this theme fall into two broad categories:

- (i) In light of the current economic situation, unemployment and emigration, there is a questioning of what constitutes Irish identity
- (ii) The Irish language is what distinguishes Irishness but that we need an approach to Irish that incorporates it into everyday life as a way of helping people to be proud of their Irishness.

The theme of promoting Ireland abroad was raised by many. Young people talked about how Ireland could rely on its students, graduates and emigrant population to promote Ireland.

“Most importantly we need to recognise that what we consider to be inherently Irish will not and does not have to be retained as part of the constant process of change. We can pick and choose together the values which will make all of our lives worth living and create a new form of Irishness which builds on the experiences and values of the past. Our ambitions should be free from historical hang-up but with the benefit of historical hindsight”.

A number of young people suggested a celebration of Irishness, a national day where Irish food, culture, language, music, sport and dancing could be show-cased in Ireland and internationally. The Irish language is important to a sense of Irishness, but many are concerned that the current approach to the teaching of Irish in mainstream education may be counter-productive.

What Can You And Other Young People Do To Achieve This Vision?

As for the first question (What is your vision for Ireland?), the report details many suggestions from young people as to what concrete steps they can take to achieve their vision for Ireland. Many mentioned voluntary work and bringing about change starting with small steps in their families and communities. Joining political parties, community initiatives, voting, and encouraging their peers on healthy behaviours were also frequent suggestions.



At the Dublin workshop participants noted that they could:

“ Take social responsibility / lead by example / Be an ambassador to be proud of who you are, listen and inspire, mentor others / Identify other Role Models of Young People who are creating change”

In the Cork workshop, the priority suggestions were “volunteering, getting involved, use your vote”. In Galway the top items noted by participants for actions by young people were:

- “Get educated! From primary school up ‘educate for life not exams’
- Establish youth forums like this to discuss topics and feedback solutions; and
- Buy Irish and be Irish, speak Irish”.

In contrast to these views, the top ranked view of young people in the Monaghan workshop regarding their own contribution focused on lack of power: “We the young generation of Ireland feel we are powerless to instigate any real change due to a lack of respect for our opinions”. More positive suggestions were also noted in Monaghan and, as in the other settings, they are dominated by ‘get involved’, ‘use our voices’, and ‘use our vote’.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In his inauguration speech on November 11th 2011 President Michael D. Higgins undertook as part of his Presidency to host a number of seminars which would reflect and explore themes that went beyond immediate legislative demands but which were important to the shared life of the Irish people. He decided that the first of these Seminars would focus on “Being Young and Irish”.

At the launch of the Being Young and Irish consultation, President Higgins invited young people to think together about the way we wish to live with others; the way our institutions must work and serve their purpose for the welfare of all; the way we define what is valuable, and to reflect on the economy and its connection to society. In his invitation to young people President Higgins invited young people to share in the shaping of a renewed Ireland:

“The transformation of Ireland needs the commitment and contribution of our young people. Now more than ever we need your energy, your ideas, your ideals, your creativity, your courage. Your country needs your passion, your innovation and your vision”.

The central goal of the initiative was to engage young people as active and reflective citizens in contemporary Ireland and to recognise, affirm and encourage them as one of the sources of wisdom in solving core social, political, economic and cultural issues confronting Ireland.

In particular, ‘Being Young and Irish’ aimed to:

- Open up channels of participation for young people and involve them in the national discussion and debate about what kind of country we now have, what form of republic we wish to create and how it can be achieved;
- Identify, promote and celebrate original, youth-led sensitive and realisable solutions to our present conditions and proposals for a better society in the future;
- *Hear from young people and seek their views on the difficulties young people from diverse backgrounds are experiencing, as young and Irish people today.*

This report details the results of President Michael D. Higgins’s Being Young and Irish youth consultation with 17-26 year olds. A total of 775¹ young people participated in the consultation which had two distinct parts. The first consisted of an invitation to make submissions directly to the Office

¹ A total of two hundred and ninety four people participated in the Regional Workshops. Four hundred and thirty nine individual submissions were received from 17-26 year olds. In addition, six group submissions were received representing the views of seventy four participants. Thirty two individuals engaged with both parts of the process. Thus a total of seven hundred and seventy five, 17 - 26 year olds contributed to the consultation.

of the President. Most of these submissions were made on-line via the website of the Office of the President. A small number were submitted by post. The second part of the consultation consisted of a series of four workshops held with approximately 75 young people each in Dublin, Cork, Monaghan and Galway during September 2012. In both parts of the consultation, the focus was on three questions posed to young people by President Higgins:

1. What is your vision for Ireland?
2. What needs to happen to make your vision possible?
3. What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

Chapter Two consists of a thematic analysis of the submissions received from 17-26 year olds. Many issues, ideas and suggestions were received in the submissions and these have been grouped into nine main categories or themes: 'Employment, enterprise, social security, concern with economy'; 'Political reform'; 'Education'; 'Equality'; 'Involve young people'; 'Be positive'; 'Health'; 'Community and civil society'; and 'Identity as Irish'. Chapter two also presents an overview of the visions submitted by young people and suggested actions that are required to achieve these visions.

Chapter Three analyses the outputs from the four regional workshops. Each workshop was a daylong series of discussions centred on the 'three questions', and structured by smaller groups of 10 people suggesting (a) their 'top five visions for a future Ireland (b) their 'top five things that need to change to achieve this vision and (c) their 'top five' suggestions as to what they and other young people can do to achieve their vision. The full group of approximately 75 participants then voted across the full range of choices to create a 'Top 10' of visions, actions and suggestions.

Chapter Four presents an overall analysis of the findings. Firstly, the outputs from across the four regional workshops are compared. Secondly, the extent to which the two parts of the consultation process are comparable is considered.

The report concludes with two Appendices, the first of which, Appendix A, details the process and methodology of the Being Young and Irish consultation. Appendix B sets out the number of submissions received by county.

CHAPTER 2: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF ON-LINE AND HARD COPY SUBMISSIONS

The primary themes are described below in order of frequency in which they were mentioned in submissions. This Part is divided into three sections. The first section examines the submissions which included a 'vision' for Ireland. As this was the first question in the consultation process, it is not surprising that this issue received the largest number of responses (232) which ranged across a broad range of themes. The second section examines the nine themes which were most frequently discussed by young people in their submissions, specifically

1. *Employment, Enterprise, Social Security, Concern with Economy*
2. *Political reform*
3. *Education*
4. *Equality*
5. *Involve young people*
6. *Be positive*
7. *Health*
8. *Community and civil society*
9. *Identity as Irish*

The third section focuses on the main suggestions for actions that emerged from the consultation process. As for submissions received for 'vision', these range across all the main nine themes listed above, and other more minor issues also. The dominant concrete suggestions are presented as a 'menu' of actions for consideration.

2.1 VISION

A vision for a future Ireland was central to this consultation process and, not surprisingly, young people responded with ‘visions’ at the centre of their responses. Young people envisioned an Ireland “where people believe there is something to serve greater than themselves”, “a free, liberal, democratic society which holds reason, science and world-class education in high esteem”. Many referred to a place where people would feel proud – proud of our achievements, proud of our culture and heritage, and proud to take our place on the world stage, including “leading the world in technology innovations”.

Young people’s visions of an Ireland of the future were steeped in positive images, thoughts and feelings about Ireland, the Ireland that they want to see come back to take its central place in Europe and the world or to take a new place in the world of the future, an Ireland that represents “acceptance and tolerance”, “honesty and integrity”, “a secular state where no one religion, sexual orientation or race is favoured but an inclusive society that celebrates its multicultural citizens and culture, where individual rights and equality for all citizens are embedded in our legislation”.

Many young people referred to a vision where people not only have rights but also responsibilities, “where people will have to be happy with what they have and not always want more ... to be ambitious but not to be greedy”, “where the youth get a back bone and not a wish bone”, “a confident hardworking nation where everybody is grateful for what they have and respectful to each other”, and where its citizens are “willing to work hard to save the planet to ensure a bright future for future generations”. The importance of collective responsibility and communities working together was highlighted, “where everyone works for the common good, aware of their role in maintaining its social, political and environmental wellbeing”, an Ireland where there is “more social integration” and acceptance of difference within society, “an Ireland that is not ageist towards young people - an Ireland that realises that its youth is its future”. The vision of Ireland was of a place where young people in particular are given a voice and “recognized as active citizens ... capable of creating change”, a place where “they are given the faith and confidence to step forward and be the future”.

An Ireland that is prosperous and self sustaining was seen as important to many, where job opportunities were available with “more incentive for people to work and not to stay on social welfare” and where the youth would want to stay, “a place where young people have a solid future and do not face the necessity of emigrating”.

Some young people envisioned an Ireland where young people have a stronger voice in the governance of the country, “especially when it comes to matters involving the youth”, where 16 year olds can vote and where the education system enables children and young people “to follow their own strengths and interests, wherever they may lie”.

A united Ireland was the vision of some of the young people, a “re-birth of this nation as a new Republic” others aspired to “developing the ever closer relationship between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland” while one suggestion was a pan-Ireland educational curriculum that could be rolled out throughout the 32 counties. The young person quoted below put this in an historical context:

“Ba mhaith liom Éire atá bunaithe ar fhorógra 1916 agus ar fhorógra 1867 go háirithe. Éire ina bhfuil athrú iomlán ar an chóras pholaitíochta, sa dóigh is nach bhfuil muid ag déanamh aithrise ar chóras na Breataine. Ní féidir linn dearmad a dhéanamh ar na Sé Chontae - is linne iad. Tá a lán fimíneachais in Éirinn an lae inniu, agus ma bhí gá ann in 1892 le hÉireann a dhí-anglánú tá sé beo bríomhar inniu i 2012. Mar fhocal scoir: ní amháin saor ach Gaelach chomh maith; ní amháin Gaelach ach saor chomh maith. [I want an Ireland based on the 1916 Proclamation and more particularly the 1867 Proclamation.² An Ireland which has a complete change in the political system, so we are not mimicking the British system. We cannot forget the Six Counties - they are ours. There is a lot of hypocrisy in Ireland today, and if there was a need in 1892 to de-Anglicise Ireland it is also alive today in 2012. In conclusion: not only free but Irish as well; not only Irish but free as well]”.

² 1916, Proclamation of the Irish Republic and 1867, the Irish Republican Brotherhood Proclamation of the Irish Republic.

Political reform was highlighted in “an Ireland where politics isn’t a bad word” and where 16 year olds can vote. Many referred to the importance of citizens’ responsibility to inform themselves and to cast their ballot at elections, and encouraging more people to get involved in political representation at local, national and European level “ensuring all voices in society are heard in the decision making process”. While some aspired to “a country in which our cultural and linguistic heritage is preserved within the framework of greater European integration”, others called for a “re-evaluation of our position in the European Union and a return to the Punt currency”.

A sustainable self-sufficient country represented many young people’s vision, “an Ireland with educational, agricultural and social support systems that are both robust and adaptable to change, do not depend on unnecessary levels of bureaucracy and can comfortably survive international free market fluctuation”. Others emphasised our rich resources in our highly skilled technology sector, aspiring to be “a high tech, entrepreneurial driven economy”, “with high skills in engineering science and technology”.

The Irish language was an important element of the vision for some:

“Tír dátheangach; áit a bheadh tuiscint cheart ar oidhreacht an oileáin - an ghaeilge agus na buanna a bhaineann leis an nGaeilge a bheith agat ach go háirithe”. [A bilingual country: a country that would have a proper understanding of the island’s heritage – particularly that people would have an appreciation of the Irish language and its richness].

“Éire a bheadh compordach lena cultúr féin is go mbeadh deis ag gach uile dhuine bheith iomlán líofa sa chuid is tábhachtaí den chultúr sin, ár dteanga”. [An Ireland that would be comfortable with its own culture so that everyone would have the opportunity to be totally fluent in the most important part of that culture: our language].

Our place on the world stage was also the vision of some. That Ireland would “become a leading example of a progressive society who simply got on with it” to a world:

“... that sees us become strong, confident and respected on the world stage. A nation that continues to produce the scholars and innovators that we have had in the past. In a national sense, I want to see Ireland be a country that gives everyone a chance to work; that gives youth a future, and old age a security”.

A socially conscious Ireland was some young people’s vision, “a country where the improvement of the living standard of the lowest in society is always a priority”, “a country where everyone has an education, ample food, a warm house and freedom from tax slavery and fear of poverty”, a country whose citizens fight “for human rights and against all kinds of prejudices and oppression”, a caring society, “where those who are vulnerable are supported in every possible way”.

Some sought a “better mental health system for young people” while others emphasised the importance of community in charting our future:

“my vision for Ireland, is one that is built upon a foundation of community and a spirit of same. A place where people can rely on each other. An Ireland that supports the people on the ground working within and making difference at community level. An Ireland that is not measured by financial success but by the progress of its people”.

In short, “an Ireland that looks after its own”.

2.2.1 EMPLOYMENT, ENTERPRISE, SOCIAL SECURITY, CONCERN WITH ECONOMY

Submissions made a clear link between the related themes of employment and enterprise culture. Both were central to a vision of an Ireland that generates wealth, provides security for its citizens and offsets the need for non-voluntary emigration.

Employment appears to be a key issue in terms of building social cohesion because young people expressed the view that without the generation of employment, the country becomes detached from its potential. The key here is that employment creates a sense of national community or 'a sense of pride', by offsetting emigration. To achieve the goal of creating employment three key themes were prominent:

- (i) Construct an enterprise culture that is jobs focused and corruption free.
- (ii) If necessary use the public sector as a stimulus for employment generation.
- (iii) Establish mechanisms for promoting innovation that are jobs focused.

On the theme of emigration, young people were divided; some viewed emigration as a fact forced upon people, others saw its potential as a resource to enrich our country. Young people stressed the need to reach out to those emigrating and to find avenues for integrating them where possible through active representation at home. However, the bleakness of the current situation is unavoidable: "I work part time below minimum wage for the same company for the past 5 years. The first thing on my mind when I get my degree is to get out of here for good".

In contrast, young people stressed the importance of adopting a resilient stance:

"I try myself on a personal level to live a thoughtful, caring, politically aware, positive life, hoping that such a way of life will instil hope and confidence in me so I never need to emigrate. I believe through this positivity I can shape the view of my generation, even if it's one person at a time".

Unsurprisingly, there is concern about the burden of private banking debt and the conversion of debt into sovereign debt which reduces social and economic capacity. Furthermore there is concern about the overall economic situation and that the focus of public policy is on stabilising the shock from the banking crisis as opposed to stimulating enterprise and especially youth enterprise. On balance,

young people have suggestions that involve mobilizing our social and creative potential. Moreover, a small number of young people emphasized the need for economic development to be driven by a collective sense of purpose; for the “welfare of the people”; that we as a society learn from the errors of the “Celtic Tiger” where private gain has ultimately delivered the “complete enslavement of generations”: “They took more than they needed. They took things which in actual fact they couldn’t afford. We need a new Ireland void of greed”.

A positive vision of a creative and innovative Ireland is evident from young people in the area of economic production based upon the belief that people, and not profits, matter most. There is a realization that this is not contrary to generating a vibrant, creative enterprise culture. A theme here surrounds the generation of the creative industries. Ireland has a lot to offer to a global culture and its diaspora has a global reach. In this context, stimulating the creative industries in arts, drama, music, dance and film is tied together in submissions with the possibility for generating employment. Suggestions include mobilizing entrepreneurs, scientists and artists together. In addition there is a suggestion that given our experience and success in attracting industries like Google and Facebook, Ireland is well positioned as a global cultural hub that can be mobilized through online companies which one young person indicated were low on overhead and set up costs.

A significant level of concern is raised by young people in relation to the prospects for graduate employment and that current labour market activation schemes are for jobseekers who have already been in the workforce, so excluding new graduates. Critical here is the need to activate the State in relation to job creation and the creation of opportunities for graduates to gain experience in industries in which they are training / studying based upon meritocratic principles, as opposed to patronage:

“My parents are not highly educated. We do not have the links required for politics, collegiality or prestige. There is no way up the social ladder. I have the qualifications, results, aptitude, ability and will to be a primary teacher. I cannot secure such a position in this country. My sister is a secondary teacher and she faces the same reality. Enthusiastic graduates become despondent”.

Social security

The concern in some of the vision statements is to create a society that is greater than the economy which is driven by a strong sense of social solidarity:

“Employers want to use our energy and desperation, so we work all of the hours available and can’t get minimum wage for it. However, every time we want to give up, we remember that our parents are getting older. Someone will have to take care of them, as they did for our grandparents. If we leave, we forsake that care that they have given us. The cycle is broken”.

