



NYCI General Election Manifesto

“The Soaring Twenties”

“Securing long-term social, environmental and economic sustainability in the next decade, by investing in young people and youth work sector”

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Background

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for 55 voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. Our member organisations work with and for up to 380,000 young people aged 10 to 24 years in every community in Ireland, with the support of 40,000 volunteers and 1,400 paid staff. NYCI functions to represent the interests of young people and youth organisations. NYCI's role is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act, 2001) and is represented on the National Economic and Social Council. The work of NYCI is based on principles of equality, social justice and equal participation for all. In achieving these aims, the NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to their community.

Introduction

The upcoming election is a crucial turning point in the history of the nation. It is highly likely that we will reach the centenary of the foundation of the State during the lifetime of the next Government. NYCI calls on all parties and candidates in the upcoming General Election, if elected to Dáil Éireann, to commit to policies and actions to address the social injustices and economic inequalities affecting young people. We urge members of the Oireachtas to take the urgent climate change decisions and implement the required policy measures to save our planet. We are also calling on all candidates and parties to invest in services and in particular, youth work services, which are making such a positive difference in the lives of so many young people.

If the next Government make the right decisions, such as the decision to invest in young people and youth work, Ireland has a bright future. The results of Census 2016¹ confirmed that Ireland has one of the youngest populations in Europe with one-third aged less than 25 years. Another CSO study² found that Ireland had the highest number of young people in the 0-14 age cohort in the EU. The 2016 census results also indicate that the number of young people aged 10-24 will increase by 13.2% between 2015 and 2025 and will be just over one million young people by 2025 (1,005,938)³. While it is true that Ireland, in line with most countries in the Western World, has a growing older population, these figures confirm that Ireland is also unique in that exhibits a large and growing youth population. Many other countries are grappling with a declining youth population, whereas Ireland has a unique opportunity to invest in a growing youth population. The next decade is an opportunity for Ireland to aim high and to deliver economic equality, social justice and environmental sustainability. This election manifesto is entitled "*The Soaring Twenties*" and is a clarion call for all parties and candidates running for election to adopt and support policies and proposals

¹ Census 2016, Central Statistics Office,

<http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY007&PLanguage=0>

² Measuring Ireland's Progress <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-mip/mip2015/introduction/>

³ E3003, Population 2011-2016 by Single Year of Age, Sex, County and City, CSO,

<https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=E3003&PLanguage=0>

in the next five years to support our country and our young people to aim high and reach their full potential.

Manifesto

This election manifesto puts forward a range of proposals to improve the lives of young people, to support them to achieve their full potential and ultimately, to ensure Ireland's long-term social, environmental and economic prosperity and security.

Summary of Recommendations

This is a summary of the NYCI proposals for the next Programme for Government:

Youth Policy:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to retain the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as a senior ministry
- NYCI calls on the next Government to appoint a Minister of State with responsibility for Youth Policy and Youth Work.

Youth Work:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop in partnership with the sector a National Youth Work Development Plan for the period 2021-2025.
- NYCI calls on the next Government to invest an additional €20m in youth work services by 2025 by means of a €4m per annum increase each year from 2021-2025, to strengthen voluntary youth work organisations to provide more supports and activities for young people and to meet the needs of a growing youth population.

Social Protection for Young Jobseekers:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to restore the full rate of Jobseeker's Allowance to all those aged 18-24 years.

Youth Homelessness:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop a Youth Homeless Strategy.

Youth Employment and Access to Apprenticeships:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop, implement and resource a National Access to Apprenticeship programme.

Voting Rights and Electoral Registration:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to bring forward a referendum to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in Dáil and Presidential elections, and referenda

and to bring forward legislation to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in Local and European elections.

- NYCI calls on the next Government to establish and adequately resource an Electoral Commission by the end of 2021.

Climate Action and Social Justice:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to establish a Climate Action Empowerment, Advocacy and Participation Fund overseen and managed by a non-statutory agency to support the participation of young people in policy-making and to support actions and activities by young people and youth groups.

