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CONSULTING YOUNG PEOPLE
'SHAPING OUR ELECTRICITY FUTURE'



Shaping our Electricity Future



National Youth Council of Ireland

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is the representative body for voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. We use our collective experience to act on issues that impact young people. www.youth.ie

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EirGrid were putting the pieces together for the unprecedented 'Shaping our Electricity Future' consultation process which would see citizens and stakeholders play a significant role in guiding the journey towards minimum 70% renewable energy by 2030. Recognising the importance and significance of the future generations who would inherit the decisions of today EirGrid looked to the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) as a partner who could ensure that the youth voice would be heard.

What follows is a report which captures the story of a unique collaboration which produced a fascinating level of high quality engagement across multiple platforms which culminated in an online Youth Assembly on April 21st.



SETTING THE SCENE

"Achieve 70% renewable by 2030." That is the task set by Government and that is the essence of the 'Shaping our Electricity Future' national consultation. There is no doubt that this work would be relevant to and also have an impact on every level of Irish society.

Quote from Mark Foley CEO of EirGrid:

"If ever there was a case to ultimately do the right thing, this is it. We are the agents of the people of Ireland and we are trying to find the pathway that has the greatest support and is the most rationale approach and that there are as many voices as possible brought to bear in terms of the final considerations."

The start point in terms of young people from EirGrid's perspective was to place a value on the inclusion of the youth voice. In order to honour that commitment, a conversation was undertaken with NYCI who have a proven track record and high levels of expertise in facilitating youth engagement and participation. Furthermore, the member organisations of NYCI alongside other youth sector relationships represented a positive picture of the opportunity to include diverse voices of young people which would add value to the consultation process.