While in general there is a strong sense of the need for social cohesion, a small number of contributors considered themselves more deserving of help than those currently receiving welfare. In all, prejudicial submissions from young people were very few; the majority were seeking to promote a fair, inclusive model of social security and labour market participation. However, there is a strong sense of anger and resentment from some who feel some recipients of social welfare are undeserving. There is a strong sense also that work provides a sense of purpose and that welfare is ideally a short, transitional stage and a desire that the State and all sectors generate the necessary machinery to achieve higher levels of employment. The term social partnership is not evident but there is a desire for social and economic co-operation and dialogue.

2.2.2 POLITICAL REFORM

“Political reform” was coded by researchers under 18 different codes. The focus was on the national political system, as distinct from local / regional governance or Ireland’s engagement with the world more widely, e.g., through the European Union or the United Nations. Surprisingly, there was little if any mention of the Troika³, for example. The general focus was on democratic engagement. The main theme related to the need to develop greater inclusion, and more involvement of citizens and particularly of young people in active politics. There was some sense that young people needed to get active, but it was mainly a question of government enacting change such that young people would be encouraged to become more involved. The tax system came in for some criticism and there was a sense that our society needs to become less unequal, as currently it is perceived that poorer classes carry an unfair burden. Overall, young people’s submissions were characterised by high levels of unhappiness and concern about the current situation. Themes are discussed below, roughly in order of frequency.

Involve more people, especially young people, in politics

This was the strongest theme in the category of “political reform”. Young people feel that they are not being heard. There is a perceived disconnection between young people and politicians and this needs to be addressed: “There is a massive void between the youth of Ireland and their elected representatives”. There was a call within the contributions for more to be done to encourage citizens to become active and engaged both in politics and in civil society. “The government needs to increase voter turnout and youth participation in politics by holding elections and referendums on a weekend”. There was a strong perception of incompetence among politicians and there was a sense that people should do something about this by going out to vote, lobbying public representatives and refusing to accept poor decision-making, etc. This theme was linked to education in the sense that young people need to be educated as to the importance of becoming actively involved in political life.

³ The European Union, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund who are overseeing Ireland’s bailout funds and associated economic management.

Reform of the tax system

Overall, participants felt that as a society we are over-taxed and there were widespread calls for the government to stop cutting people's incomes, be they salaries or social welfare benefits. There were some specific calls not to tax young people so harshly. There was a strong feeling that we live in an unequal society where the well-off do not pay their fair share. Concrete suggestions as to how to move forward in a more equitable way, however, were scarce. VAT levels on goods like alcohol and cigarettes received some mention, but not in any consistent way.

A more inclusive society

This was an important theme that was manifest in a number of different ways. Legal reform to offer real and effective protection to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community was frequently cited. Opening up Irish citizenship to migrants was a further theme. Barriers to obtaining Irish citizenship are seen to be problematic: "I am from Pakistan, but have been living in Ireland for nearly 16 years. I don't have Irish citizenship yet because of the law". Disability issues were also raised in terms of the introduction of sign language in law.

Constitutional reform

Detailed, informed commentary on constitutional reform was very limited. Of the few participants that dealt with it, the following points arose: in moving to introduce constitutional reform, the Government should take suggestions from the people (looking to the Icelandic model). Any reform should bear in mind the need to include measures that protect against bad government practices and control excessive governance.

There were some calls for politicians to be more accountable and for matters to be more transparent but not as many as might have been expected. There were remarkably few points raised in respect of local governance. Other specific points raised by very few participants were the need to reform the whip system and a call for an end to partition.

2.2.3. EDUCATION

The theme of education was prominent in a large number of submissions. A wide variety of topics were raised but a number of themes recurred repeatedly. Before identifying and discussing those themes it is useful to note a number of general observations. Firstly, there is a sense of unease and indeed unhappiness in how the participants view the current state of education. This sense of concern is strongly allied to a deep belief in the importance and value of education and the conviction that the State really needs to address the problems currently besetting the sector. It is interesting to note that attention focused overwhelmingly on the second and third level sectors and on the transition between the two sectors. The primary sector featured very infrequently. The issues raised in respect of the third level sector were almost exclusively related to fees, grants and access more generally. The quality, content and ‘ways of working’ of the third level sector did not arise to any great extent. In contrast, the issues raised in respect of the second level sector were mostly related to curriculum content, methods of assessment and to whether it is “fit for purpose”. The main issues raised by participants are discussed below.

Structural overhaul of the second level education system

Overall, this was the most dominant idea and it came through both implicitly and explicitly. We discuss this under a number of themes:

An education that better prepares people for active citizenship

There was a strong sense that the current education system does not adequately prepare people for citizenship. There were a few different dimensions to this. Most evident was the sense that education needs to be broader and to help citizens become open-minded, self-reliant, open to becoming involved in society and being active citizens: “at the moment our system does not encourage a broad view on life or an open mind. It suppresses creativity and independence and it does not educate them for life”. There was harsh criticism of the rote learning that is perceived to be involved in preparing for the Leaving Certificate examination and repeatedly participants called for the system to foster more rounded, independent, creative and critical thinking. Participants spoke of wanting young people to “study because they find it interesting, rather than studying it for the sake of earning points for their CAO application”. Teaching methods and styles of engagement in the classroom are perceived to be in need of change with some calling for “more discursive and exploratory styles”.

There was a strong sense that the education system has not adapted to meeting the needs of a changing Ireland, either in social, cultural or economic terms. Equality was strongly prized by participants and the role that education has to play in promoting awareness and understandings of “others” was very strong: “I think young people should be taught to think for themselves and taught to help others and always treat them as equal”. Diversity in terms of learning to respect other races as well as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community, the traveller community and people with disabilities was key.

Curriculum reform

Beyond this, there were calls for changes that might be grouped under the heading “curriculum reform”. Specifically, there were repeated calls for Civics, Social and Political Education (CSPE), politics and current affairs to be taken much more seriously right through the senior cycle. The political events of recent times was a clear undercurrent here and participants strongly sense the need to better prepare people to be become active in voting, to have a better knowledge and understanding of how politics works and why it is important. It was quite remarkable the number of participants who focused on one secondary school subject – CSPE – seeing within it one possible way forward out of the present scenario. In addition, participants were clearly aware of our economic difficulties and called for the curriculum to take on board the teaching of leadership, economics, entrepreneurship, sustainability and green issues, and information technology. The teaching of language, particularly the Irish language, was seen to be problematic and several participants called for fundamental changes to how it is delivered.

A submission from a group of young prisoners highlighted the needs for a more ‘hands on’ and experimental element in school, such as wood work - “Most people have a gift – if a teacher susses that, he [the pupil] should be in a class where his talents are shown”. The young men emphasise the importance of school, education and opportunities. This is reflected in their dreams for their own children’s futures, of happy and successful school experiences.

Assessment – reform of the Leaving Certificate and associated CAO points system

There is enormous unhappiness with the current Leaving Certificate assessment system and the associated points system that controls access to third level. Overwhelmingly, participants called for this to be over-hauled. It is seen to be unfair, unproductive, ineffective and outdated. There were calls for alternatives to be explored and adapted to the Irish situation.

Third level education

Access and cost were the key issues here. Access was mainly related to the points system, a system which is seen to be inequitable and hugely problematic. There was an overwhelming sense that access to third level should be free of cost:

“Colleges should be for everyone not just one who can afford the chosen luxury of gaining a university place. Those who haven’t reached their fullest potential academically or personally must be given extra help in order to make this so”.

In addition, as the above quote shows, there was a strong understanding that access is socially differentiated and this is not acceptable. The notion of introducing university fees was unanimously opposed. There were several calls for the grants system to be maintained and improved.

Appreciation and value of education

This issue appeared in a number of guises. Firstly was the idea that young people must value and appreciate the education that is provided to them by the State. Implicit here was the idea that young people should not take it for granted, and must actively involve themselves in their learning. More generally, there was a sense of the great value that participants place on education. Education is seen as being of fundamental importance. While most of the dialogue focused on second level, the value of progressing to third level, and the need for open access to third level was also very strong.

Develop colleges of further education

A minor but interesting theme emerged relating to a perceived need to strengthen provision between the second and third levels – in the colleges of further education. This was viewed as a more applied route to securing a career and was valued as such. Also, there were a few calls for third level programmes more generally to introduce more contact with the “real world” either through work placement or civic engagement.

2.2.4. EQUALITY

The theme of equality was one of the most prominent in both submissions and in the regional workshops. Young people emphasised the need for respect for individual rights and freedom of expression and many related a vision of Ireland that embraces multiculturalism. Irish people are renowned for their spirit of openness, friendliness and welcoming and this might be recognised more in the type of society we develop. The following quote crystallises the thoughts of many participants in the area of Equality:

“My vision for Ireland of the future is one where the intrinsic value of each individual is recognised and where those in power strive to fulfil the basic needs of every individual and to respect and protect their basic rights”.

Many participants proclaimed their vision for Ireland in relation to equality and recognition of individual rights. One participant seeks “an Ireland where the watchwords are inclusion and fairness - not elitism, and féin-gafaíocht (self-serving)”.

There is a strong vision of an Ireland that is inclusive and embracing of difference and that it is an extension of civic duty to tolerate and respect: “commitments need to be made not only by young people, but by Irish people in general. It is our duty to inform ourselves and as many others around us about the importance of tolerance and respect for others in Ireland today”. In relation to Travellers who experience racism and intolerance there was a strong desire to be more integrative in our approach to turn diversity into a resource than can enrich our lives. One submission highlighted this point:

“[Travellers] can take part in youth projects and other organisations in society where it is possible to mix with people from different backgrounds and get an understanding of their lives, but we need organisations that are just for Travellers too so that we can fully be ourselves and not feel judged”.

The theme of equality was raised under a number of subthemes as outlined below. The themes are disabilities, anti-racism, gender and sexual expression, legislation for equality, abortion and reproductive rights, and freedom of religion. Also raised as an equality related issue was the idea that the country is spatially imbalanced with the Dublin region taking most of the transport infrastructure.

Disability

A number of submissions were received regarding disability. The submissions raise a range of health related services and equality issues. Regarding equality they raise two themes, elimination of stigma and the related equality of rights, and suggestions for an increased awareness in the general public. A number of these submissions are made by individuals who identify themselves as having a disability. The suggestion that further legislation is required to promote the independence of people with disabilities was mentioned by a couple of participants, one who pointed out: "I cannot sign a legal document without the PP of my dad who is my main carer". Other commentators in this regard call on Irish people to "reduce stigma ... stop the labelling of people with disabilities". Another claims: "we need to erase the mindset where people who happen to be a in wheelchair or are blind are looked upon as some sort of oddity. We need to remember we are one and not a country of division".

Suggestions regarding the reduction of stigma and introduction of education include a possible inclusion of disability on the school curriculum in tandem with an abolition of discrimination in the education system and also encouraging awareness of achievement by athletes in the Paralympics. A contributor who is deaf and who teaches sign language to hearing students in college wishes that more people could sign. "It would be great if people learned even a small amount of Sign Language, enough to say hello etc". A teenager with autism requests "that more typically developed children and young people be taught about Autism and befriend people like me so they can learn from us and us from them". This links to another respondent who states "I may have a disability but it doesn't mean I can't achieve in life". The belief of participants is that people with disabilities, of all capabilities, "have so much to offer Irish life". A number of submissions suggest that more equality can be achieved by providing opportunities for young people with disabilities to participate as equals in mainstream settings such as clubs, community groups and schools.

A number of submissions stressed that Irish society must ensure that services are provided to deliver a decent standard of living, education and support to allow people with disability fulfil their potential. This includes early intervention and diagnosis, support for all and support for carers. Better data collection was called for on a broad range of disabilities and in addition, those with disabilities and mental health issues "must be involved in important decisions affecting their lives ... We must [also] seek to gain greater knowledge of people with specific disabilities".

Anti racism

Racism is an issue that concerns many of the participants. One individual claimed that they had recently experienced a lot of racism in Dublin and another claimed that “people are being subjected to racist remarks and actions everyday”. There was a strong sense in submissions of the need to be proactively anti-racist through education across the generations: “people need to be educated about racism at a very young age”. Other suggestions for tackling this include the establishment of “an organisation that would have people visit both primary and secondary schools around the country and inform them of the effect racism has on people’s lives”. This may help to “overcome the resentment and hate regarding co-existence of the races”. Hence we need to be more proactive on being anti-racist in that “we cannot stand idly by while individuals in our society use racist insults, make negative comments about the Travelling community or exploit the vulnerable”.

Gender and sexual expression

While it is acknowledged that “in the last 20 years, Ireland has become a more inclusive society” and; “attitudes throughout our nation are slowly changing”, it was also stated that “[a] lot of Irish people are very judgmental” and; “more needs to be done”. Furthermore “In so many ways ... we are still so divided by our deep-seated prejudices and misconceptions of others ... particularly ... within Irish law which to date has not extended real and effective protection to the LGBT community”.

A number of participants expressed hurt and upset on their own behalf and on behalf of friends and family and one highlighted that “currently, LGBT youth report the highest levels of suicidal inclinations [claiming that] it has been well identified in scientific literature that a positive identity formation among LGBT individuals can act as a protective factor against a low psychosocial well-being”.

Gay and transgender issues - rights and identities

Some of the submissions illustrated the personal challenge they have experienced in struggling with their own sexual identity. One stated: “it is only recently that I am beginning to feel confident and secure enough in myself to disclose my sexual orientation to my family and close friends”.

A positive vision for the future is provided by another participant:

“My vision ... is that homosexual individuals will not have to face the stigmatization that I have endured, that hurtful and demeaning comments will not be tolerated, and that gay individuals will be able to explore their self-identity in their adolescent years without concealing this identity through fear of rejection, or worse”.

It would appear that transgender individuals have an even more challenging situation: “Trans rights in Ireland are on average 15 years behind gay rights”. One participant stated: “I want to live in an Ireland where ... those who feel they were born into the wrong gender are entitled to change this legally”.

One of the main issues raised regarding sexual expression and equality was the call for a “change in the constitution to allow same sex couples marry”, and closely linked to this, permission for these couples to adopt. Some argued that while The Civil Partnership Act 2010 recognises homosexual couples in Ireland “is a far cry from actual “marriage” and puts civil partners on a different legal footing to that of a husband and wife”.

However a dissenting voice was also expressed: “I am against gay marriage. I don’t believe it is right for the government to change something so fundamental to society”.

Gender and sexual expression - what to do?

A number of participants acknowledge the good work being done already by organisations and that the present generation of young people have it within their potential to transform sexual politics in the country:

“The youth in our country, particularly within the LGBT community already offer fantastic support networks to all individuals [i.e., the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) and the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)]. This work needs to be continued because it can make a real difference”.

The issue, it is suggested, requires political leadership: “We vote for deputies, who don’t necessarily make their position on issues affecting us clear – the contentious issue of full civil equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people (even the Taoiseach, himself, hasn’t stated his own opinion)”. In contrast: “politicians coming out in support of same sex marriage” would make a big difference. For example: “I think David Norris running for President made a big impact on how people feel about the issue of same sex marriage and gay people in general”.

Legal issues

Various structural issues are blamed for stifling Ireland’s move towards a more equal society: “Ireland desperately needs a constitution which represents all members of our society regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation”. One participant claims that many Irish “laws both insult free will and equality and make me [wonder] how free we really are”.

However, while “[w]e need more legislation for equal rights,” politicians control the alteration of laws and often use the process as “a means of getting more votes or being re-elected”. Reflecting a strong desire for law that didn’t suppress personal freedoms one submission argued that:

“laws pertaining to abortion, gay marriage or decriminalising drugs or other laws which don’t directly impact on a Citizen without their direct consent can be introduced [so long as] no one is forcing those who are against it to adopt the legal facilities that their introduction would provide”.

Abortion

Submissions on the issue of abortion reflect the social divisions that exist in the country on this issue. This is raised as an equality issue because it involves the balance of rights and the respect for the health and life of both the mother and the unborn child. There are broadly two sides to this debate raised in the submissions. One that wishes to keep Ireland ‘abortion free’ through its laws while proactively protecting the life of the unborn and the equal right to life of the mother as in the Constitution. The opposing view suggests that Ireland exports its abortion problem and hence there is a need to recognise it and legislate for it.

The former view is reflected in submissions that we should “protect the life of the unborn” so as to look after “all the vulnerable people in our society” in a sense of ‘equality’. One respondent stated “I am proud to be Irish as it is one of the few nations left who respect the life of an unborn child, I want it to stay that way”.

Some of the submissions emphasised the linkage of the issue to the medical profession and healthcare, stating that structural supports need to be reinforced: particularly we need to “continue providing a high standard of health care pre- and post-natal, including counselling” and we need to ensure that “our Irish doctors continue to carry out their duty of care in the protection and preservation of the lives and rights of pregnant women and their babies at all times”. Furthermore, we need to “build support networks for people in tough situations and build awareness of other available options”.

