

BUILDING A BETTER IRELAND FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



NYCI National
Youth
Council
of Ireland

**PRE-BUDGET
SUBMISSION 2024**

National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)

The National Youth Council of Ireland is the representative body for 54 voluntary youth organisations in Ireland. Our member organisations work with, and for, up to 380,000 young people 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 and its role as the National Representative Youth Work Organisation is recognised in legislation (Youth Work Act, 2001). 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 and supported to achieve their full potential.

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Priorities for young people in 2024

1.

Ensuring all young people can benefit from Youth Work

- Provide an additional €9.4 million investment in youth work in 2024

2.

Securing a brighter future for young people

- Extend the Young Adult Travel card to 24-year-olds and make fare reductions for young people permanent (€5 million)
- Introduce a Culture and Media Card worth €200- to 18-24-year-olds to engage with cultural activities (€87.7 million)
- Reduce third levels contribution charge by €1,000 and abolish apprenticeship charges (€91.77 million)
- Fully fund the National Youth Homelessness Strategy in Budget 2024
- Address equality issues for young workers and young unemployed people by ending sub-minima rates of pay for under 20-year-olds (No cost to exchequer)
- Equalise rates of Jobseekers' Allowance for under 25s and over 25s (€64.91 million)

Introduction: Meeting immediate needs for young people and rising to strategic challenges

Young people and organisations that support and work with them have demonstrated great resilience in the face of consecutive crises of a pandemic and cost-of-living pressures.

Unfortunately, some of that resilience is now running low.

Despite the huge efforts of youth workers and volunteers to deliver transformational youth work through a pandemic, increases in young people seeking refuge, and dramatic rises in inflation, youth work organisations are still facing major funding challenges. In a survey of NYCI's members this April:

- 2 in 3 reported an increase in demand in the previous six months;
- Over 95% reported the organisation's income had been affected by the cost-of-living crisis;
- 3 in 4 saw an increase in deprivation among young people in their communities.



Youth work is moving more into social care as a result of the rising cost of living.



NYCI Member

Taken together, this means youth work organisations are forced to do more with less, in the face of rising demand and costs, while also dealing with recruitment and retention challenges which have been exacerbated by inflation.

Youth work programmes are hamstrung by the cost-of-living crisis, with many workers and volunteers needing to focus on supporting young people with social challenges before focusing on youth work.

NYCI is also acutely aware of growing social and economic challenges for young people living in Ireland.

Despite high rates of young people in employment and education, many feel Ireland is an increasingly unwelcoming home.

Young people in employment (aged 15-24) are six times more likely to be on temporary contracts than those aged 25-64, and six in 10 are on low rates of pay¹. Adjusted for inflation, by the time workers born in the 1990s reach 26, they are earning less than those born in the '70s or '80s².

Average national rents of €1,750 per month and chronic shortages in availability see many young people placed in vulnerable situations, with youth homelessness, and hidden homelessness, rising exponentially in recent years.

Despite welcome measures to reduce public transport costs, they still place a financial burden on young people, featuring in the top three areas of expenditure for 1 in 4 young people in a RED C survey for NYCI last Autumn³. Young people in rural areas also face challenges in accessing public transport.

Meanwhile, after two years of limited access to vital cultural activities during the pandemic, the cost of living has impacted young people's ability to afford important cultural opportunities.

All of this means NYCI is increasingly hearing reports of young people emigrating, and our RED C research shows that more than 7 in 10 young Irish people are considering emigrating for a better quality of life.

Historic underinvestment in critical infrastructure such as public transport and housing, and inadequate supports for youth work, combined with a crippling cost-of-living crisis have led us to an inflection point.

NYCI believes that Budget 2024 represents an opportunity to make the short-term investments needed to support youth work and young people, but also to lay the building blocks for more strategic reform that will build a better Ireland for young people.

The National Youth Council of Ireland urges all members of Government, the Oireachtas and public servants to support our Pre-Budget Submission so we can achieve this together.

Ensuring all young people can benefit from Youth Work

In Budget 2024, to address the multitude of pressures facing young people and the youth work sector, and to support the growing youth population⁴ to engage with youth work, **NYCI is calling for increased investment in the youth work sector of €9.4million in 2024, broken down into:**

- A 10% across the board increase in investment of **€7.3million** for various funding schemes, policy initiatives and programmes, and;
- An additional **€2.1million** targeted increase for the Youth Service Grant Scheme, to ensure all young people can benefit from youth work in Ireland.