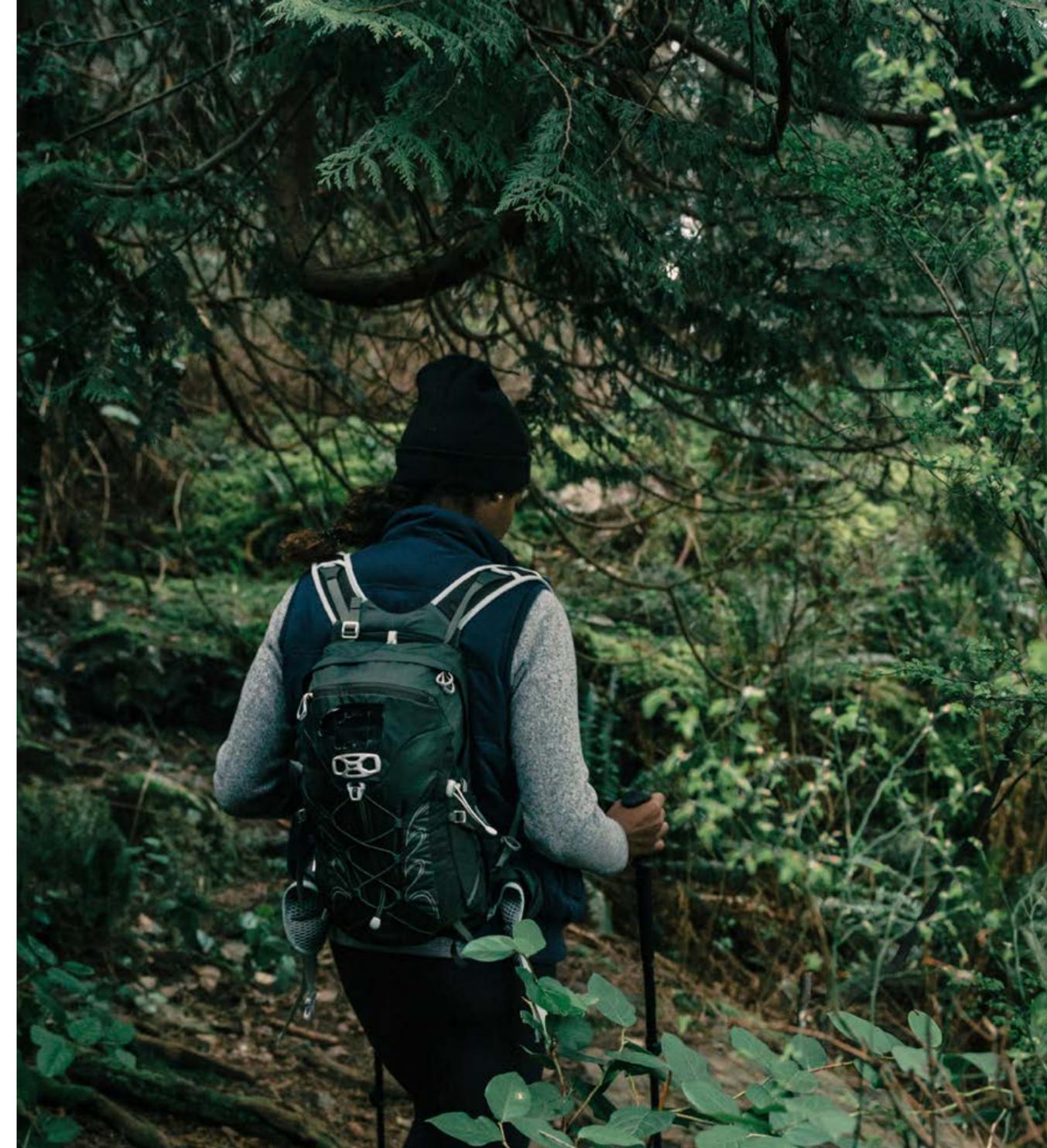
Carbon footprint

PUTTING A PLAN TOGETHER

A national Youth Assembly was the ultimate goal, but how would we get there?

An internal NYCI working group was set up and Dermot O'Brien was selected to be the coordinator for the EirGrid Consultation process.

After numerous meetings and conversations about how to maximise the potential for genuine youth engagement which would culminate in a Youth Assembly, it was agreed to pursue the following actions.



NYCI website and promo

Use the networks, expertise and reach of NYCI to build the visibility of the Youth Assembly event and to generate interest, awareness and an invitation to get involved in the consultation.

NYCI to produce a video

Developing a video piece which would set the context for the conversation about 70% renewables by 2030 and bring a youth perspective while also serving as an invitation to engage.

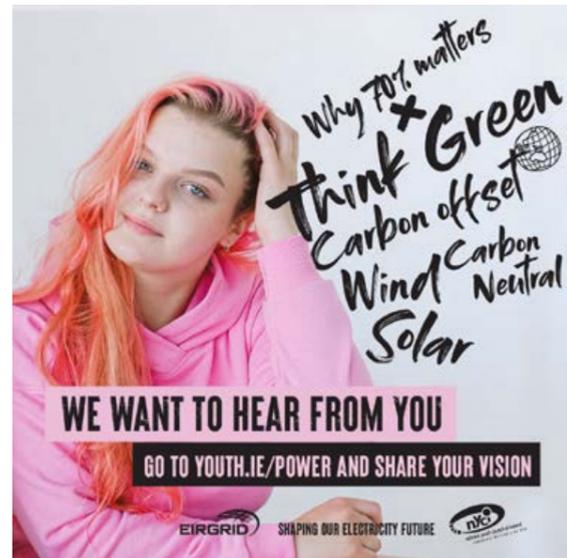
NYCI to undertake workshops with different youth organisations

The rationale for organising workshops was to achieve two things.

1. They would generate interest in attending the Youth Assembly among key groups
2. They would provide an opportunity for young people to help shape the content of the Youth Assembly and ensure that it would be accessible to them.

NYCI to organise and host a Youth Assembly with a key role for EirGrid

Host an online Youth Assembly which would include content to help with awareness, understanding and capacity to decide on priority actions while also providing an opportunity to engage directly with EirGrid experts including the CEO.