A contrary viewpoint was also expressed that the anti-abortion viewpoint arises from the influence of the Catholic Church which is “policing the bodies of half the nation”. They continue by claiming that “faith is a wonderful thing if it doesn’t disseminate hate (e.g. against the LGBT community) and if it doesn’t deny women their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health by denying them access to safe, affordable abortion”.

A number of submissions also support the idea of abortion reflecting the women’s right to choose side of this debate:

“Abortion must be legalised” and we should “respect ... life choices such as [the] wish and ... right to have an abortion. If women feel that bringing a child into an already struggling world is the wrong decision for them then they should be able to have the pregnancy aborted by a trained doctor”.

Furthermore, “as for women’s rights, I believe that abortion should be made legal [and] shouldn’t be something with guilt attached’. This latter participant frames their demand for abortion legalisation firmly as an issue of gender equality. Another respondents claims that there is an anti-abortion bias in the education system were “religion teachers are forcing a pro-life belief onto students” and as a result are “weighing down women in our society”. This respondent suggests that “[w]omen from an early age should be encouraged to stand up for themselves and argue their opinions”.

Religion

A number of individuals espoused the hope that Irish people could welcome the right for individuals to worship whatever faith they chose without prejudice. The view expressed by a couple of young people regarding religion and equality is: “this country ... needs to accept that certain teachings from the Catholic Church which dominated Ireland for a long time should be questioned”. This relates to a range of issues such as gender, and sexual equality. Furthermore one respondent stated: “I believe they need to be reminded of who they are representing up there in Dublin because it’s not just devout Catholics anymore”. This theme is picked up by another respondent who suggests that political leaders needs to be aware that “we are now a diverse and multi-cultural country, while many still feel religion an integral part of Irish culture, the State cannot favour any side (i.e., any particular religion) over any other”.

2.2.5. INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE

Many of the respondents discussed the importance of listening to the “voice of young people”. Linked to this was an underlying belief that young people need to take responsibility for this by becoming active and avoiding the risk of apathy. There was also a strong belief that there is a need for structures which would facilitate listening to this “voice”.

Importance of the voice of young people

One respondent simply and concisely summarised thus by stating: “We are young people and we want to be heard”. There is a strong feeling by the young people that they “are the future of this country” and “it would be fantastic to see an opportunity provided where we can be involved in producing the policies that shape our futures”. The importance of this engagement between young people and ‘the system’ is expressed strongly in the following quote which calls for this initiative to produce practical results:

“We need to see democracy and civic engagement work. We need initiatives like President Higgins’ Being Young and Irish to really deliver. This HAS TO go beyond just a report and submissions to government departments. It needs to create momentum and to see action and IMPLEMENTATION. We are sick of being consulted. We want our voices heard but also acted upon. We want leadership from President Higgins to challenge the status quo and for politicians to live up to their promises of radical reform rather than making excuses and appeasing the media, the IMF, and their re-election needs”.

One respondent claims that youth action is important because “we are a lot stronger than our older generations as we are not afraid to be heard and are not influenced by the teachings of the catholic church” another suggests the ‘freshness’ of young people is important: “we judge an initiative/idea on merit and not on age. A good idea is a good idea, regardless of age”.

The following submission highlights the need for young people to see an opportunity to participate

“Samhlaím ar tír ina dtuigeann daoine óga go bhfuil ról le n-imirt acu sa shochaí. Breathnaím timpeall orm féin gach lá agus feicim daoine le cumas agus muinín. An fhadhb atá ann ná ní fheiceann na daoine seo dotháin deiseanna rannphairtíochta ann. Cloiseann siad na dróch-scéalta ar fad faoi stad reatha na tíre agus mothaíonn siad díspregtha i leith an ról atá acu ann. [I imagine a country where young people understand that they have a role to play in society. Around me every day I see people with ability and confidence. The problem is these people do not see enough opportunities for participation. They hear all the bad stories and this deters them from participating]”.

Not listened to

There is an overall sense that young people are not listened to:

“Young people need first to be given the opportunity to be listened to. It is near impossible to get your voice heard in our society ... there might be a lack of participation [which is] completely understandable ... they are not shown any respect”.

This is pervasive throughout society and in the media: “on the news all you ever here is what older people want”. Going further, one participant criticised the negative viewpoint that is often promoted:

“People need to stop stereotyping the young and see them as individuals. People need to see that the ‘hoodie’ generation is not all negative. The wrong doings of the minority of youths should not cause people to overlook the good others have done.

More respect is needed for the youth of today. We are not all the stereotypical twenty-first century teenager out every night of the week, taking drugs and drinking away our parents’ money ... The Government need to meet young people not only talk to them but to sit up and listen”.

The suggestion is that many opportunities are missed by leaders who ignore young people: “People always assume we are young and immature, yet we have more bright ideas than they think”. This goes beyond creativity, to encompass practical solutions: “I believe that the youth of this country are an underused tool in establishing our stability”.

There was a confident tone of defiance in many young people's submissions: "The government needs to be willing and ready to listen to the young people of their country". One participant goes a step further stating "we will continue, and persist, until somebody finally takes the time to listen".

We are the problem / apathy

Some participants suggest that this negative view of young people is quite justified. "We have such an abundance of talent, creativity and intelligence in the country ... but we are happy to sit back and talk about ideas rather than do something". "I encounter many people that are too apathetic, too thoughtless". Some of the blame for youth apathy is directed towards stereotyping by media: "All too often newspapers and current affairs programmes run long features on the problems of the youth of today. The drink, the drugs, the assaults ... complaining about the student grant as simply a drink allowance". However the author of this recognises that young people are not helping themselves, claiming that:

"young people need to improve their image ... Therefore as young people we must tackle the problem of binge drinking, the problem of drug use and the problem of anti social behaviour head-on in order to merit support to improve the lives of all young people".

Technology is blamed for some of the apathy: "Today too many young people spend countless hours in front of TV and computer screens and yet they know nothing about their neighbour across the street". The following excerpt provides an interesting social commentary on the use of technology suppressing social engagement:

"A world of constant communication, incessant instant messaging, a domain where [photos are used to] depict an entire person's life. This generation, my generation, are ... 'technological natives'. We write and publicise things about ourselves and the world around us ... We tweet our feelings and post our opinions. Why are we in such a state? It's not technology. It's us ... We are the problem - [this is] the system of control we have chosen".

This apathy pervades all sectors of youth engagement, but a number of participants highlighted lack of political engagement: “Young people need to stop being passive about politics”. Also:

“I believe young people should be more interested in politics, imagine the energy, entrepreneurialism and outright honesty we could bring to Dáil Éireann! But who in their right mind would want to get involved after the events of recent years?”

Forum / channels for communication

There was a very strong view that there needs to be a structured forum where the voice of young people can be promoted, encouraged and fostered. Many participants praised the Being Young and Irish initiative, suggesting it is but a first step in the process: “I would like to be able to present my vision in a more elaborate and expressive forum”. “We need a 32 county youth participation mechanism”. One young person commented:

“The young people of Ireland have no say in current political climate at the moment. There is no central area for a young Irish person to sign in to air their views and have them taken on board in an unbiased fashion”.

This lack of youth forum covers both the expression of general youth issues, and political engagement: “there are not enough options to get further involved or get my views heard”. This lack of political engagement with youth is expressed clearly in the following quote:

“I believe it should be more accessible for young people to get involved in politics. I have never once heard any of my friends say ‘let’s go to a political meeting’. We could certainly add valuable ideas to government if listened to”.

Some of the participants recognise extant structures, “we should emphasize the role that organizations such as Comhairle na nÓg have in youth representation”. However “despite the fact that there are youth councils around the country with many members, nothing they say or do is taken seriously”. This is more clearly articulated in the following submission which suggests that the main flaw is a lack of transparency and “actioning” of youth views: “[We need a forum] where you can track the progress of your comment through government houses and see action actually taken place to fix problems”.

Get active / protest

Many calls to action were made by young people, with the following statement encapsulating the overall view: “we should shake off the old Irish attitude of complaining and then doing nothing. Write letters, lobby your TDs and get involved in organisations that you feel make a difference to what you’re passionate about” and also “lobby via social media, protest, write to newspapers, fill out this questionnaire”. A number of individuals berate their peers:

“I want to see my generation and the one after getting off their laptops and ipads and into the streets protesting the cost of living, cost of rent, upholding the dignity of the sick, poor, and uneducated like the founders of this country who wanted the people to walk freely, be educated freely and follow their faith freely. I want my generation to take this government and make them work for their employers, us the people”.

The intensity of views range from “mass protests, civil disobedience” to a more general “act and engage!” or “take personal responsibility”. In general the view is that “young people need to stand up and make their voices heard, if they don’t, then no one will”. This is often linked to the claim that “young people are Ireland’s future”. The following ‘battle-cries’ illustrate the range of suggestions:

“We can stand up and fight until our voices are heard”.

“We can stand together and protest peacefully”.

“I’m not afraid to stand up to those who are “trying” to make a better Ireland”.

“We can join groups that our lobbying for political reform”.

“We can keep writing letters to the government and protest outside the Dáil”.

“Elect politicians who are committed to root-and-branch systemic reform of our political system”.

“Think, speak, act. Our country is full of talented young people brimming with ideas”.

“We have to become brave. We can’t hide anymore behind fake statements”.

“Insist on getting what you want”.

“Campaign and advocate”.

“Learn about how our political system is so dysfunctional”.

Collective action is espoused by the young respondents: “all students of universities and colleges in this country should come together and protest against the government”. International examples of campaigning are cited: “Look at the youth in France they literally take things into their own hands! ... I’m not saying we should go out burning cars and what not but that energy is something we could use greatly to make the difference”. Another asserts: “Let’s give them something to think about, because this time, we are not keeping quiet”.

Young people are clear that they should be encouraging others to take action: “We can speak up and encourage others to do the same”. The overall motivation behind many of the calls to action is that “we have such an abundance of talent, creativity and intelligence in the country ... but we are happy to sit back and talk about ideas rather than do something”.



2.2.6. BEING POSITIVE

The importance of being positive was repeatedly highlighted by young people. Young people expressed a strong need for optimism in envisaging an Ireland of the future and a sense of disillusionment with the negativity they experience around them. The need to retain this sense of optimism was evident. They emphasised the importance of positive messages: ‘Dream it and you will achieve it’, expressing the importance of raising awareness of the need for change and the need to draw people together to think about ideas for the future and use “famous Irish people” (such as Jedward and Niall Horan) to highlight “how much Ireland as a country means to them”. This theme of getting people together was important “to work together as a team, united for the common cause - to bring back economic prosperity back to Irish Economy”. To combat the “air of negativity that is overshadowing our true nature”.

The need to become “more daring, risk-taking” was evident. “We need more can-do attitude in this country, and self-envisioned futures”. A recognition of this attitude already thriving in the Irish psyche was emphasised. This fighting spirit “where we out-sang every country that participated (in the European championships) despite performing dismally” needs to be harnessed. “We can build a strong, educated, focused society, with a thriving economy that will leave the biggest nations of the world gob-smacked ... and become a leading example of a progressive society who simply got on with it”.

Building on our welcoming nature, “the land of a thousand welcomes ... our friendliness, our happy outlooks and our welcoming nature”, a vision could be “an island that when a tourist arrives they don’t want to leave”. The need to go “back to basics”, to treasure our traditions, to “learn from mistakes made” was noted while at the same time the importance of not being “dragged down by the “ball and chain” of different generations’ choices and way of thinking”.

“What if a mother told her child the earth was flat from birth, she made up songs to sing, poems to read, about the flat earth while the child fell to sleep, every day confirming that indeed the earth was flat. What would that child believe on his first day of school?”

In the same spirit, young people were highlighting the vulnerability of the young who are easily manipulated into believing what they are persistently told and the importance of giving positive messages, messages that reflected positivity not pessimism, which reflected achievement not failure, that focussed on our strengths not our weaknesses.

National pride – it's a great country

Some young people described our people as lacking “a sense of national pride”, seeming to have “forgotten the rich legacy and heritage that our small island is overflowing with Seanchaí sitting around a fireside relaying tales of Ireland’s myths and legends, creating onstage productions of the works of writers such as Yeats and Synge, hosting local feiseanna, céilithe and barn dances in every corner of the country”. Most references to our heritage however were in the form of expressing a deep awareness of our country as a great nation and our people as resourceful, competent, well educated and owning a strong sense of community spirit.

“We have an amazing willingness to make the very best out of a situation that so often seems impossible. That is why today I know that we are not only going to take on the difficulties we face but do so in such a way that ensures Ireland will once more be a strong, vibrant and truly brilliant place to live”.

Many young people asked that we recall events in the country that evoked a feeling of pride in our country:

“... the carnival atmosphere when Ireland qualified for soccer championships, or the feeling each county gets when they win an All-Ireland or each parish’s swagger when they win the county – even at Junior ... every year without fail, we have an opportunity to celebrate Ireland’s birth”.

National pride, “I believe in Ireland, Ireland is great”, “A place where you can be proud of calling home” was very evident in the views expressed by young people in this consultation process. It was also pointed out how sport illustrates “the feelings of pride, inclusiveness and trust in their team and their home place that sport makes one feel”. It was acknowledged that in terms of sporting achievements, Ireland “has constantly punched above its weight throughout the decades. Sport has the ability to transform the lives of people throughout our country”.

An example of how far we have come; “our relations with our British cousins have never been stronger and ... the majority of us are delighted to at last have mutual peace” as well as being “at the forefront of business & technology because of our educated minds” during the boom years. Pride in our achievements – academic, sporting, musical will stand to us in the future in helping us get our country back on the global stage, “we have a fantastic country here and we need to celebrate it”. “We are resilient. We are determined. We are Irish”.

The need for strong leadership in Irish politics and all aspects of life was voiced – including our Irish role models such as Michael O’Leary, and Katie Taylor. “Young people need Irish role models to look up to. This will create an innate belief in young people that we can achieve our dreams”, “where our government stand as an example to all other nations”.

2.2.7. HEALTH

Submissions on health included mental health and suicide, and mental health services. In addition, issues of alcohol, smoking and drug use were raised under the broad theme of health.

Access to mental health services

Mental health and suicide were raised and many of the comments made were articulated in the first person. Reflecting this, one participant pointed out:

“Too many people are dying because they aren’t aware of the help that’s there and too often, they can’t get the help they need when they look. I am a young person whose mental health service does not help their mental health. I do not want to end up as another number among the hundreds who take their lives each year. We need change and we need it now”.

The issue is one of access: “A complete change in the mental health services is needed if we want to lower the suicide rate in Ireland. I would like to see that every young person in every part of Ireland has access to a quality mental health service that is suitable for their age and meets their needs”.

Stigma out of mental health

Many submissions highlighted the lack of mental health education and the reluctance to tackle mental health stigma in Ireland: “why are the young people of Ireland taught about their sexual health and physical health, but so little about mental health?” Pointing out the risk of non-investment in this area, a number of participants warned about the potential impact of this neglect: “mental health should be fully integrated into our education system from junior Infants and people must be encouraged, throughout their lives to talk and not to feel ashamed or embarrassed by their worries”. Respondents claimed that we need to eradicate the stigma: “I want people to discuss mental health issues like discussing how they had the common cold” and “We need to banish the stigma about mental health. Until then people will continue to suffer in silence and keep their worries to themselves”.

It is suggested that mental and physical health should be “approached on equal footings, and access to treatment for both available”. This is justified by participants who claim that “unaddressed mental health issues can lead to physical illness ... increased stress on our acute hospital systems ... at a cost to the individual and the state!”

There is an acknowledgement that attitude to mental health is improving a little but not enough, particularly within some specific sectors such as young men: “many young men from lower middle class or disadvantaged backgrounds ... where I am from ... are afraid to express themselves among their peers as they feel that it would be perceived as a sign of weakness and as a result often never address serious issues of depression, insecurity or anger”. Another respondent continued with this thought – “young men often lack the language to express themselves in words and often do not clearly understand the issues that they are facing because they have no experience of addressing mental health issues”. Because of this, “the level of suicide is worryingly high among young men in particular, who are constantly emasculated by many corners of society”. “There is a view, expressed by some, that society is changing somewhat with regards to these negative issues”.

There is a view, expressed by some, that society is changing somewhat with regard to these negative attitudes:

“I think my generation are ambassadors for change in the area of mental health and disability, I find that when I discuss the fact that I have Aspergers with my own friends I am less likely to be labelled or treated differently than if I tell adults - I think we should endeavour to spread this knowledge to others”.

Structural issues regarding mental health

Having highlighted the poor culture / awareness regarding mental health, participants identified a broad range of structural issues and problems in this sector. Some of them very specific:

“There is such a long wait to get to a mental health service and about a month to 2 months wait between each appointment. You should be able to access the service in no longer than a week and have appointments as often as you need them”.