Access to Higher Education:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to review the SUSI (Student Universal Support Ireland) grant scheme, taking into account the real cost of living and with a view to providing meaningful support to students on lower incomes, to pursue higher education.
- NYCI calls on the next Government to reduce the cost of the student contribution charge over the next five years.

1. Youth Policy

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

The establishment of the Department for Children and Young People in 2011 and the appointment of the first ever cabinet level Minister, was a significant development. This was designed to ensure the needs, concerns and voice of children and young people were given greater political priority and prominence in public policy. This Department was also established to play a greater role in policy development and coordination, and to ensure that child and youth policy is integrated across Government. The scope, role and responsibilities of the Department has grown significantly in the past five years. The total budget for which the Department is responsible for has grown by 51% in the 2014 – 2019 period from €999m to €1510m.⁴ Furthermore, the number of staff in the Department has grown by 80% from 157 to 284 in the same period.⁵ We support the retention of the Department and call on the next Government to give a commitment to retain the position of Minister for Children and Youth Affairs as a senior ministry and maintain the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Despite the growth of the Department of Child and Youth affairs, NYCI is concerned that the focus on the needs of young people and the youth work sector has diminished in the Department in recent years. While the Department has grown in size and scope and has increased responsibilities, its focus on young adults in particular has been limited. The lack of progress on the implementation of the National Youth Strategy and the failure to provide meaningful investment in youth work illustrates that youth policy and youth work have not been given sufficient attention and resources in recent years. We acknowledge that all public spending was cut during the recession, however, an analysis of Government spending since 2011 indicates that while overall public expenditure has increased by 12%, youth work funding has increased by just 0.3% (see Table 1). As our economy and public finances recover, it is evident that young people and youth work services are not getting their fair share from the exchequer and this needs to be addressed by the next Government.

⁴ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 1371, 8th May 2019
<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-05-08a.3711>

⁵ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 565, 10th December 2019
<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-12-10a.1463>

Table 1: Current Spending 2011-2019

Year	2011	2019	% change +/-
Total Government Spending ⁶	€52.8bn	€59.3bn	+12%
Total Youth Work Spending ⁷	€60.2m	€60.4m	+0.3%

As noted already, the overall funding allocations within the Department have increased by €511m or 51% between 2014 and 2019, however, of these additional monies, only 2% or €10.6m has been allocated to youth work.⁸ We believe that a dedicated Minister is required to ensure that youth policy and youth work get the requisite political and departmental attention. That is why we are calling on the next Government to appoint a Minister of State with responsibility for Youth Policy and Youth Work.

Proposals:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to retain the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as a senior ministry
- NYCI calls on the next Government to appoint a Minister of State with responsibility for Youth Policy and Youth Work

2. Youth Work

National Youth Work Development Plan 2021-2025

Since the completion of the last National Youth Work Development Plan in 2007, Ireland and the youth work sector has experienced huge change and challenge. We have been through the great recession, which impacted severely on young people. The youth work sector endured among the most severe funding cuts, most of which have yet to be reversed. At the same time Ireland's youth population has risen considerably and has become a much more diverse society, while also undergoing significant social change. The sector has responded to these challenges, with the evolution of programmes delivering digital youth work and in promoting diversity and inclusivity, among others.

The first and most recent National Youth Work Development Plan for the period ended in 2007 just as Ireland entered a period of economic, social and political crisis. The first plan was developed by Government in partnership with the youth work sector and set out a five-year strategy for the development of youth work in Ireland. It also examined the range of youth

⁶ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 242, 8th May 2019

<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-05-08a.645>

⁷ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 1363-1366, 8th May 2019,

https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-05-08/1363/#pq_1363

⁸ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 1363-1366, 8th May 2019,

https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-05-08/1363/#pq_1363

services and their relationship with other aspects of youth policy and provision. It explored the challenges facing the youth work sector and set goals and actions for the development of youth work over the five-year life of the plan.

NYCI believes a new plan is required to maximise the potential of the sector and to better co-ordinate our efforts. A plan is also required to address the challenges that young people and the sector face, to support sustainable investment and to ensure there is a collective way forward agreed by both the youth work sector and State. The development of a new National Youth Work Development Plan would help to guide the proposed investment in the sector. That is why NYCI is calling on the next Government to develop a National Youth Work Development Plan for the period 2021-2025 in partnership with the sector

Proposal:

- NYCI is calling on the next Government to develop a National Youth Work Development Plan for the period 2021-2025 in partnership with the sector.