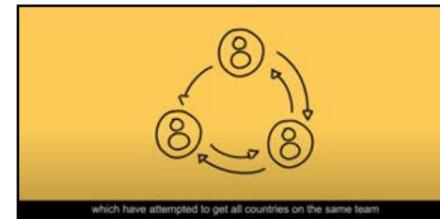
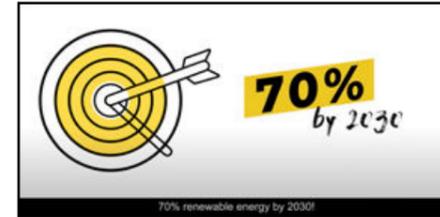


WEBSITE AND PROMOTION

NYCI undertook to develop a unique brand and messaging plan that would align with the EirGrid content but also give a distinctive youth vibe.

A variety of assets were developed which featured on a specific EirGrid consultation & Youth Assembly registration webpage on the NYCI website and also throughout the NYCI social media outlets including FB, Twitter and Instagram.

Additionally, NYCI organised some youth focussed media to promote the Youth Assembly and to build awareness and interest around the context of the conversation about renewable energy and how it relates to climate activism and the SDGs.



NYCI VIDEO

While EirGrid had produced some fantastic videos for the consultation it was felt that a youth perspective video would add another dimension. The video would serve as a tool for engagement and also a 'We were working off a vibe around 'Your Future, Your Vision, Your Voice' for the messaging in the video.

The intention of the video was to introduce people to the story of electricity and its development in Ireland, referencing the need for change. The video suggests that it is time to leave some elements of how we produce energy in our past and to focus on a future that both aligns with the SDGs and gives us every opportunity to set ourselves up for a maximising the potential for renewable energy.

"In Ireland we have set ourselves a target, 70% renewable energy by 2030! It's ambitious and that's a good thing because it's important! What's also important is how we achieve this in ways that are fair, feasible and sustainable."

EirGrid are leading a very important conversation about HOW we can achieve 70% renewables by 2030 and with NYCI they are inviting YOU to get involved because choices need to be made, priorities need to be identified and we need to get on with the work of positive change!"

WORKSHOPS

The rationale for holding workshops was motivated by a commitment to ensuring that the Youth Assembly event would have maximum potential for positive and purposeful engagement alongside productive outcomes in terms of the consultation and the four options from which participants had to choose.

A number of organisations were offered the opportunity to host a workshop which would introduce the 'Shaping our electricity future' consultation process, build confidence among the young people to engage in the conversation and outline the proposed content for the Youth Assembly.

Participation

Workshops were delivered with the following organisations:

Foroige Donegal a youth group

Macra na Feirme reps from various groups

Eco Unesco an environment focused youth group

Liberties College students of youth and community studies course

Cork YMCA a collection of young people from a variety of local groups

Wicklow Comhairle na nOg young people from the Youth Council in Co. Wicklow

NYCI Global Youth Work 'youth cttee' young people who had been working with NYCI on the Global Youth Work agenda including the development of the Youth Manifesto for Climate Justice.

The participants across the workshop groups represented a positive geographic and demographic spread.

Engagement

Workshops were held on Zoom. Times and days were at the discretion of each organisation. Dermot O'Brien – NYCI EirGrid Consultation Coordinator, facilitated all of the workshops. The flow of the workshops involved a combination of digital engagement through Menti and discussions with Dermot. The overall idea was to build a positive connection with the content and concept for the Youth Assembly while illustrating the value and importance of the youth voice in the EirGrid consultation. While a significant amount of the content was new territory for the young people in the workshops there was no sense at any stage that any individual or group felt out of their depth.

Impressions

The workshops proved to be invaluable in terms of how they supported sign ups for the Youth Assembly but more so for how they contributed to the architecture of the big event.

Young people at every workshop admitted knowing little of little or nothing about EirGrid and certainly not how it worked or where it sat in the picture of Ireland's electricity. The explanation of this in an accessible way was very much recognised and valued by the young people. The new awareness of the electricity landscape and their own pre-existing sense of value for positive action on climate proved to be a valuable motivating factor for attending the Youth Assembly.

About the participants

130 young people directly participated in this consultation process – the online Youth Assembly and seven workshops. Counties represented: Louth, Wicklow, Tipperary, Kildare, Mayo, Galway, Down, Carlow, Waterford, Meath, Dublin, Monaghan, Donegal, Roscommon, Westmeath, Offaly, and Clare – from NYCI member youth organisations, youth representatives, and special interest individuals.