The lack of psychiatric places for young people and their resultant admission to extremely unsuitable adult psychiatric wards was highlighted by a number of participants as a very serious problem, exemplified by the following entry:

“When I was 16 I was admitted to an adult psychiatric unit. I was attacked by another patient, saw grown men walking through the corridors naked, saw a patient put his arm through a window, saw a woman burning herself with cigarettes. The environment was as damaging as it was helpful but there was no other suitable facility available to me”.

A number of improvement approaches are proposed to achieve “a more person centred mental health system that provides and looks at the needs of the individual and not just their generic condition”.

Changes required are both attitudinal and structural:

“If psychologists were the heads of teams and not psychiatrists, I believe this would make a huge difference [people might be] listened to rather than just handed a prescription which is usually the case ... All they know is psychopharmacology”.

Overall, these suggestions are proposed to “reduce the stigma around discussing mental health given that young people may see they have very common concerns”, however, an underlying concern of many commentators is the following:

“It bemuses me [that] we still cannot discuss mental illness without judgement. It’s like any other illness that can be treated and cured. It is society’s fault that mental illness is emblazoned with embarrassment, angst and shame. I want to help change this”.

Healthcare

Overall regarding healthcare, respondents suggested that “the system is wrong”:

“We need to have a broader discussion on disability, health and mental health than simply how much they get in the budget (which of course is important!)”. Also, “We need to have broader discourse as a society as to how we view people with disabilities and mental health problems and work to challenge misconceptions through education”.

One of the issues raised is that of inequality in the system: “We don’t have a fair and equal healthcare system in Ireland”, with the overall view that this relates to cost. One individual claimed that people are afraid of the current public system therefore people “have to invest in private health insurance because you’re afraid of dying while on the waiting list for treatment at a public hospital. Suggestions in this regard ranged from requesting a “more affordable health care” system to one respondent who proposed that “there is a need to abolish completely the private health care system, one system for all where all users are treated equally”.

Structural issues and alternatives

A number of structural issues were highlighted. One respondent questioned the fees that doctors get for medical card visits, suggesting “the GP should get a fixed rate of €30,” because people abuse the system, not thinking how much it is costing the government”. A couple of suggestions were made regarding the professionalism of current medical practitioners, believing that under qualified individuals are working in the sector. One respondent went further and suggested that “doctors who abuse the system and mistreat their patients, mentally, etc. should not be able to practice”.

While the majority of health related submissions related to conventional practices, a number of alternative approaches were mentioned: “[m]y vision is an Ireland where holistic natural preventative health care replaces the failed medical model we currently have”. Another participant espoused broadening the health concept to include “art and art therapy, drama, music, yoga, pilates” suggesting these should be validated and protected.

The future of health provision

Visions for the future of general health provision in Ireland include:

“The current health system (HSE) needs to finish and a new, up-to-date, citizen friendly and efficient system needs to be implemented. A proficient and honoured health-system has a vacant seat in my envisioned Ireland”.

“I see an Ireland where we are in no fear of the health care system, where we can go in confidence to seek medical treatment, where we know that the best will be done for us”.

Alcohol

There were a range of submissions related to various aspects of alcohol, covering themes such as alcohol abuse, binge drinking and underage drinking. While one respondent talked about the importance of preserving “pub culture”, in the main, the tone of these submissions ranged from people who felt that young people were wasting their lives with alcohol to more questioning submissions trying to understand why alcohol is so pervasive and finally suggestions for how alcohol issues might be tackled. The following submission summarises a range of views:

“Alcohol is the drug of choice among youth. Many young people are experiencing the consequences of drinking too much, at too early an age. As a result, underage drinking is a leading public health problem in this country”.

In this regard, one respondent admonished young people and told them not to “bury [themselves] in drink, drugs and popular culture”. Another stated that “many social sub-obstacles mutate from alcohol ... people should learn that ... it causes more harm than good and [should] learn other ways to spend days, rather than getting drunk and causing harm socially”. In general, the participants who discussed alcohol were quite clear about the damage it can cause to individuals and society, recognising that it is “a difficult problem which delves into other areas of our lives such as work, addiction, socialising, sport, and mental health”.

Some respondents highlighted the underlying causes that they suggest lead to alcohol abuse: “As young people, we need alternative and affordable options for social outlets [instead of] meeting for drinks on any given evening”. Another individual questioned: “what facilities are out there for the youth to partake in that one does not have to dig extraordinarily deep into their pockets to pay for”. The following submission further illustrates this idea:

“I don’t think enough time has been spent on looking at our needs. If I’m completely honest it’s not fun living here. There is a great lack of facilities for young people and more often than not most of us resort to drink to fool ourselves into thinking that we are having fun. In reality we spend much of our time on the computer developing a sort of artificial social life, devoid of face-to-face interaction”.

According to a number of submissions, passivity is not acceptable: “the drinking culture needs to change”. It is suggested that this change should be highlighted for young people at an early age: “We need to send secondary school students into the hospitals to see the effects of alcoholism and substance abuse”.

A number of submissions suggested that “people need to be more educated about this problem in Ireland”. Tackling alcohol related issues would have a positive social impact: it “would reduce crime rates, fighting on the streets and A&E waiting lists at night”. A range of solutions are suggested for this problem: ranging from “I think a higher tax being placed on spirits, wines and shots would make a huge difference to society” to “have student campaigns to promote fight against alcoholism and drugs”. One respondent blames those selling alcohol for the under-age availability: “Alcohol is so widely available these days that employees don’t ask the customers for ID anymore. Maybe this is why Ireland is known for being drunk?”

One respondent blames cheap alcohol in off-licences and shops as the main problem since consumption of drink is then un-supervised. Their proposal is “to cut the taxes on alcohol sold in drinking establishments such as pubs, night clubs and restaurants, whilst simultaneously raising taxes on alcohol sold in off licences”. This would simultaneously support the declining pub trade.

Drugs

Only a small number of respondents commented on drugs, with very little overall consensus. Submissions relate to the harm that is being caused by drugs with some submissions focused upon the harm caused by their criminalisation.

The participants provided a number of arguments for drug legalisation (particularly cannabis), with an overall emphasis on the point that if drugs are legalised they will be safer:

“If legalised there “would not be as much of a black market”, therefore, “less organised crime related to drugs ... crimes like robbery and the likes because prices would be lower without the criminals involved”.

It was claimed by one respondent that cannabis “has no reported deaths or illness” – and that :

“The laws surrounding cannabis need to be changed, it’s disgraceful that a toxic substance [alcohol] which is the cause of a lot of domestic and social problems as well as mental and physical illnesses is legal while a non toxic substance which many Irish people chose to smoke is illegal. It’s a waste of tax payers money ... [which is] negatively effecting many young people ... receiving a criminal record for possession of this relatively harmless drug”.

While the main drive for legalisation focuses on cannabis, a couple of respondents are stronger in their views seeking “complete legalization of all drugs” to remove the criminal aspect, with high regulation especially for ‘hard drugs’. There is a strong belief by some young people that the ‘system’ is “enabling ... evil people by having the drug illegal”. In all instances of legalisation, regulation is emphasised, perhaps even with the use of a photo ID or swipe cards and the related imposition of a strictly controlled minimum age.

Smoking

While in the main, the submissions regarding drugs related to alcohol and illegal drugs, a small number of passionate comments were provided about smoking, all being negative. One respondent exclaimed: “I believe in the 21st century it is a failure of a nation that young people still smoke”, with another stating: “the goal should be to completely eradicate smoking from Ireland”. Respondents are frustrated that smoking has not been tackled effectively by society: “campaigns based on ‘MPOWER’ may marginally reduce the number of smokers, but is ... extremely inefficient based on the number of smokers in the country”. Going much further, one respondent suggested that “there are no real plans to effectively phase out smoking” and suggested that it could be entirely phased out over a generation.

2.2.8. COMMUNITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Submissions articulated visions and suggestions on the theme of community in two key senses:

- (i) *The need for a strong sense of community where community is a feeling or spirit that provides the basis for co-operation, solidarity and security.*
- (ii) *The need to develop communities as the basis of participation that includes youth, adults and older people.*

There was a strong sense in the submissions that a sense of community has been lost during the boom years. Here, submissions pointed out that while individuals need to be valued within a shared sense of solidarity, individualism is an insufficient basis for providing the spirit and energy towards recovery and social progress. It is this spirit of togetherness in community that appears to give meaning and belonging to individual lives in a variety of settings, from the cradle to the grave:

“Importance is the very thing we crave in life. We want to look into the eyes of our fellow countrymen/women and see that they want us to work for them (employment/colleague), socialise with them (friends), share our lives with them (loved ones) and why not? Money comes and goes but that feeling remains right to our very last breath”.

Equally, there was a strong sense in submissions of a vision for a form of development that is driven by co-operation or ‘meitheal’. Community is also the basis of local economy as ‘we can start by supporting local producers and trades’.

The need to develop community is premised upon the inclusion of diversity; inclusive of race, ethnicity and sexual identities. Furthermore community is the basis of social solidarity that is needed to help us as a ‘national community’ in strained times:

“I would like people to stay positive until this recession is over and to see people helping each other through these tuff times”.

In the submissions, community was also perceived as a protective spirit – protective of the vulnerable and protective of rights; and one that is premised upon intergenerational solidarity:

“I hope to one day have children, Mr. President. I would like to see them grow up in a society that cares for their welfare and takes proactive steps to ensure it”.

In addition to perceiving community as representing a form of security, it is also understood as a mechanism with which young people can engage to rebuild an active civil society. Several submissions stressed the importance of young people becoming involved in building happiness and prosperity:

“I think fellow young people can help by becoming more active in their own communities. It can be something as small as ensuring an elderly neighbour is okay. Change begins with each and every individual and to ensure Ireland is indeed a prosperous and happy place once more it is vital that everyone becomes aware just how important one voice is. It is time for pestering local politicians, joining in protests against social injustices and being aware of what needs to be changed. It is up to young people to take action and to take it now”.

The vision and actions here stress young people’s participation and the acknowledgement of the importance of activity, solidarity and community from an early age:

“What would also make this possible would be for the schools starting from primary school to make young people more aware of being a part of a community and encourage them to participate in any way possible. As teaching this at a young age would become a part of the child’s view on how they belong in society and what they can do to be a part of it”.

2.2.9 IDENTITY AS IRISH

Contributions on this theme fall into two broad categories:

- (i) *In light of the current economic situation, unemployment and emigration, there is a questioning of what constitutes Irish identity*
- (ii) *The Irish language is what distinguishes Irishness but we need an approach to Irish that incorporates it into everyday life as a way of helping people to be proud of their Irishness.*

An example of the first theme is the need to consider what we are good at, if anything at all:

“We had a millennium of subjugation by imperial interests and the Church, followed by the appalling gombeenism of the Celtic Tiger, which built on foundations which were destined to collapse. How can we be proud of that? It’s bizarre that so many people use the catchphrase ‘you’ll never beat the Irish’ when (in reality) we’re not very good at anything”.

While tradition and heritage are critical aspects of identity, there is also a sense that Irish should be borrowed from this and from an understanding of where we fit in the modern world:

“Most importantly we need to recognise that what we consider to be inherently Irish will not and does not have to be retained as part of the constant process of change. We can pick and choose together the values which will make all of our lives worth living and create a new form of Irishness which builds on the experiences and values of the past. Our ambitions should be free from historical hang-up but with the benefit of historical hindsight”.

Celebrating Irishness was valued in submissions. One participant suggested organising a ‘national day’ in the interest of boosting the economy and morale. This is needed, one submission suggested, because we are unsure of our identity and not so proud of it now.

“The entire state was built on the values of being Irish especially being proud to be Irish. Unfortunately in a situation seen the world over we have very little to be proud of. Our friends have boarded the first planes out of here, our parents tighten the belt by the week and the cuts just keep on coming. In order for things to change and to get our kinsmen back, the powers that be need to take a good look at where we are in the world right now”.

The second articulation of Irishness focused on the place of Irish language and the need to both cherish and support its incorporation into everyday interaction and discourse. “Déantar an iomarca díspeagadh ar an rud atá traidisiúnta agus Gaelach agus is gá dúinn bheith bródúil asainn féin agus ár bhféiniúlacht a chur chun cinn” [Irish people show too much contempt for tradition and the Irish language and we must be proud to promote ourselves and our identity].

This is articulated alongside a sense of enriching Irishness with other cultures. Irish in everyday life is preferred to Irish language that is forced. In what needs to happen, one submission suggested:

“We can start speaking Irish more in our daily lives, such as on the pitch in a game of football or hurling. The fact that younger people look up to, and try to copy, what people a year or two older than them do, means that if we as 18-22 years old start incorporating the Irish language into matches, they will imitate us and thus start the ball rolling for a revival of the Irish language”.

Moreover, there is a sense of the need for a renewed pedagogy for the Irish language or learning Irish through Irish, as against learning Irish as a translation of English:

“I also feel that teaching an Irish class through English is really foolish. In the gaeltacht, classes are taught solely through Irish. Explanations of something a student doesn't understand are given in Irish. For example, if a student doesn't understand the word “doras”, the explanation - given in Irish - is something along the lines of “you go through it to get into a house or a room, you shut it if it is cold outside”, etc; instead of simply saying “door” in English. This develops people's understanding, and also broadens their vocabulary”.

In articulating a vision for Irishness there is a sense that the language needs to become deinstitutionalized and integrated into common discourse and active in all social settings. A practical suggestion here:

“Young people could come together for a cup of tea and create Irish speaking groups in their local youth centres. They could try use cúpla focal in their daily conversations to encourage the people around them to start speaking Irish too”.

While there is recognition that increasing the number of Gaelscoileanna is a way of achieving a wider adoption of the language, it is also acknowledged that there is a place for spoken Irish in conversation. Hence, there is a strong sense of the need for a new approach to the way Irish is taught:

“The way the language is taught in school should also be changed, I really think it turns people against the language rather than giving them reason to embrace it. So many students pass the leaving cert, able to write essays and reproducing passages that have been learned off by heart, without having skills in understanding or speaking conversational Irish - and definitely with no passion for the language either”.

The need to “invigorate a renewal of Irish culture” building on Ireland’s international “reputation for its creative culture and as an arts based society” was noted along with building on what Ireland has that is unique, e.g., our language “only when they move abroad do many Irish people appreciate the value of a national language”.

2.3 SUGGESTIONS [FOR ACTION]

Young people gave a range of suggestions as to what could be done in this country to realise their vision. In line with the key themes identified in the analysis of the submissions, most of these suggestions can be considered under the themes of:

- The need to change attitudes in terms of having a more positive outlook and being prepared to embrace change
- Promoting our national identity and celebrating what we value in Ireland
- Political and legislative reform
- Educational reform
- The need for awareness in relation to health risks
- Ways of addressing the economic downturn in the form of innovative ideas and emphasising the need for us to help each other, to capitalize on the resources that we have as a people
- The need for ongoing consultation processes so that people from various strands of society can get involved and be represented at decision-making fora with policy makers.

The theme of 'be positive' was a strong one found in this consultation process. Young people felt that a winner's mentality was needed as well as a greater focus on innovation throughout society, "Let's use our imagination, it is our only asset that cannot be taxed".

Suggestions for change included ideas such as awarding innovation in our society, "change the 'Knowledge Economy' model into the 'Creative Ideas' Economy". The need for wiser, more experienced, more successful Irish people to encourage younger, less experienced people to develop their skills, ideas and businesses was highlighted. Having a "national day" was suggested as a way of celebrating all things Irish, ranging from food to crafts to music to theatre. In this way, tourism could be promoted, local trade and produce could be showcased and the values that we hold dear could be reinforced in Irish society. Supporting local producers and trades people and providing grant schemes for young people looking to work in local produce sectors could instil a stronger sense of community that some feel has been lost in Irish society.

Postgraduates could help school students, particularly those who have failed in mainstream education; famous entrepreneurs and artists could share their experiences to encourage others to follow their own path. In general, the promotion of volunteering was suggested by many as a means of promoting community values, helping out those less fortunate and sharing much needed resources within our country.

Two young people gave detailed suggestions as to the establishment of a new organisation. The first, proposed as “The Amárach Institute”, would aim to “harness 21st century ideas from Irish people and institutions around the world in order to sow the seeds of renewal and reform and elevate society’s level of consciousness”, while the second, “Arts Eire”, would focus on “making the arts available to every child and young adult” throughout the country.

The theme of promoting Ireland abroad was raised by many. Young people talked about how Ireland could rely on its students, graduates and emigrant population to promote Ireland:

“Promote young Irish people abroad to enhance the knowledge of Ireland’s culture to the local community of their respective adopted cities. Young people will undertake projects to try and create mini Irish festivals wherever they are ... to ‘Green’ an iconic area of their city ... to encourage organising mini hurling demonstrations, modern Irish dance seminars”.

Another young person commented: “we need to promote Ireland on the global stage” – in sectors such as “science and technology”. The message was that to be ambassadors for our country “we must also speak highly of Ireland to others”.