Investment in Youth Work Services

Voluntary youth organisations are active in almost every community reaching over 383,000 young people. They are particularly active in supporting young people from economically or socially disadvantaged communities, with 53.3% of all participants coming from these areas.⁹ Voluntary youth organisations work in a broad range of areas such as active citizenship, social and political education, and supporting the participation of young people in education and training. They also deliver programmes to promote positive mental health, enhance digital competence, school completion and employability. Many youth organisations also run projects in youth justice, equality and anti-racism and alcohol and drug awareness. Voluntary youth organisations also organise international exchange programmes for young people, allowing them to meet, engage and work with young people from other countries and cultures. The track record, credibility and reach of the youth sector is also demonstrated by the fact that we have one of the highest levels of involvement by young people in youth and student organisations in the EU, with 61% of young people active in a youth/student organisation here compared to an average of 41% across the EU.¹⁰

As detailed in the Indecon Report,¹¹ for every €1 invested in youth work the economic benefit/costs saved by the State in the long run are €2.20. This study demonstrates that investment in youth work not only supports young people to reach their full potential and become active citizens, it also reduces long-term costs for the State in relation to the health, justice and welfare services for young people. One of the unique features of youth work services in Ireland, is the contribution of the over 40,000 adult volunteers who work with and

⁹ Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants, pp 49 November 2012

¹⁰ EU Eurobarometer Number 478, March 2019

<https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/flash/surveyky/2224>

¹¹ Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants, pp 18 November 2012

for young people. These volunteers bring their life experience and expertise to youth work and provide a critical resource to organisations in the sector and considerable savings to the State. In 2012, Indecon estimated that the annual economic value of youth work-related volunteering at €47.7m.¹² Too often, the State has viewed the work of recruiting, training and maintaining volunteers as being cost neutral, when in fact voluntary youth organisations have to invest significant staff time and resources in gaining new and supporting existing volunteers. The State must provide more financial assistance in this regard.

Investment in youth work services from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) decreased by 31.8% over an eight-year period, from €73.1m in 2008 to €49.8m in 2014. While funding for youth work from DCYA has increased in recent years and now stands at €61.8m¹³ in 2020, it is €11.3m or 15% below that of over a decade ago. We acknowledge that all public spending was cut during the recession, however, an analysis of Government spending between 2011 and 2019 indicates that while overall public expenditure has increased by 12%,¹⁴ youth work funding has increased by just 0.3%¹⁵ in the same period. As our economy and public finances recover, it is evident that young people and youth work services are not getting their fair share from the exchequer and this needs to be addressed in the next 5 years.

In 2008, the investment in youth work services was €76 per young person. By 2014, this had collapsed to €58 per young person. While there has been an increase in funding, the youth population is also growing significantly, therefore the actual investment in 2020 comes to just €67 per young person. The results of Census 2016 indicate that there will be 1,005,938 young people aged between 10-24 years in 2025¹⁶. As outlined earlier in this document, NYCI is calling for the development of a National Youth Work Development Plan 2021-2025. This plan would detail the priorities for investment over the five-year period. We propose that investment in youth work services should be increased to €82 per young person by 2025, which amounts to annual funding of €82m by 2025. In order to achieve this, NYCI is calling for the next Government to invest additional funding of €4m per annum in the period 2021-2025.

Proposals:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to invest an additional €20m in youth work services by 2025 by means of a €4m per annum increase each year from 2021-2025, to strengthen voluntary youth work organisations to provide more supports and activities for young people and to meet the needs of a growing youth population.