Other notable impressions from the workshops included feedback on the branding for the Youth Assembly and some valuable honesty around people's preconceptions in terms of the need to have high levels of understanding or expertise in order to engage with the Youth Assembly. The workshops certainly allayed any fear in that regard but the feedback also informed our communications focus for the final week leading up to the event.

Outputs

There is a collection of contributions from the workshops in the Appendix. All of these contributions informed the preparation for the Youth Assembly but also represent a consultation in their own right.

In our preparation for the Youth Assembly, we discussed with participants the role that could be played by EirGrid experts at the event. There was a unanimous positive response to the idea that it would add value to the event if they were involved. This feedback gave us a valuable insight as to how we should consider the most effective slot within the flow of the Youth Assembly to include an EirGrid Q&A.

THE 4 OPTIONS

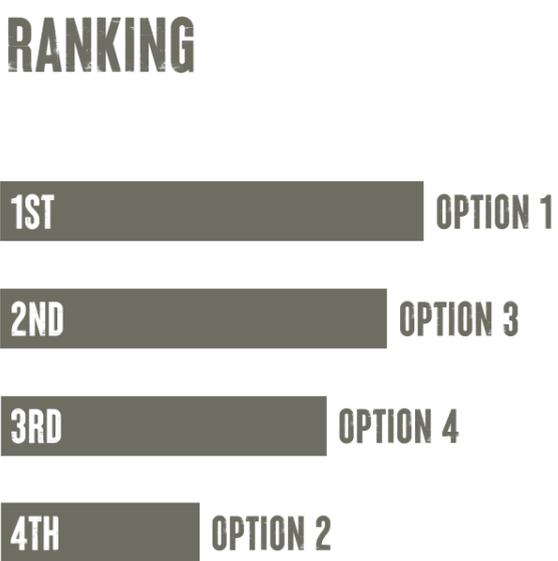
At each workshop we offered participants the opportunity to select their preferences from the 4 options in order of 1 to 4. Primarily this was about testing the method for selection and getting feedback from groups about how easy and understandable it was. The following is a graphic which represents the totality of the workshop feedback.