Welcoming diverse populations and their respective cultures was seen as important “and hopefully their richness will add fresh impetus to the development of Irish culture”. At the same time, ideas as to how Ireland could promote our national language were also offered, ranging from dedicated television/radio programmes to mandatory gaelscoileanna, dedicating urban space as ‘gaeltacht’ areas, and increasing opportunities in school for learning conversational Gaeilge while also encouraging the establishment of Gaeilge-friendly youth clubs.

Many suggestions were offered regarding political reform with a strong emphasis on the need for consultation and creating opportunities for politicians to engage with local communities and the youth in particular. Local workshops, online interactive web sites, a new Dáil na nÓg, random selection (as in the jury selection process) for local councillors are but a few of the suggestions offered. Another suggestion was that the government would be run by a committee of public representatives drawn

from a wide range of professionals and lay persons working in these roles part time. Reducing the voting age to 16 and having more women involved in politics were also suggested by some young people as a way of ensuring better representation from young people in contributing to political affairs in Ireland. A few raised the suggestion that Ireland should perhaps review its membership of the European Union while others noted that we need to preserve our Irish heritage and culture within the framework of Europe. Finally, a suggestion was made that Ireland and England could get together to discuss the possibility of a “New Republic” and draw up a new Irish constitution.

Involving youth in national governance emerged as a strong theme. Practical suggestions included Uachtarán na hÉireann to appoint at least one person between the ages of 16-18 to the Council of State; local youth organisations to be founded, where young people can meet with their TDs, which would provide them with a better understanding of the issues and opinions of young people.

Raising awareness of health risks such as smoking, drinking and other substance abuse was noted. Bringing school children to hospitals to help educate them as to the health risks involved in these behaviours was one idea raised. Promoting cafes as social outlets rather than pubs was also suggested. Computer assisted counselling and television programmes devoted to issues such as depression, anxiety and suicide to increase access for those in need were some of the ideas put forward.

Education featured strongly – the need to introduce more continuous assessment mechanisms, improving the economic curriculum to provide expertise for the future and teaching entrepreneurial skills from an early age (primary school) were suggested as ways that the educational system could help to prepare our youth for the future and improve the chances of realising the visions articulated. Another suggestion was volunteering or community work that could attract ‘points’ in the Leaving Certification examination and therefore be valued more in society and enhance young people’s opportunities for further education or employment. An integrated ‘north-south’ education curriculum whereby all children on the island of Ireland would be educated to the same curriculum was suggested. Attracting foreign students to study in Ireland was seen an opportunity to promote Ireland. Other ideas for the curriculum included teaching culinary skills, having work experience compulsory in schools, using laptops instead of books. One young person drew on the famous Chinese proverb: “If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; and if you are planning for a lifetime, educate your children”.

Education is also seen as a tool for the promotion of equality: “in schools [we need] to create awareness of our multi-cultural, diverse and unequal society, focusing on the taboo areas like the Travelling community, the LGBTQ community and people who have disabilities”. More than awareness, “[t]he citizens of the country must . . . be taught to open their minds in terms of our mixed race citizenship and other variables which have arisen in recent years”.

These programmes would challenge stereotypes and promote understanding about people “rather than what is shown in the media”. While this is proposed for all levels of education, “there should be more of an emphasis in primary schools” encompassing themes of racial equality, gender, ethnicity and the traveller community.

One future-focused suggestion moves away from suggesting a varying sectoral focus and suggests “[a] different kind of education is needed here, not a formal type. We need to educate people in kindness”. This would satisfy the suggestions of others who suggest that “[p]eople need to open their minds to equality”, furthermore, “gender-neutrality should be used in teaching children from an early age”.

The role of social welfare was mentioned by many young people, who frequently questioned the fairness of how it is distributed and noted the injustice of recipients also working and so ‘cheating the tax payer’. A number of suggestions for public work schemes were made, for example:

“I would like to see people who are not working but are capable of work, and are receiving benefits have to do voluntary work to receive them. Some people choose to stay on the dole rather than work because they earn more money that way. It’s only fair that these people should have to give something back to the country in order to receive their benefits. Each person should have a set amount of hours to complete where they volunteer in an area of their choice e.g., with the homeless, animals, street cleaning, collecting litter, painting schools etc, cutting grass, planting flowers in parks and estates etc. and when they complete their hours and only then may they receive their money. It’s not fair that people get paid to do nothing and other people who work and go to college to make something of their lives don’t get anything free but have to pay towards the upkeep of the unemployed. Why not save money and make everyone contribute to the running of Ireland by doing voluntary work. It seems so obvious, I don’t know why it hasn’t been introduced before”.

And:

“The introduction of more public work schemes, for example, picking up litter or filling in potholes, so that people are working for their social welfare payment rather than just to show up at an office and sign their name once a week. This benefits everybody because it does not demand high academia to do basic work to improve the general maintenance of the country. This would also help attract tourism. It also instils a sense of pride among the people who do said work. As well as that it would instil a sense of community spirit. Furthermore it would help develop a work ethic in people who otherwise would get used to a sense of entitlement from the state. This could also help prevent people remaining in the poverty cycle”.

Other ideas offered included ways of improving the skills of young drivers – by starting earlier at 15 years but insisting on parental supervision and introducing more road signs at road bends to indicate maximum approach speeds as is done in New Zealand, revitalizing public spaces, in particular unused retail spaces, and ‘ghost estates’ and building sites. Investing in sport and youth clubs was seen as a way of promoting equality and valuing diversity in Irish life. Improving broadband and providing more public transport in rural areas were also suggested.

In concluding this section, it is worth drawing attention to the few young people involved in this consultation process who expressed some doubt as to whether they would be heard:

“It’d be great if some of the ideas that are being expressed to this President’s Initiative actually went somewhere. We in Ireland are very good at talking about things and thinking that means we’ve actually done something about them. I hope that once the seminar is over, people with power keep getting bombarded with these ideas. Setting up some kind of ongoing forum where ideas could be discussed and developed, maybe reporting every few months, could be a great outcome of this process”.

Concrete suggestions for action

Suggestions for action ranged across all themes. Below, the predominant suggestions for concrete actions are presented. These are the suggestions which were most frequently cited in submissions.

- Action: Young people who struggle to find work should be offered a placement / internship in either the public or private sector, so that they can put their skills to use, and be ready to take up employment.
- Action: More resources should be made available to the social welfare fraud detection unit. All initiatives required to merge databases to aid detection of social welfare cheats to be a priority.
- Action: All future votes to be held on Saturdays.
- Action: Reduce the age of voting to 16.
- Action: Both First and Second level curricula should be reformed to include a much greater emphasis on civic participation and politics.
- Action: A fair chance of access to third level for all must be guaranteed, with equitable charges and grants.
- Action: Ensure all primary school children experience music and art in the classroom, as it encourages creativity and self-confidence.
- Action: Secondary curricula should be amended to introduce more continuous assessment and so reduce reliance on the outdated 'end of year exam' model.
- Action: From a young age all children should be educated about valuing all people, regardless of race, and about the negative effects of racism on individuals and society.
- Action: All schools to develop, and strongly implement, equality and diversity programmes.
- Action: A national youth consultation forum to be established so the views and ideas of young people can be heard.
- Action: Have a follow up event to the Being Young and Irish consultation to monitor progress.

- Action: Each constituency to establish a youth forum for TDs to meet regularly with young people to gain a better understanding of their issues, opinions and ideas.
- Action: Expand high profile, easily accessible mental health facilities for youth. Investment in youth counselling services is required nationwide. Computer assisted counselling and television programmes devoted to issues such as depression, anxiety and suicide should be available.
- Action: A newly energised public health campaign targeted at adolescents and young people about the dangers of alcohol and drug use is required. It needs to match the creativity and pervasiveness of advertising campaigns of the alcohol industry.
- Action: Visiting dignitaries should not be brought to visit pubs and breweries for photo opportunities. The image of Ireland abroad should be associated with positive, creative, messages.
- Action: All secondary students should earn marks or points for volunteering, and this should be built into the curriculum.
- Action: Fáilte Ireland and our embassies and consulates should resist marketing Ireland as a place of pubs and alcohol. More varied, imaginative messages need to be developed.
- Action: Embassies and consulates to keep a database of Irish people abroad and to engage with them and support them to promote Ireland in their adopted countries.
- Action: The Department of Education to examine successful models for preserving languages elsewhere (eg, Wales) and apply to the Irish setting.

CHAPTER 3: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

Four workshops were held in Dublin, Cork, Monaghan and Galway on, respectively, the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th September 2012. Approximately 70-75 young people attended each workshop and each session commenced with opening remarks by the President, Mr. Michael D. Higgins.



The purpose of the Workshops was to provide a forum for young people to meet, debate and discuss the '3 questions' at the centre of the Being Young and Irish initiative:

1. What is your vision for Ireland?
2. What needs to happen to make your vision possible?
3. What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

All workshops were facilitated by an experienced youth consultation expert, Ms. Olivia McEvoy. At each location, the group was sub-divided into smaller groups of 10 individuals, who in turn were facilitated by volunteer youth workers and others with youth consultation experience, as per the methodology described in Appendix A.

The sessions at each Workshop were structured so that the top-ranking responses to the President’s ‘3 questions’ were recorded. The outputs from each of the Regional Workshops are described below.

The first stage of each workshop was for participants to brainstorm on a number of issues and topics. The results of their thoughts was the creation of ‘word-clouds’ using real-time uploading of single word submissions from each individual / group, which were inputted into software and, thus, a number of interesting word-clouds were produced. The resultant visualisations were used to ‘seed’ the discussion on each of the three subsequent workshops.



Figure 1: Word cloud from Monaghan workshop



Figure 2: Word cloud from Galway workshop

Each session generated a wide number of ideas, which were all summarised and displayed on posters. The ideas were ranked by asking participants to vote by placing a 'sticky dot' to the issue they felt was most important, and in this way all participants had a vote across the full range of topics that had been generated by the smaller groups.



Throughout the course of the day, participants were also invited to display a message for posting to the Being Young and Irish Facebook page



DUBLIN WORKSHOP, SATURDAY 8TH SEPTEMBER, DIT BOLTON STREET.

Part 1: What is our vision for Ireland?

The first main task for the participants in their facilitated groups was to discuss their thoughts on their vision for Ireland. At the end of their discussion each group was tasked with identifying their top five ‘visions’ for Ireland of the future. Each of the 10 groups presented their chosen themes to all of the workshop attendees, who then voted for what they saw as the most important aspect of their personal vision (five votes per person). Thus, the outputted 50 ‘visions’ for Ireland were considered by all participants. Merging of similar themes yields the following list of overall top visions.

Table 1: Top 10 Visions for Ireland – Dublin workshop

1	Accountability / transparency in leaders / finance / systems / services / government / accountable political system (reform) participation structures, responsibility, party structures, demographic variety	66 Votes
2	A suitable complete education (including special needs, life skills, practical aspects & is holistic) education and skills reform - critical thinking (free, education, democracy, voice, participation)	51 Votes
3	Equality (gay marriage, gender, wage / salary etc) => equality in Ireland / an equal enabled ireland: via education and communication	44 Votes
4	Mental health & suicide awareness (mainstreaming, bottom up approach, input from role models, detachment of taboo)	35 Votes
5	Cultural identity (recognition of importance of Irish language, history and arts)	26 Votes
6	Free quality education for all + access - fair and equal access / participation in world class education	20 Votes
7	Move from apathy to proactivity (youth led change & innovation, removal of jargon & buzz words in communication with youth / youth engagement)	20 Votes
8	Pride in Ireland and its people	14 Votes
9	Improvement in the planning & implementation of green technology	12 Votes
10	More opportunities and less exploitation in youth employment	11 Votes

Political reform attracted the highest number of votes from the Dublin workshop participants. Dissatisfaction with how the country and the financial systems have been run is evident in the call for leadership that is transparent and accountable to the people. The need for involvement and participation in the political system is also evident. Educational reform also appears to have been a major issue for participants. The division into two categories above reflects the dual focus on curriculum reform (no 2) and the practical issue of access for all – including free fees (no 6).

Education that is relevant for life (with an emphasis on life skills) and one that prepares young people for the job market was seen as important along with support to enable all citizens of our country to gain access to an excellent standard of education. Equality attracted the third highest number of votes. A country that does not discriminate against any of its citizens regardless of age, marital status, sexual orientation or socio economic class was seen as part of the vision of a future Ireland. Mental health and suicide awareness featured strongly, attracting the fourth highest number of votes. A strong cultural identity that values the Irish language came next, resonant of another theme, Pride in Ireland and its people (no 8). A greater involvement of young people in political and decision making fora was also seen as important. A greater appreciation of our environment coupled with the need to capitalize on technological developments is captured in the second last theme – ‘Improvement in the planning and implementation of green technology’. Other issues that received votes include: social justice (7), health services accessible to all (dental, mental, physical) (7), community approach to decision making (6), entrepreneurship spirit (6), an honest government that knows its responsibilities, acting for justice and fairness, both locally and nationally (6), constitutional reform (6), and real democracy (5). Some of these are reflected above in ‘Political Reform’.

Part 2: What needs to happen to make your vision possible?

The next task involved participants reflecting on the fundamental changes that need to happen in Ireland, how to circumvent vested interests that might be stopping change and how the blocks to change might be removed. In a similar process to that employed in workshop 1, the 10 groups produced a list of their top five ‘things that need to happen to make your vision possible’. This also generated 50 themes to rank. The top 10 themes are illustrated in Table 3 below.

Table 2: Top 10 Suggestions for Making the Vision Possible – Dublin workshop

1	Promotion of Irish and access to gaelscoileanna / More primary level gaelscoileanna / support in-service training for all teachers in Irish schools	37 Votes
2	Create secular society and remove church influence / Secular constitution that respects the rights to religious affiliation	35 Votes
3	Funding for Mental Health / Disability - creation of awareness and prevention / Also Improve standard of Mental Health in Ireland - supports & services / within workforce / education in schools	34 Votes

4	Expansion of civic participation and engagement of voters / Citizen participation through petition / Direct democracy: Citizen-initiated referendum / reform such as weekend and absentee voting	31 Votes
5	Reform politics - Non partisan platform for engagement / Better communication - make politics sexy, use social media, Facebook polls etc	29 Votes
6	Radical change to education - more accessibility, resources / Investment / services within the system / more opportunities to become aware and get involved / grants	27 Votes
7	Constitutional reform / Legislate on various issues (gay marriage, gender issues, abortion, transparency, voter age)	23 Votes
8	Create a vibrant volunteer culture which is accessible	22 Votes
9	Support local businesses and entrepreneurial activity	10 Votes
10	Encourage individual action - just do it	8 Votes

The priorities for change were evenly spread across ‘more access to gaelscoileanna’, ‘a reduction in church influence’, ‘improved mental health services’ and ‘greater civic participation’. Other important priorities were political reform, constitutional reform and more access and better services in education.

Part 3: What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

In this workshop, participants were asked to focus on what they can do themselves to bring about change. Following the same format, participants produced their own statements on what they can do, and all participants voted to produce the following ranking of possible actions. The top 10 merged actions are as follows:

Table 3: Top 10 Suggestions - What individuals can do to achieve their vision for Ireland –

Dublin workshop

1	Create youth panel of Ireland - direct inputs into government decisions / Effective Youth Lobby (annual congress of youth oriented groups, young people for young people)	43 votes
2	Make small changes in own life, family, community etc to build into bigger changes nationally / Start with individual responsibility => Community => National	32 votes
3	Involve yourself / come together in active citizen groups / proactive engagement / campaign, protest / lobby TDs etc / Voice your opinion	27 votes
4	Lobby for holistic approach to education - second level life skills / creativity / opinion / debates / innovation / critical thinking	25 votes

5	Volunteer / join organisations / make a difference / find your platform and get involved / Volunteer and make it accessible and encouraging people to volunteer	24 votes
6	Engage with media / Social Media / Set up Facebook group for people attending workshops to continue this dynamic	21 votes
7	National Change Day / Get off your arse day, take responsibility, listening and doing - suggestion boxes at local network centres	20 votes
8	Take social responsibility / lead by example / Be an ambassador to be proud of who you are, listen and inspire, mentor others / Identify other Role Models of Young People who are creating change	20 votes
9	Overcome Fear of Failure & Judgement	18 votes
10	Take responsibility to defend people of minorities from discrimination and othering / Challenge yours and others views	17 votes

Almost all suggestions involve practical steps that young people can take to become involved (such as joining lobby / advocacy groups) and to ‘start small’ by making changes in their own lives that will impact on their families and communities. Volunteering, becoming involved, and getting engaged, dominate the top 6 suggestions. Related themes of ‘taking responsibility’ for some aspect of change also appears in this ‘Top 10’ of what ‘you can do’ from the Dublin workshop.