¹² Assessment of the Economic Value of Youth Work by Indecon Economic Consultants, November 2012

¹³ DCYA Press Release, January 15th 2020 "Minister Zappone announces €61 million in youth work funding for 2020"
<https://www.gov.ie/en/news/0e7b0f-minister-zappone-announces-61m-in-youth-funding-for-2020/>

¹⁴ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 242, 8th May 2019
<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-05-08a.645>

¹⁵ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 1363-1366, 8th May 2019,
https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2019-05-08/1363/#pq_1363

¹⁶ Census 2016, CSO <http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=EY007&PLanguage=0>

3. Social Inclusion

Social Protection for Young People

NYCI supports full equality for young people. We opposed the decision of previous Governments to reduce welfare payments to young unemployed persons under 26 years of age and we want the full rates to be restored. We acknowledge the decision of the Government in Budget 2020 to restore the full rate of Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) (currently €203 per week) to those aged 25 years. Based on our analysis, this decision benefited 1,800 young jobseekers. We also welcome the decision to restore the full rate of JA for young people aged 18-24 years, if they are living independently and in receipt of State supports (e.g. Rent Supplement, RAS, and HAP). It is important to note that the Government anticipate that this measure will only benefit in the region of 200 young jobseekers. This means that based on the most recent data, that almost 12,000 young jobseekers aged 18-24 years will remain on the lower rate of €112.70 a week. We are disappointed that the vast majority of young people aged 18-24 years are still on the lower rates of payment. We believe the imposition of lower rates on young jobseekers is contrary to the provisions of Article 40.1 of the Irish Constitution,¹⁷ which dictates that all citizens should be treated equally and must be addressed.

NYCI commissioned the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) in 2019¹⁸ to conduct a detailed analysis of the Minimum Essential Standard of Living for young people on Jobseeker's Allowance aged 18-25 years. The VPSJ Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) budget standards details the minimum income required to live and participate in Irish society in the social and economic life in Ireland. The research places an emphasis on 'needs, not wants', and produces comprehensive, transparent, itemised lists (of over 2,000 items, goods and services) detailing what is required to meet minimum needs and enable an acceptable minimum standard of living. From this, budgets specifying the actual average weekly cost of a minimum acceptable standard (the Minimum Essential Standard of Living) are compiled, producing MESL budgets for 90% of households across urban and rural Ireland.

The results from the MESL for young people aged 18-25 years indicate that the current levels of JA payments create economic poverty, hardship and social exclusion. This is particularly so for the 5,581 young people¹⁹ who are long-term unemployed (12 months or more). The analysis from VPSJ demonstrates that for all those on the lower rates of JA, with the exception of young people aged 25 living in the family home, the current payments are wholly

¹⁷ Irish Constitution http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Historical_Information/The_Constitution/February_2015_-_Constitution_of_Ireland_.pdf

¹⁸ NYCI Pre-Budget Submission 2020, "A Fair Share for Young People and Youth Work" <https://www.youth.ie/documents/nyci-pre-budget-submission-budget-2020/> P16

¹⁹ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 381, 5th December 2019 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-12-05a.967>

inadequate. For the vast majority of recipients, the current payments are a fraction of what is required to live with dignity. We are calling on the next Government to restore the full rate of JA to all young people aged 18-24 years.

Proposal:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to restore the full rate of Jobseeker’s Allowance to all those aged 18-24

Youth Homelessness

In November 2019, 10,448²⁰ people were recorded as homeless, which included 6,696 adults and 3,752 children under 18 years. The number of young people aged 18-24 who are homeless was 882 in November 2019, which represents a doubling of the numbers homeless since August 2014.²¹

The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*, identifies ‘economic security and opportunity’ as a national outcome for children and young people up to the age of 25. Despite this national outcome, homelessness amongst young people in Ireland is a significant and growing problem. While there are many reasons a young person can experience homelessness, issues such as reduced social welfare supports, young people being a lower priority on housing waiting lists, unsuitable emergency accommodation and inadequate support services (especially for those leaving care) are major contributory factors. Many young people have difficulty accessing affordable and quality housing in the private rental market and/or social housing sector. The cuts in social welfare for young people have made it increasingly difficult for many to be able to afford to leave home and live independently. Furthermore, these cuts and lack of supply have made it very challenging for young people leaving care to access housing.