- 1 GENERATION-LED**
Put Clean generation to where most power is used

- 2 DEVELOPER-LED**
Let developers decide where to locate clean generation

- 3 TECHNOLOGY-LED**
Try new ways to move clean power across the country

- 4 DEMAND-LED**
Put large electricity users close to sources of clean power

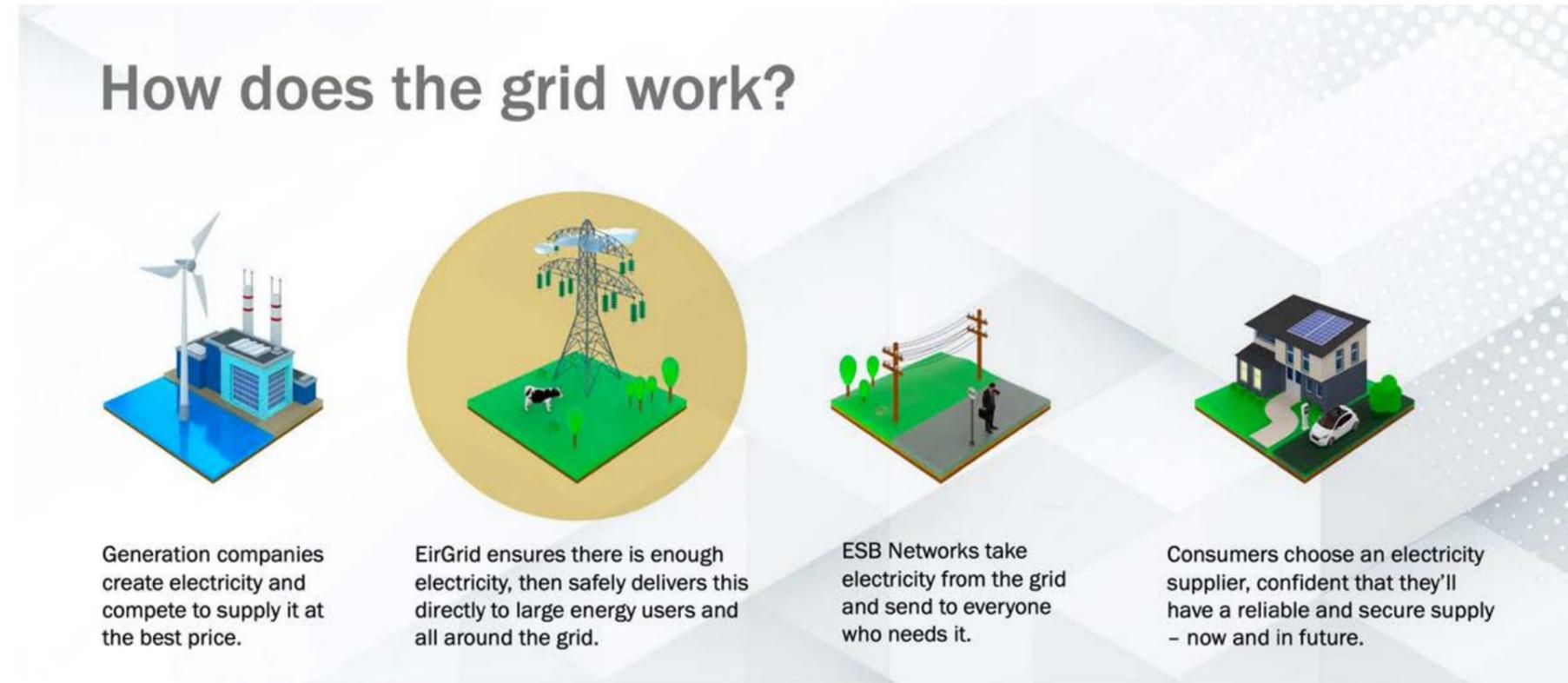


ELECTRICITY & EIRGRID - WHAT'S THE STORY?

We showed the [NYCI video](#) to set a context about why we are here and what the challenge is for the consultation.

We explained the way electricity moves from Generators to Consumers and the role of EirGrid in this picture. It was important

to confirm that EirGrid exists to satisfy the consumer in terms of electricity and good price as well as take on board Govt directives about renewables. It is not a private company with shareholders etc looking to generate profits.



HOW DO YOU MAKE DECISIONS?

We introduced a set of 8 elements which were refined through the workshops. It was proposed that these 8 elements are factors that may come into play when people are making big decisions in life. The idea was to support the participants to get into a frame of mind whereby they are considering what is important to them when faced with life changing decisions. In the context of the 4 options within the EirGrid consultation we were mindful that being

able to make informed choices about priorities required some levels of information, awareness and understanding.

The participants were invited to indicate for each element what degree of importance it would be in decision making for them by sliding the indicator along the line from 'not important' to 'very important'.





A Menti was shared which invited participants to identify key questions that come to mind when big announcements are made and when you apply a social justice, human rights, just transition lens?

The idea here was to give an outlet for people to share the type of questions that help them to do perspective taking, healthy analysis or critical thinking. To not question is to passively accept and that can be risky.

The following statements give us a fascinating insight as to what type of questions the participants would be asking if a change of any type was proposed which would have an impact on society.
Full list in appendix

Is this 'just transition'? Who was consulted? Who will benefit? What are the political gains by announcing this? Who is this undermining? How will BIPOC and marginalised communities be affected?

Was I consulted? How can I make sure that I am consulted next time?

Is this realistic?

What impacts will this decision have?

How will this get the majority of people on-board and educated?

Who is making the decision?

What information are they leaving out?

That saving the planet will come before financial concerns. Especially right now when inflation is at record lows, and borrowing so cheap. Now is the time for the government to be investing in clean green infrastructure for the future. What does this mean for me/my family? Is this affordable?



The BIG 4 options – Exploring the 4 proposed options from EirGrid. The idea of this section was to introduce the 4 options in an accessible and engaging way. The approach aimed to continue building on the awareness, understanding and capacity of participants who will be ultimately choosing their own priorities from the 4 options.

We shared a very well made EirGrid video (which was endorsed at the workshops) which comprehensively explained the 4 options in a way that was understandable and accessible to all participants.