CORK WORKSHOP SATURDAY 15TH SEPTEMBER, NEMO RANGERS GAA CLUB

Part 1: What is your vision for Ireland?

As in the Dublin Workshop, participants first brainstormed on ‘the characteristics of a well-functioning society’. Each of the seven groups (consisting of approximately ten individuals each) ranked the top five most important aspects of their vision, creating 35 ‘visions’ for Ireland. Some were very specific, for example, ‘transport and energy infrastructure’ and ‘take the stigma off mental health’. Others were more aspirational, for example, ‘more positivity’, ‘community involvement and civic responsibility’.

Some similar themes were expressed by different workshops using different language, so there is an element of their ‘vote being split’. For instance, one group ranked ‘religious/cultural diversity and acceptance’ among its top five. Meanwhile, another group ranked ‘diversity/optimism’ among its top five. These ‘visions’ only received four and two votes respectively out of the 362 votes cast, so the ‘distorting’ influence is minor. The top 10 visions overall are presented in Table 5.

Table 4: Top 10 Visions for Ireland – Cork workshop

1	Political reform (improved system, greater education / involvement)	32 votes
2	Culture and arts, language and food	30 votes
3	Equality of rights – stigma free	28 votes
4	Reform (political, social, education, economic, healthcare, self-sustainable)	24 votes
5	Creativity (economic, innovation)	17 votes
6	Involvement in community and society in an enthusiastic way	17 votes
7	Employment	17 votes
8	More positivity	15 votes
9	Health, mental, physical (provision of services)	15 votes
10	Education cost! Reviewed at all levels. Equal access for all. EQUALITY	15 votes

As we can see, ‘reform’ and ‘equality of rights’ feature strongly. The rather ambiguous ‘culture and arts, language and food’ also features strongly. Also important in the ‘Cork vision’ are elements of creativity, involvement and employment. Education is at the bottom of this ‘Top 10’ list, but it is worth noting that the ‘Education vote’ is dispersed. Other ‘education visions’ that did not make the top 10 include ‘Revamped education system, education for living’ (14 votes); ‘Holistic education model, for life not for exams’ (10 votes); and ‘Education, access, standards, promoting critical thinking’ (7 votes). So, clearly, a reformed education system was important for Cork participants.

Myriad other themes were recorded. In no particular order, and just to give a flavour:

- American style positivity
- More Gaeltachts
- Fun
- Profitable economy
- Political education
- National pride
- Workshops like today
- Social mobility

Part 2: What needs to happen to make your vision possible?

In this workshop, participants brainstormed on ‘fundamental changes you would make to how Ireland is run’, ‘are there vested interests / things stopping change?’ and ‘how can the blocks on change be removed?’ Again each of the seven groups produced a top five of ‘things that need to happen to make your vision possible’, generating a selection of 35 priorities to rank. A total of 317 votes were cast and the top 10 ranked things were:

Table 5: Top 10 Suggestions for making the vision possible – Cork workshop

1	Putting plans into action	22 votes
2	Reform education, subjects, curriculum (political education)	19 votes
3	Positive media guidelines (rules)	18 votes
4	Reduce debt	17 votes
5	Overall approach to education (attitude to life learning)	17 votes
6	Culture (more gaelscoils)	15 votes
7	Education system (e-education, subject specific courses, continuous assessment, civic education)	14 votes

8	Stop church and private enterprise from dictating public policy	14 votes
9	Get young people voting	12 votes
10	Constitutional reform	11 votes

The emphasis was on action and educational reform. As in Workshop 1, Education is a dominant theme, appearing in Rank 2, 5, 6, & 7. Cork participants saw education reform as a mechanism for wider social change.

Again, we can get a flavour of the discussion in the ‘what needs to happen’ workshops from a selection of the contributions, in no particular order:

- Drinking culture in colleges
- Change attitudes to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender people
- More consultation with young people
- Votes on Saturdays
- Looser party whip
- Age and gender quotas in politics
- Active participation
- Change apathetic mindset
- Civic education
- More expertise in politics

Part 3: What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

In this workshop, participants were asked to suggest real, concrete things that they and other young people could do to bring about change. The seven groups each ranked their top five suggestions. A total of 309⁴ votes were cast and the top ten ranked suggestions were:

Table 6: Top 10 Suggestions - What individuals can do to achieve their vision for Ireland – Cork workshop

1	Volunteering (community, vetting, training)	24 votes
2	Volunteer (encourage involvement)	21 votes
3	Challenge stereotypes, respect	18 votes
4	Lead by example (show initiative, put yourself in others shoes)	18 votes
5	Use your vote	16 votes
6	Use the tools you have	14 votes

⁴ It is worth noting that the numbers of votes cast declined from 362, to 317, to 309 across the three workshops, which possibly reflects a declining novelty in the ‘sticky dots’ voting method.

7	Be ourselves, be honest and be strong in our vision	14 votes
8	Grassroots participation in community groups	14 votes
9	Be enterprising	13 votes
10	Reduce stigma and stereotypes about young people	13 votes

There was considerable ‘splitting of the vote’ in this workshop due to slightly different wording being proposed by groups. Volunteering is clearly the dominant suggestion, in 1st and 2nd place. ‘Participation’ is a related concept to volunteering and received 14 votes. However, its true position is higher in the rankings as a number of ‘wordings’ did not make it into the Top 10 (Be active, participate, 9 votes; Get involved, 6 votes; Campaigns, get involved, 4 votes; Join interest groups, 4 votes).

Similarly, ‘Use your vote’ received 16 votes, but ‘Use vote to engage with politicians’ was outside the Top 10, with a further 11 votes. So, the overwhelming suggestions from the Cork workshop are

- Volunteering
- Getting involved
- Use your vote.

MONAGHAN WORKSHOP SATURDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER, ST. MACARTAN'S COLLEGE

Part 1: What is your vision for Ireland?

Educational and political reform dominate the visions for a future Ireland for the Monaghan workshop participants. Equality, accountability and a community spirit also featured. There was also an emphasis on what are perhaps local preoccupations – better health services and better transport. A united Ireland also appears in the Top 10, uniquely across all four regional workshops. A separation of church and state also features in the Monaghan Top 10.

Table 7: Top 10 visions for Ireland – Monaghan workshop

1	Educational Reform – subject reform, points system, opportunity, interactive and useful in life.	41 votes
2	Political Reform – transparency, inclusiveness and better communication between local and national level.	36 votes
3	Health – reduce cost, improve service, reduce waiting time, better hospitals, equality, better healthcare.	21 votes
4	A more positive Ireland with a greater sense of community spirit – national language pride.	20 votes
5	There needs to be accountability across all public services.	19 votes
6	Innovative industries – Ireland would have a diverse range of employment opportunities.	19 votes
7	Equality – race, gender, religion, LGBT, background etc.	16 votes
8	United Ireland – improved cross border relations.	14 votes
9	Independence of State and Church.	11 votes
10	Improved transport	10 votes

Part 2: What needs to happen to make your vision possible?

As in other workshops, participants brainstormed on ‘fundamental changes you would make to how Ireland is run’ and ‘the identification of obstacles and barriers to change’. Participants as a group then completed the sheet ‘What needs to happen to make your vision possible?’

Table 8: Top 10 Suggestions for making the vision possible – Monaghan workshop

1	Creation of Jobs – utilise unemployed	38 votes
2	Political Reform – lower voting age	26 votes
3	Politicians need to take more interest in youth and our views	23 votes
4	Financial position needs to be stabilised	22 votes
5	Culture – Change structure of Irish exams	19 votes
6	Use Experts in Government – training in how to run the country	17 votes

7	Use of money and budgeting to be re-assessed	14 votes
8	Fairer education system – more recognition for non academic talent – change points system – ongoing assessment	10 votes
9	Get students opinion about how to reform education system	9 votes
10	Role of media to promote possibility – job creation not job losses; regulation and more balanced media.	9 votes

The creation of jobs was the strongest suggestion by far, with 38 votes. The financial / budgetary position of the country also featured highly. A third strong theme was education, which appeared in various guises in place 5, 8 and 9.

Other notable themes which did not make the top 10 priorities were

- a fairer distribution of funds, axing of high salaries and bonuses
- more co-operative government
- positivity – government to send a positive message.

Part 3: What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

The groups ranked their priorities for ‘what can you and other young people do to achieve your vision’ in seven workshop groups. The following outlines the top ten suggestions from across all seven groups:

Table 9: Top 10 Suggestions - What individuals can do to achieve their vision for Ireland – Monaghan workshop

1	We the young generation of Ireland feel we are powerless to instigate any real change due to a lack of respect for our opinions	60 votes
2	Get involved in political / non-political youth groups	29 votes
3	Share your opinions – use social networking to raise awareness; take advantage of opportunities like BY&I	24 votes
4	Having young people in positions of power and offered equal respect / opportunities	23 votes
5	Stand up and fight for what we want – use our voices	23 votes
6	Use our voices – social media become involved in political debate; represent the youth voice.	15 votes
7	Get involved – join student councils / unions – make most of TY; join groups and clubs related to your talents	15 votes
8	Use your vote – register; inform yourself on what you are voting on	14 votes

9	Young people need to be more active in informing structures e.g. consultation	12 votes
10	Educate ourselves about politics	10 votes

The No 1. Choice for ‘what can you do’ in Monaghan is unusual in that it is negative in tone – young people feel ‘powerless to instigate any real change’. This contrasts with the generally positive suggestions recorded elsewhere. More positive suggestions are also noted and, as in the other settings, they are dominated by ‘get involved’, ‘use our voices’, and ‘use our vote’. Other notable issues raised in the workshop that were not included in the top 10 were:

- volunteer and become more active in society
- be positive and encourage each other
- have conviction and get up and do something.

So, apart from the Top ranked suggestion that young people are powerless, the majority of votes are for various forms of positive action.

GALWAY WORKSHOP, SATURDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER, NUI GALWAY

Part 1: What is your vision for Ireland?

As in the other workshops, participants brainstormed on ‘the characteristics of a well-functioning society’. Divided into eight groups, the young people ranked the most important aspects of their vision, creating in the process 40 ‘visions’ for Ireland. The top 10 visions that emerged overall were as follows:

Table 10: Top 10 visions for Ireland – Galway workshop

1	Culture and language - revival, survival, pride, promotion	63 votes
2	Inclusion and equality for all	41 votes
3	Acceptance of mental health & improved facilities (for same) in e.g. school, community, free open access to services and information	34 votes
4	Improved education system (that it be more holistic; we learn from places where it works; multi-disciplinary support; diversified)	32 votes
5	Pro-activity and civic responsibility	22 votes
6	Political reform – transparency, accountability, public consultation	21 votes
7	Eradication of church influence	15 votes
8	An Ireland that enables people to stay in their country and communities	13 votes
9	Embracing individuality & compassion and respect for each other (sexuality, race, gender, age, religion, values)	
10	Active community. Empowering each other, common values, embracing new communities, inclusion of all	11 votes

The importance of culture and language is clear, receiving the largest number of votes. Inclusion and equality are also very important to the vision of Galway participants. Improved facilities in health and education also feature. While mental health appears here at number 3, health more generally was much less of an issue: ‘improved health system’ had four votes. ‘Health reform’, either singly or in combination with other public services, got seven votes. Health appeared again, however, under ‘Personal Development’ (just outside the top ten with 10 votes) and here the emphasis was on physical, sexual and mental health at the personal level.

Part 2: What needs to happen to make your vision possible?

Once again, participants reflected on the fundamental changes that might be made to how Ireland is run; on how vested interests or things might be stopping change and; on how the blocks to change

might be removed. In a similar process to that employed in workshop 1, the eight groups produced a top five of ‘things that need to happen to make your vision possible’, thus generating 40 possible priorities to rank. The top 10 are listed below:

Table 11: Top 10 Suggestions for making the vision possible – Galway workshop

1	Educational reform – spher /cspe taught as serious subjects; ‘learn for life not just for exams’	26 votes
2	Political reform (whip system, parochial politics, seanad reform)	25 votes
3	Creation of more secondary gael-scoileanna. Change how Irish is taught from an early age	24 votes
4	Mental health services – accessible for all in all communities. Reduce waiting lists. Educate about mental health at a younger age. De-stigmatise.	20 votes
5	Update and review constitution – place for everyone – all represented	19 votes
6	Review of Acht na dTeangacha and implementation of review	18 votes
7	Education – restructuring exams, continuous assessment, projects, civic / social topics	17 votes
8	Diversity – government, workplace, community	16 votes
9	Educate Ireland on ability of youth (& change)	13 votes
10	Reform of education for a more diverse and affordable system	13 votes

Educational reform, political reform and changes to how Irish is taught dominate the suggestions. Education featured really strongly in the above. Points 1 and 7 are concerned with issues to do with curriculum reform, teaching styles and methods of assessment. Point 10 relates to issues of access to the educational system itself. The focus on language (traditional culture) is also very strong here (ranked no 3 and again no 6).

A very specific focus on Acht na dTeangacha also features (18 votes).

Part 3: What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

Participants worked on the question of ‘what can you and other young people do?’ The top ten suggestions from across all of the groups in Galway emerged as follows:

Table 12: Top 10 Suggestions - What individuals can do to achieve their vision for Ireland – Galway workshop

1	Get educated! From primary school up ‘educate for life not exams’. Have cspe taught as a serious subject, educate people about up-coming elections	36 votes
2	Establish youth forums like this to discuss topics & feedback solutions	27 votes
3	Buy Irish and Be Irish, Speak Irish	23 votes
4	Get involved in political and cultural debates and have an open mind	23 votes

5	Normalise political and social discussion with friends, challenge negative comments	13 votes
6	Lead by example. BYI was step 1	12 votes
7	Follow through on the BYI with reports on progress	11 votes
8	Be proud to be Irish and engage with other cultures, multiculturalism, embrace international opportunities (UN, EU)	11 votes
9	Vote!	11 votes
10	Hold our public representatives to account	11 votes

Fairly clear and consistent messages emerge in the above. Suggestions were largely in the category of ‘get educated, get involved (in political debates / discussions), vote’. Related to the idea of getting involved was the large number of votes for ‘establish youth forums like this’ and ‘follow through on the BYI with reports on progress’.

Other similar points that did not make the ranking include ‘set the agenda – establish volunteering activities in school’ (10 votes); ‘make sure your voice is heard’ (9 votes); ‘become a leader’ (7 votes); ‘participate and get involved’ (6 votes); ‘get out and create awareness’ (3 votes). So, overall, while education was the key theme here, it was closely followed by active civic involvement. Expressing Irish identity – an open inclusive Irish identity, was also very important.

CHAPTER 4: OVERALL ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Having examined in detail the results from the two separate parts of the consultation process (the 'submissions phase' and the 'workshop phase'), this final section has three aims. Firstly, we synthesise the outputs from the four Regional Workshops, and consider the similarities and differences across the four locations (Dublin, Cork, Monaghan and Galway). Secondly, we consider to what extent the results of the two parts of the consultation process are comparable. Finally, we consider some of the 'dissenting voices' as not all participants expressed exclusively positive and optimistic sentiments.

Comparison of Results from the Regional Workshops

Interesting similarities and differences are evident in the priorities and suggestions made across the four regional workshops. Approximately 75 17-26 year olds attended each Workshop. An attempt was made to ensure gender balance and a representation of seldom heard voices. The same format of small groups proposing suggestions and the total group voting for a 'top 10' was used in each location. However, responses were mediated by a large number of volunteer facilitators who, inevitably, responded to the variety of ideas by using idiosyncratic words or phrases to represent ideas. So, a direct comparison of identical themes is not possible. Also, we should not make broad regional generalisations based on the views of c.75 young people in each region. However, interesting common patterns are evident. Below, the main responses to the '3 questions' across the four locations are summarised.

What is your vision for Ireland?

The top ranked themes (with over 30 votes each) in young people's visions for a future Ireland are accountable government and political reform (Dublin, Cork, Monaghan); educational reform (Dublin, Monaghan, Galway); Equality (Dublin, Galway); mental health and suicide awareness (Dublin, Galway); and culture (Cork, Galway).

Notwithstanding the variations in terminology and language used, there is a remarkable similarity in the features identified as important in young people's vision for a future Ireland. That is,

- political reform
- educational reform
- equality
- mental health and suicide awareness
- culture

Many other issues were raised also, but the themes above dominated young people's votes on what were **the most important aspects** of their vision for a future Ireland.

What needs to happen to make your vision possible?

Young people across the four venues were asked to rank suggestions for 'what needs to happen to make your vision possible?' The top ranked suggestions can be summarised as 'Promotion of Irish language/more gaelscoileanna' (Dublin, Cork, Galway); 'secular society and removal of church influence' (Dublin, Cork); 'funding/support for mental health services' (Dublin, Galway); 'reforms to politics (Dublin, Monaghan, Galway) and education' (Dublin, Cork, Monaghan, Galway); 'debt reduction' (Cork, Monaghan); and 'creation of jobs' (Monaghan).