We believe that the restoration of the full rate of JA will assist many young people experiencing homelessness and at risk of homelessness. The current policy of reduced JA payment means that young people who are unemployed have no chance of supporting themselves out of homelessness and into accommodation. Much more needs to be done to address youth homelessness and that is why as a member of the Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness.²² NYCI supports the call for the development of a Youth Homeless Strategy. This strategy must include measures to prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place. The Government must give tenants greater security so young people can plan for their future. The strategy must guarantee that all young people leaving State Care have a

²⁰ The Department of Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government Homelessness Report, November 2019 https://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_november_2019.pdf

²¹ Focus Ireland Press Release on Youth Homelessness, October 2019 <https://www.focusireland.ie/press/focus-ireland-conference-calls-for-national-youth-homelessness-strategy-as-number-of-18-24-year-olds-homeless-has-doubled-in-5-years/>

²² Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness <https://www.endyouthhomelessness.ie/who-we-are/>

secure home. It must also address the needs of young LGBTI+²³ people, who are at higher risk of homelessness across the world. Homeless services should be LGBTI+ friendly and staff should be trained to respond to specific needs.

Proposal:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop and implement a Youth Homeless Strategy

4. Youth Employment and Access to Apprenticeships

We welcome job growth in the Irish economy and the consistent trend of reduced youth unemployment, which in December 2019 stood at 12.6%.²⁴ The rate of youth unemployment (15-24 years), however, it is more than three times that of those aged 25-74 years which stands at 3.7%. In December 2019, this translates into 18,469 young people aged 18-24 signing on the live register.²⁵ We are particularly concerned about the 5,581 young people²⁶ who are now long-term unemployed (for 12 months or more). As noted by a Eurofound study,²⁷ Ireland has a lower than average EU youth unemployment rate, but a higher than average long-term youth unemployment rate. In addition to the young people on JA and Benefit, in 2018 we also had 21,907 young people on Disability Allowance,²⁸ an increase of 45% since 2013. Another area of concern is the continued high number of young people '*not in education, employment and training*' (NEET). In 2017, Ireland's NEET rate among 15-29 year olds was 13.1%.²⁹

²³ Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex (LGBTI+) people

²⁴ CSO, Monthly Unemployment Report, December 2019,

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentdecember2019/>

²⁵ Live Register, CSO, December 2019 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/lr/liveregisterdecember2019/>

²⁶ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 381, 5th December 2019

<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-12-05a.967>

²⁷ Eurofound (2017), Long-term unemployed youth: Characteristics and policy responses, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1729en.pdf

²⁸ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 1485, May 8th 2019

<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-05-08a.4034>

²⁹ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 591, 26th March 2019

<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-03-26a.1416>

Table 2 Unemployment Data December 2019 (NEET rate is 2017)

Overall Unemployment Rate ³⁰	4.8%
Age 25-74 Unemployment Rate	3.8%
Youth Unemployment Rate (15-24)	12.6%
Young Long Term Unemployed (12 months) ³¹	5,581
Not in Education, Employment, Training (NEET) rate (15-29) ³²	13.1%

National Access to Apprenticeship Programme

As one measure to address youth unemployment, NYCI is calling for the establishment of a National Access to Apprenticeship programme. We welcome the expansion and growth in apprenticeships in the last number of years. The number of apprentices in training in 2019 was 16,000³³ up from 10,445 in 2016³⁴ driven by a 110% increase in the number of new entrants between 2013 and 2018.³⁵ Funding has also increased by 131% from €52.7m in 2014 to €122m in 2018. We support the overall Government commitment to increase the number of new entrants to 9,000 per annum by next year with the introduction of a range of new apprenticeships including in areas such as animation, horticulture and healthcare³⁶.

At present, only 2% of apprentices are young women and 2.8% have a disability. There is no data available on other categories such as young people who are socially and economically disadvantaged or those from a minority ethnic background. As we expand the number and range of apprenticeships, it is vital that these opportunities remain open to all young people, especially disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. In that context, the review of pathways to participation in apprenticeships by SOLAS in 2018 was welcome.³⁷ Any policy or measures to increase participation by underrepresented groups will require investment. In 2019, the funding for SOLAS pre-apprentice programmes was €873,000, which is less than 1% of the overall apprenticeship budget, with no direct State funding for access to apprenticeship programmes.