Comments in reaction to the EirGrid video:
(all comments in appendix)

There were no disadvantages mentioned for the Generation-Led approach.

Would have been to have seen a greater balance of pros and cons for each.

It assumes that we can keep consuming and that the energy can come from somewhere.

I enjoyed it. It was simple, clear and modern.

The 1st option will be the easiest to supply by 2030 and will reduce the most electricity and afterwards it can be worked towards other areas that use less electricity.

**It needs to be an ethical mix between option 1,3 & 4. We need to be taking a firm stance with private companies both about their energy usage, placement and profit margins (ie. how they contribute to the country via taxes and paying their workers)
What about energy efficiency?**

Clear that combination is likely the way forward possibly of option 1 and 3.

Certainly ensuring stakeholders are included should be a minimum, not purely going for larger projects that may not suit communities and should if possible be community led
Complex and challenging decisions need to be made.



Breakout room discussions:

At this point in the event we felt that it would be important to create spaces where participants would have an opportunity to have conversations in small groups about what they've heard so far. Getting the chance to speak about positives, negatives and what is interesting at this point was an important part of the process of understanding and awareness raising. We wanted to have non-threatening breakout room spaces without heavy facilitation with the dual aims of opening up the chats and then working on key questions for our EirGrid experts.

Key questions and open dialogue:

In this section we wanted to make the most of the opportunity to open up a dialogue between participants and our EirGrid experts. Our intention was to ensure that any lingering queries or major questions could be presented while at the same time creating a space for people to share perspectives and passions about a just transition towards a sustainable future. (full list of questions in appendix)

Questions which featured in the dialogue with EirGrid reps:

Participant:

There was a question about the significance of community within the scope of the process and the importance of community buy in, engagement and empathy.

EirGrid:

I can absolutely assure that what we have to do once we have answered the big macro questions is talk to local communities on a project by project basis. We will really engage intensively and extensively with communities.

Participant:

A fascinating question asked about how possible or likely is it to have a combined approach going ahead. E.g. Generation and Technology.

EirGrid:

Our own sense is that there will be a combination or a blend of the different approaches and what we are looking to get as part of this engagement is a sense of what exactly is that blend and what are people's thoughts on it.



Participant:

We see that the Technology approach is challenging and costly. Are there any examples from other countries in terms of benefits or burden?

EirGrid:

As part of our work we would talk to our global peers. Good examples are Australia, GB, Denmark, parts of the US, Germany who are really looking to use a large amount of renewables onto their power system. We would talk to them to get a sense of best practice, are we missing anything? Is there something Ireland should be doing? Taking concepts like hoovering up power in parts of the grid with a lot of renewables and transporting it in bulk to different areas with a lot of demand.

Participant:

What is the single biggest barrier to this process? How can we make sure that the goalposts aren't shifted down the line? We know the power of massive lobby groups. Can we maintain the principles of people led and community oriented approaches?

EirGrid:

The biggest challenge is winning hearts and minds. If we can mobilise the ordinary people of Ireland, Great Britain and United States behind what we need to do, we will definitely get the job done. There is no question about it. The biggest issue is if people don't buy into the vision, if people don't feel its relevant to them, if they feel its imposing on them or not, or not listening to their needs. That's why conversations like this are so important. When we finish this process and put a roadmap out there, I know in my heart and soul, people are going to object to it, they agree in principle but not in that particular location.

The more we invest in education, in conversations and in trying to get us all on the same pathway, it's the best investment of our time and energy. Using fear tactics doesn't work, you've got to try and engage people in a way that it becomes relevant for them and they want to be part of it. If we lose the hearts and minds we are going to fail.

Participant:

What about the for profit dimension in a landscape where renewables are needed?

EirGrid:

Irish innovation has got us to 40% renewables in 2020. How do we protect you and me as tax payers and our position in the next ten years? If you want to build a wind farm in Ireland you're going to have to compete in an auction. Auctions keep people honest. There's an intrinsic protection for tax payers. Nobody is going to rock in here and make a small fortune.