It is interesting to note how the role of the Irish language, and education through Irish, was highly ranked as a force for positive change. Specifically, gaelscoileanna ranked very highly in three of the four locations as something that 'needs to happen to make your vision possible'.

What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

There was a marked similarity in what young people suggested they could do to achieve their vision of a future Ireland. In all cases the suggestions were positive, with the exception of the No. 1 response in Monaghan, which was 'We the young generation of Ireland feel we are powerless to instigate any real change due to a lack of respect for our opinions'. More generally, the dominant suggestions were to 'create/be involved in a forum that could make suggestions and feed into political decision making' (Dublin, Monaghan, Galway); 'make changes in one's own family / community, lead by example' (Dublin, Cork, Galway); 'get active, involved, informed' (Dublin, Monaghan, Galway); and 'volunteer' (Dublin, Cork).

These responses reflect the life-stage of the respondents. Young people of this age are rarely in positions of social, economic and community power, so are not yet in a position to call upon political, commercial or 'celebrity' status to effect change. Instead, they recognise that they can bring about change by:

- Getting involved in decision-making fora
- Leading by example in their own families / communities
- Getting active, involved and informed.

Are the Results of the Two Parts of the Consultation Process Comparable?

The two parts of the consultation process (that is, the multimedia consultation and the Regional Workshops) asked the same three questions:

1. What is your vision for Ireland?
2. What needs to happen to make your vision possible?
3. What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

However, this is where the similarity ends. They were two very different processes, largely involving different participants⁵. The submission process allowed people, in their own time, to submit material in any form and length that they liked. They were free to reflect and to craft lengthy submissions in their own terms. Few stuck rigidly to the format of the three questions. Rather, they tended to focus on one or more particular issues of concern to them. Consequently, they answered the three questions idiosyncratically and, for example, a given contributor's 'vision' might have been contained in a final sentence which identified a particular problem.

Meanwhile, the regional workshops were structured so that groups proposed and voted on short summary statements, often just a single word or a short phrase. Some of these were very clear, such as 'reduce debt' as something that 'needs to be done'. Others were more enigmatic and the result of an unrecorded discussion between a group of 10 participants and a facilitator; the Number 2 'vision' vote from the Cork workshop is a particular example, 'Culture and arts, language and food'.

⁵ A total of 294 people participated in the Regional Workshops and 439 17-26 year olds made submissions. Only 32 individuals engaged with both parts of the process (so, 701 individuals were involved altogether). In addition, six group submissions, involving 74 young people, resulting in a grand total of 775 17-26 year olds being involved.

Having said this, common themes emerged from the two processes. The vision for the future was largely positive. Concrete areas for change / action were identified, particularly in the areas of politics, education, and language education. Suggestions for action were made across all aspects of Irish life and society. Finally, when asked what 'you and other young people can do', the vast majority suggested 'getting involved', 'using our voice / vote' and 'volunteering'. We summarise below the common responses to the three questions but highlight the limitations of this comparison exercise – this is not a simple merging of results between the two strands of the consultation process, but rather a broad summary of the primary themes.

What is your vision for Ireland?

Young people's vision for Ireland is overwhelmingly positive. They envision a secular, confident Ireland with excellent education / health / social support systems; an Ireland of which they can be proud on the global stage; a place where arts, culture, heritage and the Irish language are valued. They envision a place with high levels of social and community cohesion and cooperation, where the vulnerable are cared for and supported, and where human rights are valued; where there is an acceptance and tolerance of all citizens and cultures, regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation.

The vision also includes economic prosperity, an enterprise culture and the opportunity of education and employment for all, a place where young people have a solid future, free from the threat of forced emigration and the burden of massive socialised debt. Irish food, crafts, and other products will be valued and recognised internationally.

A sense of 'Irishness', of having a unique cultural, historical, linguistic and artistic identity is important. For some, the vision includes a closer relationship between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

What needs to happen to make your vision possible?

Young people were asked to identify the changes required to bring about their envisioned Ireland. Political reform was highlighted by many as a requirement for progress and development. The majority of submissions referred to national, rather than local, politics. There was a strong perception of incompetence among contemporary politicians. The need for young people to be better informed and more engaged in the political process was expressed by many. It was widely acknowledged that young people themselves have a responsibility to become involved, to make their voices heard. Young people have good ideas that they can contribute, but are typically stereotyped in the media as immature and irresponsible. Young people need to challenge these stereotypes and show all

the positives they have to offer. Many suggested there needs to be better communication between politicians and young people, for example using social media.

There was a very strong view that there needs to be a structured forum where the youth voice can be promoted, encouraged and fostered. Many participants praised the Being Young and Irish initiative, and called for further related initiatives to bring the process further.

Young people called for legal reform to create a more equal society and protect the rights of, for example, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community and those seeking Irish citizenship.

A high value was placed on education and reform of many parts of the education system was seen by young people as a priority. The second level system, in particular, is deemed by many not to be 'fit for purpose' as it does not prepare people for active citizenship and over-emphasises a narrow set of skills required to perform well in the current Leaving Certificate examination. What is required is that students are educated in life skills, to be good citizens, to be open minded, to be creative and to think critically. Respect for diversity should be taught. Changes in education can impact on political reform through a greater emphasis on education of CSPE, politics and public affairs. The teaching of entrepreneurial skills from primary school will help prepare young people for the future. Access to third level should be available to all and supports should be made available to those that require it. Graduate employment should be facilitated by the state, by way of placements and internships if necessary.

The economy needs to be stimulated, with an emphasis on job creation and we need to integrate welfare and social protection more closely with inclusivity, enterprise culture and social solidarity. There is considerable growth potential in the creative industries, including arts, drama, music, dance and film and the natural creativity of the Irish people should be harnessed to create a global cultural hub.

It was suggested that alternatives to socialising centred on alcohol will promote health and reduce the social and health problems experienced by too many young people. Greater activity in promoting public health messages to young people about the harms and dangers of alcohol use is required. The health service needs to provide age-appropriate and early intervention services to address youth mental health and suicide. Youth community mental health services need to be improved.

A number of young people suggested a celebration of Irishness, a national day where Irish food, culture, language, music, sport and dancing could be show-cased in Ireland and internationally.

The Irish language is an important part of our 'Irishness', but it was suggested it needs to be used in more everyday settings. The current forced pedagogy in schools is not effective and may be counter-productive.

What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

Young people saw many opportunities to implement change, starting with themselves and their immediate families/communities and extending outwards. The overwhelming response was to 'get involved, get informed, get active'. In the words of one contributor

"I want to see my generation and the one after getting off their laptops and ipads and into the streets protesting the cost of living, cost of rent, upholding the dignity of the sick, poor, and uneducated like the founders of this country who wanted the people to walk freely, be educated freely and follow their faith freely."

Many highlighted the need to join organisations, such as student unions, youth groups and advocacy groups. Many referred to the value of the Being Young and Irish campaign and a desire to see it continue, and to develop into a wider opportunity for the voices of young people to be heard, and real action to follow.

Many young people saw volunteering as a way of promoting community values, helping those less fortunate, and as a route to concrete action for positive change.

The importance of using every vote, at local, national and EU levels, was stressed. Many contributors spoke of the need to fight against apathy about politics / society among young people, to shake off old attitudes of complaining, and doing nothing.

Many young people stressed the importance of 'being positive', of harnessing 'our can-do spirit' and of 'being proud of our country'.

Dissenting Voices

Whilst the overall tone of submissions was overwhelmingly positive, we do not wish to exclude the minority of voices that were negative and critical. Some submissions were cynical, for example:

What Is Your Vision for Ireland? *"We should vote to be invaded since it's been proven without a shadow of a doubt that this country can't run itself".*

What Can You And Other Young People Do To Help Achieve This? *"Emigrate".*

Some were conspiratorial:

"In my understanding the reason we have the dole here is to trick the working class into signing on every month saying they are that legal entity and keeping them trapped in the system. And I'm sure you know yourself the president, Taoiseach etc. don't have too much control over this country at all! The secret societies have their hands everywhere!"

Some were strident

"What is our president for, a figure head, he should step in and make changes as head of our country not to be domineered by his minions.

I would also like to see the lone parent allowance reformed, the child benefit, rent allowance, housing, all that reformed. There are people out there who are having children because they can work less than 25 hours a week and have far more in their pockets than me, who works 35 hours a week, drives for 15 hours a week and gets taxed at 21% and gets no allowances!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Did you ever think about cutting the dole (like properly) yeah so if they complain, go get a job! Stop paying people to sit around all day, don't make it easy, and stop making self employed people who pay tax all through their lives jump through hoops to get a pension".

Some were frustrated with the technological interface of the consultation process:

"I spent a while reducing my ideas - essential and important - to the most concise to fit into these boxes, but I left a line of "My Address" open, meaning when I clicked "Go back" my entire contribution was wiped! What is the point of that? NOT a good idea at all. If that is the way this website works, then I'll only be one of many getting hacked off. That's a lot of people's time wasted, including yours. These websites should always have a "comment to the webmaster" box so the message gets to the right people. For An Uachtaráin himself: Great job so far".

And finally, a small number were anti-immigration:

"Get rid of all foreigners that are here living off the state, do what other countries have always done like Dubai. Make them go home and work there".

Conclusion

This report presents the results of the two strands of President Michael D. Higgins' youth consultation with 17-26 year olds, Being Young and Irish. It is the first time such a consultation has taken place with this age group in Ireland. A total of 775 young people engaged with the process. The sample is not scientifically representative and some cohorts are striking by their absence (the Irish Diaspora and respondents from Northern Ireland, for example).

Submissions were generally positive in tone. There was a strong call for political, educational and economic reform. There was also a strong desire for the voices of young people to be heard and a desire for a forum where the views and ideas of young people can be fed into the political establishment. Finally, there was a strong willingness to 'get active, get informed, get involved'; to volunteer; and to commence the change process by one's own actions in one's own family and immediate community.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The overall aim of the Being Young and Irish initiative was to engage young people in ‘take charge of change’, to become an active part of shaping Ireland’s future. The consultation sought to ‘engage young people as active and reflective citizens in contemporary Ireland and to endorse them as one of the sources of wisdom in solving core social, political, economic and cultural issues confronting Ireland’ (Áras an Uachtaráin, 2012, p. 2⁶). In doing so, Being Young and Irish endeavoured to:

- ‘Open up channels of participation for young people and involve them in the national discussion and debate about the kind of country we have, what form of republic we wish to create and how this can be achieved
- Identify, promote and celebrate original, youth-led sensitive and realisable solutions
- Hear from young people and seek their views on the difficulties young people from diverse backgrounds are experiencing, as young and Irish people today’ (Áras an Uachtaráin, 2012, p. 3).

To achieve the above, the Being Young and Irish initiative consulted with young people between 25 May 2012 and 29 September 2012 to elicit their views and suggestions in relation to three key questions:

- What is your vision for Ireland?
- What needs to happen to make your vision possible?
- What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?

There were two key phases to the initial consultation process. **Phase 1** involved a **multimedia consultation** whereby submissions were sought in various formats including text, audio, and video. **Phase 2** involved face-to-face engagement through four **regional workshops** which took place in Dublin, Cork, Monaghan and Galway.

⁶Áras an Uachtaráin, (2012). Being Young and Irish Brochure (English language version). Retrieved on 25 May 2012 from www.president.ie.

In Phase 1, submissions could be made through a dedicated online form which was placed on the President's website (www.president.ie); by email; or by post. The range of possible submission formats available aimed to enable young people to express themselves in ways most convenient to them. In Phase 2, young people were invited to attend day-long regional workshops to share their views on their ideas for change. The President attended each regional workshop. A team of researchers from Dublin Institute of Technology also attended these seminars and subsequently collated the seminar output together with key themes emerging from their analysis of submissions. Findings are presented in the current report.

On completion of the consultation process the President will be hosting the national Presidency Seminar (17 November 2012) which will be underpinned by the views and suggestions put forth through the submissions and regional workshops. At this point young people will have the opportunity to present their vision and suggestions for change to senior politicians and other policy makers. At this national seminar young people will be facilitated to produce a declaration of their vision for Ireland's future, drawing on the findings of the consultation process. Key to the vision of Being Young and Irish is that the process does not end here but that suggestions for action and change be directed to those positioned to realise them.

Phase 1: Multimedia Consultation

The multimedia consultation represented the first phase of the Being Young and Irish consultation process and took place between 25th May 2012 and 29th September 2012.

Sample

The consultation was opened up to any young person aged 17 to 26 years who had an interest in shaping Ireland's future; it was not a requirement to be an Irish citizen, to be resident in Ireland, or to have Irish nationality to get involved.

A targeted awareness campaign was implemented in order to access as many young people as possible. As part of this campaign, adverts were placed on youth oriented websites (such as Entertainment.ie; and Spunout.ie); radio broadcasts were made on national radio and youth oriented radio stations (such as Spin, iRadio, Red FM, and Beat); printed advertisements and feature articles were run in newspapers (such as the Irish Times); and posters and fliers were mailed out to youth organisations. In addition to this, a Being Young and Irish Facebook page was established in order to

promote the initiative and to showcase ideas, suggestions and feedback from the regional workshops. A Being Young and Irish brochure was accessible in English, Irish, and easy to read formats through the President's website. Contact was made with organisations involved with Irish abroad (such as the GAA) in order to access the Irish Diaspora, and features were carried in the Huffington Post.

Ethics

The methodology of the Being Young and Irish initiative was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Dublin Institute of Technology. On the submission website, a prominent notice stated 'I am aware that my submission may be published and/or broadcast and by submitting I am giving express permission for reuse of my material (In any publication or any public airing of this material your anonymity is ensured)'. Contributors had to 'tick a box' in order to proceed past this notice. Contributors were also requested to provide their name, gender, postal address, email address and date of birth.

Summary of submissions received

A total of 439 young people aged between 17 and 26 years made submissions to Being Young and Irish between May 2012 and September 2012. A further six group submissions were received (the age and gender of group participants was not always reported, so they are not included in the figures below). As depicted in Figure A1, 50% (220) of the individual submissions were from females, 47.5% [208] were from males and for 2.5% [11] gender was not specified.

GENDER OF YOUNG PEOPLE (n=439)

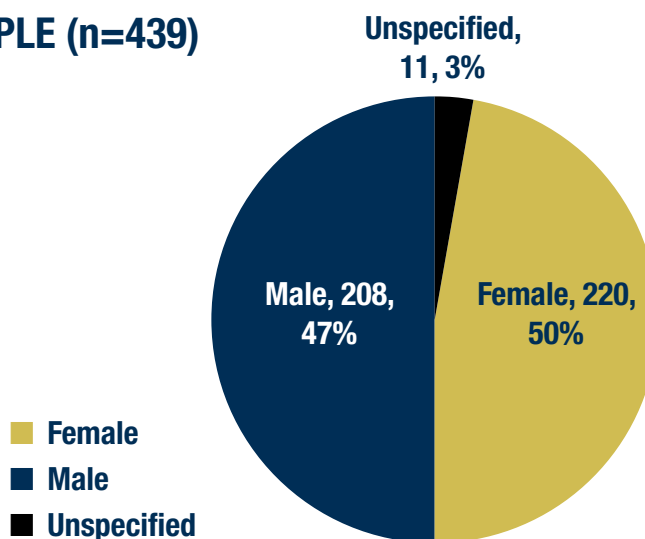


Figure A1: Gender distribution of young people who made individual submissions to Being Young and Irish (n=439)

Nineteen year olds were most frequently represented (17%) [74], followed by 18 year olds (14.5%) [64] and 20 year olds (14%) [61], with the least submissions coming from those aged 26 years (3.5%) [15]. The age distribution of the young people who made submissions is presented in Figure A2.