³⁰ CSO, Monthly Unemployment Report, December 2019, <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentdecember2019/>

³¹ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Question 381, 5th December 2019 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-12-05a.967>

³² Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 591, 26th March 2019 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-03-26a.1416>

³³ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 367-377, May 8th 2019 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-05-08a.1001>

³⁴ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 114, 117-119, 18th January 2018 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2018-01-18a.295>

³⁵ Dáil Éireann, Parliamentary Questions 367-377, May 8th 2019 <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2019-05-08a.1001>

³⁶ <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2017-Press-Releases/PR17-12-08.html>

³⁷ <http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/PathwaysApprenticeshipReviewNov18.pdf>

NYCI supports programmes such as the TU (Technological University) Dublin Access to Apprenticeship³⁸ (ATA) scheme, which is primarily funded by the private sector; supports young people aged 16-24 from disadvantaged backgrounds, and with limited educational qualifications in Dublin City. The TU Dublin ATA programme supports the participants over a 12-week period to sample a range of apprenticeship opportunities, assists with CV and interview preparation and includes two weeks work experience. NYCI supports the expansion of such programmes across the country but it should be done as part of an agreed national policy, and not in an ad hoc manner. In order to develop and implement a national ATA programme, it must involve the key stakeholders, such as the local Education and Training Boards, Institutes of Technology, SOLAS, local employers and the local youth and community sector. A national Access to Apprenticeship scheme would provide supports and tackles barriers, which may prevent disadvantaged young people from opting for and being able to sustain an apprenticeship, with a particular focus on the long-term unemployed. Therefore, NYCI calls on the next Government to develop, implement and resource a National Access to Apprenticeship programme.

Proposal:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to develop, implement and resource a National Access to Apprenticeship programme.

5. Voting Rights and Electoral Registration

Extend Voting Rights to 16 and 17 year olds

NYCI has been advocating for the extension of voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 years since 2009, when we launched our “New Age in Voting” campaign. In January 2013, the Constitutional Convention following a submission and presentation from NYCI voted to support the introduction of voting rights for 16 and 17 year olds. The Government accepted this recommendation and up until December 2014 committed to bringing forward a referendum to allow 16 and 17 year old citizens to vote. In January 2015 the then Government reneged on this commitment and have refused to hold the referendum as promised since then. In April 2017 and in March 2018, the then Government and some opposition parties blocked legislation in Seanad Éireann, which would have facilitated young people aged 16 and 17 to vote in the 2019 Local and European Elections.

³⁸ <https://www.dit.ie/colleges/collegeofengineeringbuiltenvironment/accesstoapprenticeship/>

While we are disappointed with the actions of Government and some opposition parties, NYCI remains committed to campaigning and advocating for the introduction of the right to vote at 16. We will continue to argue for a referendum in accordance with the decision of the Constitutional Convention on extending voting rights to young people for referendums and in Dáil and Presidential elections. We will also continue to campaign for legislation to facilitate young people aged 16 and 17 years to vote in Local and European elections.

Electoral Commission

NYCI has actively promoted the participation of young people in the electoral process for many years. We have consistently organised campaigns to encourage and support young people to register to vote and to vote in all elections and referendums. We welcome the fact that voter turnout among young people aged 18-25 years has increased in recent years. The upsurge in youth voter registration and participation in the two referendums on marriage equality and abortion rights was welcome. Much of the work done in elections and referendums to support and promote youth voter participation is undertaken by civil society organisations, such as NYCI on very limited resources.

While many aspects of the electoral system currently function well, one component of the system, namely the voter registration system is in our view not fit for purpose. The current system is under-resourced, inconsistent and inaccurate. It was designed at a time when the vast majority of the population were born, raised and lived in the one area and remained there all of their lives. It was not designed or administered to capture a population, which is highly mobile, especially a young mobile population. In 2017, a poll commissioned by NYCI and conducted by Red C found that up to 22% of young people aged 18-29 were not registered to vote, rising to 28% for those aged 18-24.³⁹ The recent confusion over whether those who had registered since May 2019 were registered to vote in the upcoming General Election is a further example of why the current system is flawed.