Final priority choices

In the final part of the session we invited young people to make their choice 1 to 4 from the options presented by EirGrid. Below is the graphic of the final result.

- 1 GENERATION-LED**
Put Clean generation to where most power is used
- 2 DEVELOPER-LED**
Let developers decide where to locate clean generation
- 3 TECHNOLOGY-LED**
Try new ways to move clean power across the country
- 4 DEMAND-LED**
Put large electricity users close to sources of clean power



In some final responses the CEO of EirGrid Mark Foley welcomed the level of engagement from and questioning by the young people involved. He asked for the young people, "How can we ensure that this doesn't become a one hit wonder?! Some of the insights and narrative coming through today is really thought provoking and it needs a bit of rethinking about and circling back. What we need to do, to deepen the engagement and provide a mechanism whereby your voice can be continuously fed into EirGrid. We come up with a plan but we've got to deliver the plan which means the consultations to make it happen will be multiples of what we've done to simply come up with the roadmap. So please speak up to let us know what we need to be doing to keep this going."

In further comments from Robbie Aherne who is leading the 'Shaping our Electricity Future' strategy he complimented the "thought provoking questions and a superb and inspiring video developed by NYCI. He noted that there are challenges here that we need to work together as a society to find the best way forward." He concluded by saying that "in 2010 the amount of renewables on the system in Ireland was 10/15% and we've grown that to 43% in 2021. That's a monumental achievement, Ireland is a world leader in this space of renewable integration."



KEY EMERGING ASKS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

- The overarching message is essentially saying "We want a role, invite us in".
- We want you to continue connecting with us throughout the whole journey of transformation. "Consultation should not be a "one hit wonder".
- We are passionate about community and we want you to show us how you will involve communities throughout the process.
- We need your support so that we can keep this conversation going.
- We want assurances about environmental impacts, the power of lobby groups and the commitment to sustainable solutions.
- We want you to continue creating content and sharing your insight and expertise in accessible ways.



It's our world too

APPENDIX

Key questions that come to mind when big announcements are made and you apply a social justice, human rights, just transition lens?

The idea here was to give an outlet for people to share the type of questions that help them to do perspective taking, healthy analysis or critical thinking. To not question is to passively accept and that can be risky.

The following statements give us a fascinating insight as to what type of questions the participants would be asking if a change of any type was proposed which would have an impact on society.

Is this 'just transition'? Who was consulted? Who will benefit? What are the political gains by announcing this? Who is this undermining? How will BIPOC and marginalised communities be affected?

Was I consulted? How can I make sure that I am consulted next time?

Is this realistic?

What impacts will this decision have?

How will this get the majority of people on-board and educated?

Who is making the decision
what information are they leaving out?

That saving the planet will come before financial concerns. Especially right now when inflation is at record lows, and borrowing so cheap. Now is the time for the government to be

investing in clean green infrastructure for the future.

What does this mean for me/my family? Is this affordable? How will this affect me? Is this the right thing to do? How can i play a role?

what is the step by step plan to implement it? targets are important but the trajectory is vital to actually get there! Is every decision the government makes (e.g. planning decisions) going to be in line with renewable energy? Will social housing all be renewable energy supplied?

How do we achieve collective consciousness?

Which stakeholders are driving this announcement
Who/what will be effected if/if not this decision is made
How will this get buy-in from communities, what are the tangilbe benefits for people? Not developers
What different groups were asked about this?

How does this benefit the average person and not the detail fanatic?

Does this please the public or the shareholders?

Will this affect the health, physical and mental of the major population?

How will this affect me? What can I do to promote/learn/debate the announcement? Is this announcement doing what it is meant

to and for 'everybody'/ who are we leaving behind?

Is there a well-thought through plan?

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How will it affect the environment and the less privileged people of the world? Will it be accessible for everyone?

Who benefits? Does this decision disproportionately favor a specific group/business/demographic?

What are the implications of this, what impact will it have? Who will be impacted? What is driving this change?

How will it affect my finance. Who is really benefiting from it, Corporate, Government or the general joe soap
What are government resources that are accessible to the public to take part in it
Will this help the future. Is this making a better future for my future kids/Family and other generations to come.
How will this affect the most vulnerable and marginalised in society?