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE (n=439)

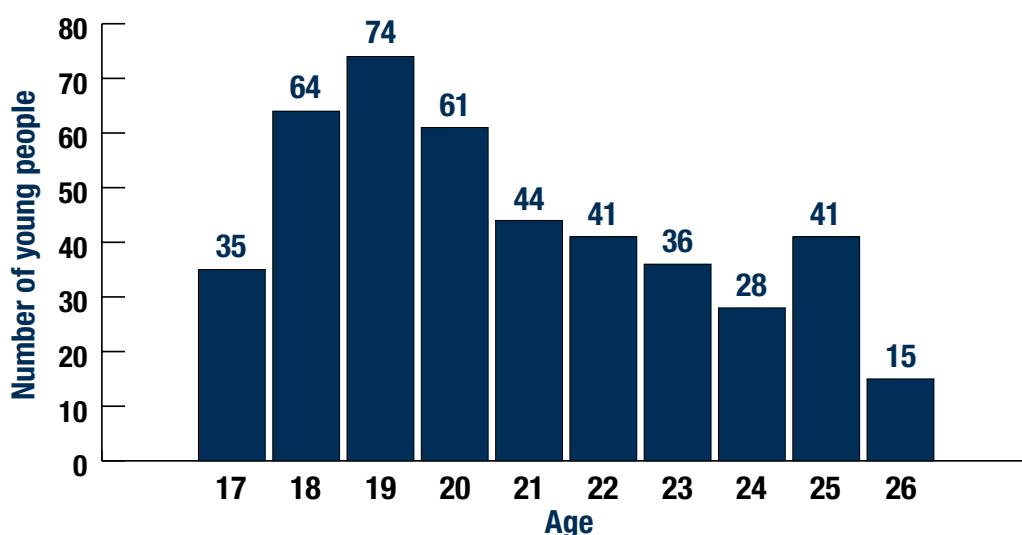


Figure A2: Age distribution of young people who made individual submissions to Being Young and Irish (n=439)

Within Ireland, the respondents were more likely to have come from Dublin (101) [23%], followed by Cork (55) [12.5%] than from any other county in Ireland. The proportion of respondents per region of Ireland is depicted in Figure 3. As can be seen, 42% (185) came from Leinster⁷; 36% (158) from Munster; 14% (62) from Connaught; and 6% (26) from Ulster. A detailed county breakdown can be found in appendix B.

PROPORTION OF YOUNG INDIVIDUAL RESPONDENTS FROM WITHIN IRELAND BY PROVINCE (n=437)

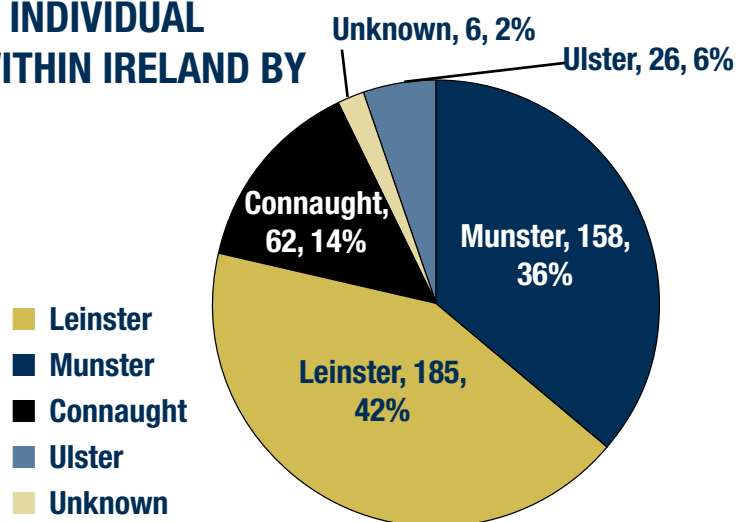


Figure A3: Proportion of Being Young and Irish respondents from within Ireland by region. This includes group submissions and does not reach the total number (N) of 439 as ‘outside Ireland’ respondents are not included

Eight young people reported their residence as being outside Ireland [Australia (1), Belgium (1), China (1), India (1) and the United Kingdom (4)].

⁷Leinster: Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath, Offaly, Westmeath, Wexford, and Wicklow.
 Munster: Clare, Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, and Waterford.
 Connaught: Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Sligo, and Roscommon.
 Ulster: Antrim, Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Down, Fermanagh, Monaghan, and Tyrone.

The total number of submissions received was 681, made by 664 individuals and groups/organisations representing young people⁸. Submissions from 219 individuals (33%) were excluded from this analysis as they came from younger teens, older adults and those who did not reveal their age. A breakdown of respondents by proportion within and outside of the target age range (17-26 years) is presented in Figure A4.

PROPORTION OF RESPONDENTS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF THE TARGET AGE RANGE OF 17-26 YEARS (n=664)

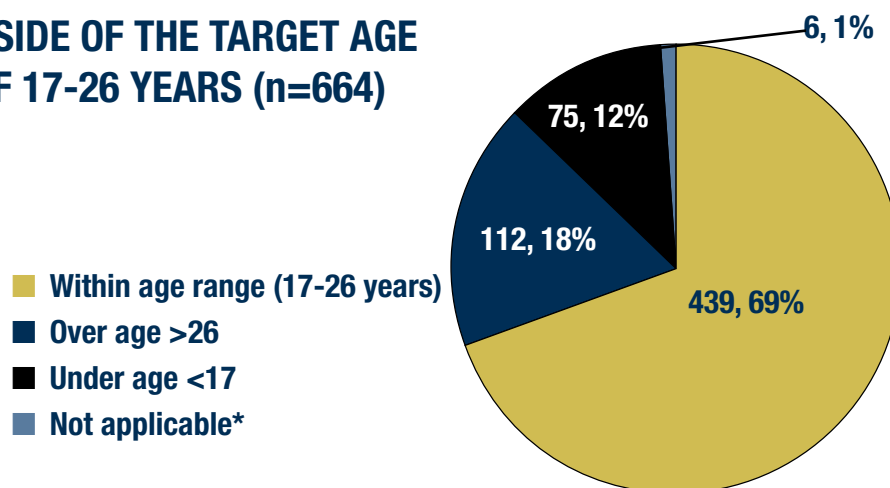
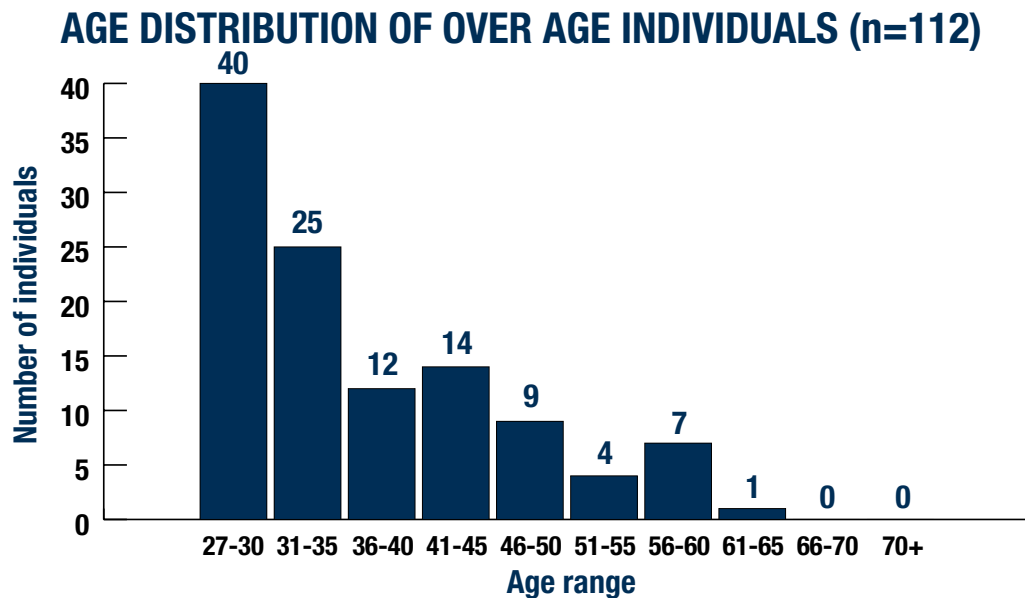


Figure A4: Proportion of respondents within and outside the target age range of 17-26 years (N=664). *Not applicable refers to submissions from groups/organisations representing young people.

As can be seen in Figure A5, 112 individuals (18%) over the age of 26 years made submissions. Those in the 27-30 age category were represented most frequently among them (40) [36%].

⁸ A number of individuals made multiple submissions. Six groups/organisations representing young people made submissions.

Figure A5: Age distribution of those over the target age range who made submissions to Being Young and Irish (n=112)



In total 75 individuals (11%) under the age of 17 years made submissions to Being Young and Irish. Among these, those aged 16 years were most frequently represented (25) [33.3%]. Figure A6 presents the age distribution of this group.

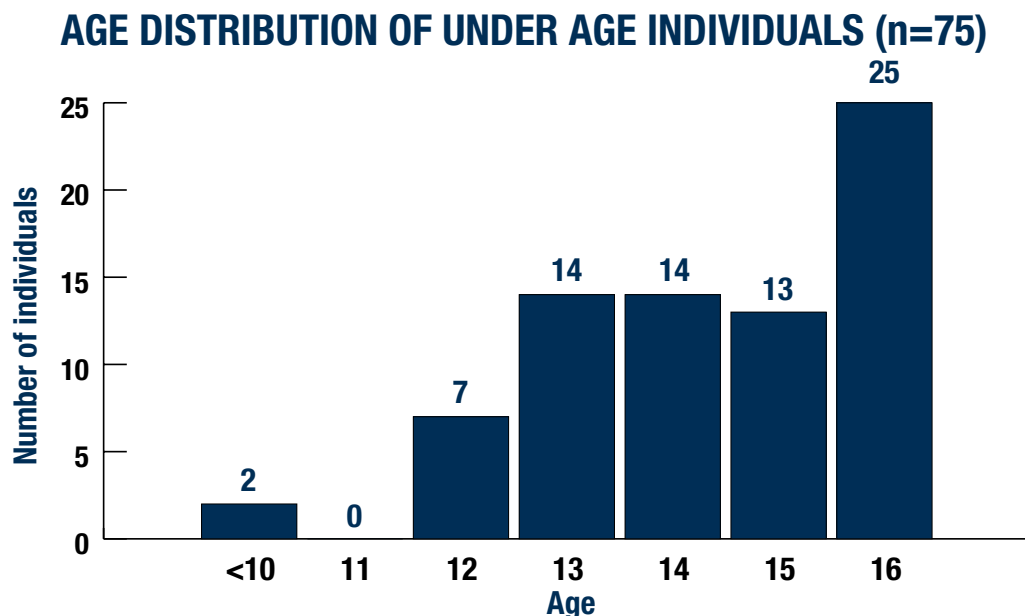


Figure A6: Age distribution of those under the target age range who made submissions to Being Young and Irish (n=75)

Five percent (32) of those who made submissions to Being Young and Irish did not reveal their age. Of those outside the target age range, 11 reported residing outside Ireland [France (3), Italy (1), Japan (2), United Kingdom (2), and the United States (3)].

Data analysis

Submissions were received in a range of formats including text, audio and video. The full text of each submission was uploaded to NVivo (vers. 10), a software package used to assist in analysing qualitative data. Each entry was closely read and 'coded', whereby the primary topics/themes raised in the submission were noted. Some submissions were short and focussed on a single issue, whereas others were lengthy and highlighted a range of topics. Analysts worked in pairs and made regular reference to each other's work to ensure, in so far as possible, that a shared understanding of codes was being applied. This process generated 173 codes.

Naturally, there were similarities and overlaps in the themes. For example, 'Education' emerged as a dominant theme, with submissions ranging across the spectrum from primary education, secondary education, civics education, further education, tertiary education, college fees, and so on. So, the next stage was to collapse the 173 codes to the primary themes. This was done by the full group and it involved finding commonalities across the codes to identify 11 primary themes, which were as follows:

1. Vision (232 sources, i.e., mentioned in 232 submissions)
2. Employment, Enterprise, Social Security, Concern with Economy (174)
3. Political reform (163)
4. Education (162)
5. Equality (122)
6. Involve young people (106)
7. Suggestions [for action] (105)
8. Be positive (89)

9. Health (82)
10. Community and civil society (74)
11. Identity as Irish (52)

Many more minor themes were identified, but we felt that the above selection captures the dominant themes of submissions. As we can see from this list, submissions cannot be neatly categorised to the three questions at the core of the consultation (1. What is your vision for Ireland? 2. What needs to happen to make your vision possible? 3. What can you and other young people do to achieve this vision?). This is because submissions did not confine themselves to this structure. So, for example, the dominant theme in submissions was 'Vision' (not surprising given the questions posed), and these frequently contained elements of other themes relating to, for example, 'education', or 'health'.

Phase 2: Regional Workshops

Four Regional Workshops took place in Dublin, Cork, Monaghan and Galway on four consecutive Saturdays in September 2012. The process the programme for these four Regional Workshops is outlined below.

Encouraging participation in Being Young and Irish regional workshops

In an effort to make the Being Young and Irish Regional Workshops as accessible as possible, there was an open call for participants with no specific qualifying criteria for participation. Participants were asked to complete and submit a very simple form which was available as part of an information leaflet or online. The participants were then randomly selected while ensuring a gender, geographic and age balance at each Regional Workshop. Twenty per cent of places were also reserved for seldom-heard young people.

In addition to the Being Young and Irish launch, which had representatives from 27 organisations, an information leaflet with details on how to apply to participate in the Regional Workshops was sent to schools, students unions, youth organisations, youth reach offices, youth cafes, social welfare offices and local Citizens Information Board offices. All University and Institutes of Technology Presidents were requested to send a global email to their student and alumni bodies with information on the initiative

and a number did so. Also, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade engaged the support of Irish Embassies to communicate with young people abroad about the initiative.

Information was sent to all the Irish language schools in the 32 counties, and Gaisce volunteers contacted English language schools nationwide.

A concerted effort was made to include young people who were not attached to any organisation. The information leaflet was followed up with phone calls and emails encouraging participation of young people from all backgrounds and of all abilities aged between 17 and 26. Where numbers of any particular cohort of young people or in any particular region were low, further phone calls targeting these specific groups were made to relevant organisations and contacts.

As 20% of places at each Regional Workshop was reserved for seldom heard young people, organisations representing seldom-heard young people were allocated a number of places for their members. Young travellers, immigrants, people with physical and intellectual disabilities, unemployed people, people from poor economic backgrounds as well as young people from the 'school completion' programme were approached and represented at the Regional Workshops. Young people in organisations focused on mental health as well as Irish language speakers and young people from Northern Ireland were also included and represented at the Regional Workshops. Applications were accepted up until the day before the Regional Workshop in each location.

Number of participants

The concerted effort to encourage a diverse participation in the Being Young and Irish Regional Workshops, outlined above, resulted in 294 participants attending the four Regional Workshops, 54% of which were female and 46% of which were male. While it had been planned to have 100 participants at each Regional Workshop, on average, 23% of the number of registered participants 'did not show' on the day.

Table A1: Number and gender of participants at Regional Workshops

LOCATION	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	FEMALE	MALE
DUBLIN	75	40	35
CORK	73	34	39
MONAGHAN	72	39	33
GALWAY	74	47	27
TOTAL	294	160	134

Logistics

Once selected, the project manager liaised directly with the participants, providing information about the Regional Workshops in advance. The four venues were selected to ensure maximum accessibility and familiarity for young people. To that end, the Regional Workshops were held in an IT college (Dublin Institute of Technology, Bolton St. Campus), a GAA sports ground (Nemo Rangers, Cork) a secondary school (St. Macartan’s College, Monaghan) and a university (National University of Ireland, Galway). The Office of the President operated a public transport policy except where people would not be in a position to travel otherwise. Public transport costs were reimbursed, where necessary.

Ethics

Participants were given information on ‘research ethics’ in advance of each Regional Workshop and advised that they would be asked to sign a statement indicating that they understood this information at registration for the event.

Programme and methodologies

A programme was devised based on a pilot exercise held with 33 young representatives in March with the aim of being creative, challenging and engaging for the participants. Methodologies included word clouds that were generated in real time, facilitated workshop sessions that used specifically tailored materials for the initiative as well as democratic voting on the priority outcomes.

The methodology for the consultation was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Dublin Institute of Technology.

A number of activities to engage participants during the breaks were also employed with participants encouraged to share their experiences of the regional workshop through social networks such as Twitter and Facebook. A videographer was also on hand to record the event and conduct interviews with the participants for the purpose of creating a number of video postcards to promote the event and capture the experiences of young people taking part.

Support personnel

The Regional Workshops were ably supported by an inspirational team. Organisations including the National Youth Council of Ireland, Foróige, Youth Work Ireland, the Irish Wheelchair Association, Headstrong and Catholic Youth Care provided highly skilled facilitators so that there was a ratio of at least one facilitator for every ten participants. An Gaisce provided volunteers to assist the logistical arrangements for the event.

APPENDIX B: NUMBER OF SUBMISSIONS BY COUNTY OF IRELAND⁹

County	Number of respondents
Antrim	3
Armagh	0
Carlow	4
Cavan	13
Clare	27
Cork	55
Derry	1
Donegal	4
Down	1
Dublin	101
Fermanagh	0
Galway	33
Kerry	7
Kildare	10
Kilkenny	7
Laois	8
Leitrim	4
Limerick	42
Longford	3
Louth	11
Mayo	10
Meath	11
Monaghan	4
Offaly	8
Roscommon	8
Sligo	7
Tipperary	18
Tyrone	0
Waterford	9
Westmeath	4
Wexford	7
Wicklow	11
Unknown	6

⁹ One group contribution was received which collected the views of young people across counties Antrim, Down, Derry, Armagh, Fermanagh and Tyrone; this is recorded in the Antrim numbers as the contribution was sent from Antrim