Since 2007, three successive Governments have promised the establishment of an Electoral Commission and the commitment remains outstanding. The outgoing Government did commence another consultation on the setting up of an Electoral Commission in December 2018, in which NYCI participated. Given the ongoing serious deficiencies in the current registration system, NYCI supports the establishment of an Electoral Commission and calls on the next Government to establish this body by the end of 2021. In the first instance, we believe the new Electoral Commission must prioritise the reform of the electoral register and work to increase the number of registered voters, in particular young voters. It is vital that the Electoral Commission when established, is adequately resourced to undertake this important task. We also believe that the Commission should be adequately resourced to undertake research and to directly and indirectly support voter engagement and participation

³⁹ "Up to 150,000 young people may not be on the electoral register as deadline nears" <https://www.youth.ie/articles/up-to-150000-young-people-may-not-be-on-electoral-register-as-deadline-nears/> 2017

campaigns. There is limited data and research on how best to promote and support citizen engagement in the electoral process.

Proposals

- NYCI calls on the next Government to bring forward a referendum to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in Dáil and Presidential elections, and referenda and to bring forward legislation to extend voting rights to young people aged 16 and 17 in Local and European elections
- NYCI calls on the next Government to establish and adequately resource the establishment of an Electoral Commission by the end of 2021.

6. Climate Action and Social Justice

Climate Action Empowerment, Advocacy and Participation Fund

Ireland must work towards a climate or carbon-neutral⁴⁰ economy society in a short time period. While the move towards a low carbon economy will create opportunities and benefits, it will also be disruptive and costly for many people and sectors, at least in the short-term. In many instances, there is a danger that it will be those in Ireland and globally on the lowest incomes with fewer opportunities and alternatives and a lack of political voice and influence that will endure the heaviest burden of these changes. Apart from the social and environmental cost on individuals, families and communities, Ireland will have to pay EU fines of €7bn,⁴¹ if we fail to meet our climate change targets.

Young people at home and abroad have led and shaped the debate and taken direct civic action through marches, school strikes, online advocacy and a range of other actions on climate change and climate justice. Young people have rightly become frustrated by the foot dragging of Governments and institutions in tackling the climate crisis. They have also been active in keeping social justice to the forefront of all policies, decisions and actions on climate change. The Irish Government have developed policies and set up a range of structures and mechanisms to develop and progress measures and actions at national and regional level to address climate change. These include the development of a Climate Action Plan with 183 actions, the establishment of the National Dialogue on Climate Action and Climate Action Delivery Board, the appointment of a Just Transition Commissioner and a Just Transition Review Team. At regional level, the Government has appointed the Midlands Regional Transition Team and four Climate Action Regional Offices. All this indicates a lot of activity on

⁴⁰ NESCI "A Vision for 2050" Evaluating the Options, Paper 7, 2012

http://files.nesci.ie/nesci_secretariat_papers/ccbg_No7_A_Vision_for_2050.pdf

⁴¹ Indepth Q & A: Why Ireland is nowhere near meeting its climate change goals, June 2019

<http://www.climatechange.ie/in-depth-qa-why-ireland-is-nowhere-near-meeting-its-climate-change-goals/>

the issue, however, the extent to which this action is real and meaningful has yet to be determined.

NYCI welcomes the inclusion and invitations from Government Departments and statutory agencies for young people to participate in some of these structures, so that their voice and views feed into and influence the decision-making process. At present, this work by young people is undertaken on their own time and at their own cost. NYCI is of the view that where the State invites young people to participate in these statutory structures that such youth participation should be supported by the State. In most cases everyone else in the room is paid to be there as a salaried employee, while the young person is expected to attend and contribute at their own cost, and in many cases forego education and work. Therefore, the participation of young people should be financially supported, by compensating them for travelling, subsistence costs and participation costs and in supporting the input and feedback from other young people to those representing their view through supports for meetings/networks.