Who is benefitting the most from this?

Is this widening or decreasing inequality?

What are the trade-offs?

Are these targets realistic? What sacrifices might we have to make to achieve what is being proposed?

Does this create actual positive change for the future and ensure that nobody is left behind in that decision?

How will this be paid for? Is there an implementation plan and is it fully financed?

Who actually made this decision? Did they talk to experts “by trade”, experts “by experience”, and all the people who will be impacted?

Will this truly create change? or is it just going to be another handshake and photo opportunity for the government?

Who did they take into consideration when making the decisions?

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We shared a very well made EirGrid video (which was endorsed at the workshops) which comprehensively explained the 4 options in a way that was understandable and accessible to all participants.

Comments in reaction to the EirGrid video:

I think combination is the way forward
Would've liked for their to be more information on actually just reducing your electricity consumption as a whole- the first step in all this action is to reduce

Generation-Led seems to be the way to go from this, and would seem to give the most support to community led utility co-operatives,

APPENDIX

bringing new meaning to the phrase “people power”! I liked that all the options were kept very separate by showing the pros and cons which helped my mind to process the choice ahead. The government would have to cohesive in their approach. Planning permissions is so important. Not a good history of controlling larger industries in Ireland how would they control where they set up? I'm struggling to see how these decisions include regular working class people ?

Seems like a heavy reliance on wind, I think there needs to be other renewable backups considered e.g. solar. Also the negative ecological and environmental impact weren't mentioned which will also sway peoples decisions

Why is developer led get its own point and community led is not even mentioned?

Twass quality, i enjoyed it a lot, definitely those four options need to be discussed in detail.

There were no disadvantages mentioned for the Generation-Led approach

Would have been to have seen a greater balance of pros and cons for each

It assumes that we can keep consuming and that the energy can come from somewhere.

I enjoy it. It was simple, clear and modern
The 1st option will be the easiest to supply by 2030 and will reduce

the most electricity and afterwards it can be worked towards other areas that use less electricity

It needs to be an ethical mix between option 1,3 & 4. We need to be taking a firm stance with private companies both about their energy usage, placement and profit margins (ie. how they contribute to the country via taxes and paying their workers)

What about energy efficiency?

Clear that combination is likely the way forward possibly of option 1 and 3

Certainly ensuring stakeholders are included should be a minimum, not purely going for larger projects that may not suit communities and should if possible be community led

Complex and challenging decisions need to be made.

Mentions nothing about changing our energy consumption habits in the first place.

video seems biased in favour of option 1

Despite the idea of demand led

Would be good to have a hybrid of approach 1 and 4. We need to reach these targets and I wouldn't trust corporations to do it by themselves

What is the effect on communities if we cluster where big industries are? Does it enlarge peoples need to travel further for work and use more energy getting there/

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For offshore wind, will floating offshore be considered?
Needs to prioritize community leadership and put the planet first no matter what.

The integrated nature of the SDG's implies that a focus on one area can't be done without consideration of its impact on all other areas. We need to think how we address the deprivation of rural areas and how each option widens or closes inequality gaps. We must reduce the power of large corporations and ensure communities are the biggest stakeholders, decision makers & benefitters.

Four brilliant options, if possible to aid rural Ireland bring jobs out of cities like Dublin. But I fear it isn't possible to influence organisations and what would happen to the buildings they leave behind to move if we could get a technology based approach that'd be ideal, but it could be interesting to see how some of these options could be combined.

No mention of bipoc or indigenous people

Corporations shouldn't be making the decisions. They'll just act in their own interest. We need bold, aggressive action to make these goals happen.

To bring people along, need to make it relevant. It's not individual people who seem to not be on the renewable energy train - it is companies using larger amounts of energy and who 'green wash'/ Need their commitment to these changes.

Consideration of community owned renewables which were mentioned here should be considered. eg. if there is a wind farm then the income from one could be shared with the community and could be focused on addressing some of the social inclusion issues We cannot allow the decision to be made by those driven by profit alone ie. Corporations.

The overall aim should be about generating jobs outside of cities and supporting rural Ireland.

Not fully comprehensive.

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