The Government's Climate Action Plan aims to enhance the effectiveness of climate-related communications, network building and deliberative capacity within and through the National Dialogue on Climate Action. This, in our view, can best be achieved through empowering and supporting local groups and networks, in particular local youth groups and networks. At present, many young people are actively campaigning and organising activities on the issue of climate change, climate action and social justice through a range of online and in person networks and organisations. The vast majority of these have little or no access to funding or resources. NYCI believes such youth groups and networks should have access to funding to support their work. To support young people to participate in official structures and mechanisms and to support youth groups and networks to undertake activities and actions to promote and advance climate action and social justice, NYCI calls on the next Government to establish a Climate Action Youth Empowerment, Advocacy and Participation Fund.

Many young people involved in climate action and social justice work are rightly wary of seeking or securing funding from Governments. They fear that such funding will come with conditions attached, which will inhibit their independence and work or will be onerous and bureaucratic. Therefore, NYCI proposes that an intermediary agency or non-statutory body should manage the fund; this agency must be independent of and at arm's length from Government. The role of the intermediary agency will be to ensure that the allocations of funding are fair, open and transparent and to report to Government providing assurance that all public funding is properly spent and accounted for. The intermediary agency should operate in such a way as to minimise bureaucracy and fund within its budget a range of activities and actions by young people and youth groups, which come within the broad remit of empowerment, advocacy and participation.

Proposal

- NYCI calls on the next Government to establish a Climate Action Empowerment, Advocacy and Participation Fund overseen and managed by a non-statutory agency to support the participation of young people in policy-making and to support actions and activities by young people and youth groups on climate action.

7. Access to Higher Education

Student Grants

The number of students participating in higher-level education continues to rise and reached a record high of 235,644 in the academic year 2017/2018⁴². While the number of students has increased, investment by Government and supports to students has not kept pace. The Strategy for Funding Higher Education estimated in 2016 that an additional €100m was required to meet student financial supports in the following 3-5 year period. The cost of living and in particular the costs of rent, insurance and other ordinary and everyday expenses is putting financial pressure on many students and their families and may also be leading to students dropping out or being unable to pursue third-level qualifications. The TU Dublin Cost of Living Guide⁴³ estimates that a student living away from home, excluding student fees requires on average €1092 in Dublin and €981 outside Dublin per month to make ends meet. The current grant support even at the highest level of €678 per month, only cover 60% (Dublin) to 70% (outside Dublin) of the costs. In recent years the number of students in receipt of Student Support Universal Ireland (SUSI) grants has fallen from 80,622 in 2015/2016 to 76,600 (provisional figures) in 2018/2019. NYCI supports the call from our member organisation, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) for the next Government to review the SUSI grant scheme taking into account the real cost of living and with a view to providing meaningful support to students on lower incomes to pursue higher education.

Student Fees

Ireland will have the highest student fees in the EU after Brexit. At present, the student contribution charge stands at €3,000 per student per year, having doubled in the last six years. Student fees⁴⁴ are now the second largest cost for students living away from home after the cost of accommodation. Higher education is a public good and increased financial support should be viewed as an investment rather than a cost. A recent study found that the return on investment from the seven universities alone came to €8.9bn.⁴⁵ A reduction in the student

⁴² USI Pre-Budget Submission 2020, "The Crisis Never Ended" http://usi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pre-Budget-Submission_compressed.pdf (All the data in this section)

⁴³ TU Cost of Living Guide, 2018/2019 <http://www.dit.ie/campuslife/studentssupport/costoflivingguide/#>

⁴⁴ USI Pre-Budget Submission 2020, "The Crisis Never Ended" http://usi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Pre-Budget-Submission_compressed.pdf (All the data in this section)

⁴⁵ An Impact Assessment of Irish Universities, Indecon Economic Consultants for the Irish Universities Association, <https://www.iaa.ie/ouruniversities/universities-impact/>

contribution charge would support access and reduce the financial burden on many hard-pressed students and their families. Therefore, NYCI supports the call from USI for the next Government to reduce the cost of the student contribution charge over the next five years.

Proposals:

- NYCI calls on the next Government to review the SUSI grant scheme taking into account the real cost of living and with a view to providing meaningful support to students on lower incomes to pursue higher education.
- NYCI calls on the next Government to reduce the cost of the student contribution charge over the next five years.