This investment will:

- Equip the youth work sector to support delivery of a key Government policies including the forthcoming National Policy Framework for Children and Young people and Action Plan for Youth Services, the National Action Plan Against Racism and the work of the Child Poverty Unit in the Department of the Taoiseach;
- Ensure young people's calls to address recruitment and retention of youth workers in the sector are heeded,

along with the setting out a workforce development plan for paid staff and volunteers in the sector;

- At a time of increasing demand for services and deprivation in communities, assist youth work organisations in dealing with the cost-of-living crisis and enable them to deliver high-quality programmes and supports for young people;
- Ensure all young people have the opportunity to access youth work by boosting funding for the Youth Services Grant Scheme through a "Transformation Fund" for universal youth work to catch up with rises for other schemes since 2014;
- Develop appropriate volunteer recruitment campaigns and volunteer supports;
- Support long-term planning for capital funding.

Supporting young people's development

Youth work recognises young people and youth workers as partners in a learning process and provides opportunities for young people to engage in diverse

programmes and activities in areas including arts, recreation, global citizenship, rights and equality issues, health and wellbeing, and life skills such as leadership, teamwork and decision-making, among many others.

NYCI consistently hears from young people, youth workers and its members about how life-changing youth work experiences can be. A recent review of “young peoples’ perspectives on youth services” affirms this, with young people saying it plays an important role in supporting their personal and social development and maintaining positive health and wellbeing⁵. This is supported by recent evidence reviews detailing the many positive outcomes of youth work^{6,7,8}.

Ireland’s well-developed and networked youth work sector is a leader in Europe. It has the second highest participation rates among young people in the EU, strong professional quality and standards frameworks and is one of only six European countries to have degree-level courses in youth work⁹.

With a new Policy Framework for Children and Young People to be launched shortly, along with the publication of a new Action Plan for Youth Services, now should be a time for optimism for the sector. However, with youth work receiving only 1.3% of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) budget¹⁰ in 2023, underinvestment means significant additional supports are needed so that youth work organisations – a critical partner in the implementation of those plans – can help deliver them.

Equipping the Youth Sector to deliver on National Strategies and Vision for Youth Work

The soon-to-be published National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, and Action Plan for Youth Services will set the strategic policy direction for young people up to 2028.

Together, they will focus on how Government works to realise the rights of children and young people in Ireland, to support strategic youth service development and to ensure that young people in Ireland are able to benefit from high-quality youth work.



NYCI’s “Vision for Youth Work”: *All young people living in Ireland have access to high-quality, well-resourced youth work services, which meet their expressed needs, delivered by paid professionals and well-supported volunteers.*



To achieve this, and NYCI’s “Vision for Youth Work”, open engagement with the sector, a recognition at the highest levels of Government of the contribution of non-formal education and youth work to the lives of young people, and importantly, data-driven policy and investment, are sorely needed.

Without adequate workforce planning and scoping of the youth work sector, implementation of these strategic documents and any reform of the Youth Service Grant Scheme and review of the “UBU Your Place Your Space” scheme, may be stymied by inadequate reliable data and planning.

While NYCI is hearing first-hand reports of the loss of many youth workers to the sector, there is limited data available to understand current, let alone future, workforce challenges, both for paid staff and the large numbers of volunteers which form the foundation of the sector.

A report commissioned by NYCI in 2012, and prepared by Indecon¹, is the latest available evidence of the size and scale of the sector, including its workforce, volunteering and participation rates. While this report provided a robust evidence basis, eleven years on policymakers are still reliant on this to inform funding decisions.

Recent reforms of funding schemes, including the UBU scheme, have added additional reporting and compliance burdens for youth work organisations. Any future reforms must be supported by investment in core funding so youth workers can focus more time on supporting young people.

“ All the key stakeholders have to be around the table...and you can't expect voluntary organisations to comply with very high standards of governance on a shoestring. ”

**Youth work service manager,
April 2023, NYCI Members
Cost-of-Living Survey**

To build the structures to ensure the youth work sector can be partners in delivery of strategic change, both now and into the future, NYCI is calling for Government to:

- Fund an independent review of the scale of the sector, to inform a data-driven approach to funding need;
- Work with the sector to deliver a Workforce Development Plan to identify current and future education and career pathways and recruitment and retention needs;
- Increase core funding to support implementation of strategic reforms.

Addressing recruitment and retention

NYCI frequently hears from young people about the difference “one good adult” made in their lives. Youth workers and volunteers across the country offer transformational supports to young people every day.



At the youth centre, there were a lot of us with difficult or troubled backgrounds, but our youth worker, Emma, was always there for us.

I often felt broken and she'd help me pick up the pieces with tea and coffee. She was the only person who would see me crying, and she made me feel human when I felt I didn't belong in this world. She helped me calm down, organise my thoughts, and empower me to tackle my problems.



Jacky from Dublin, on the difference youth work made to her life

Many, however, fear a hollowing out of the workforce. With increasing reports of recruitment issues, academics from Maynooth University Community and Youth Work team and the Director of the City of Dublin Youth Services Board recently referred to it as a “crisis” at an Oireachtas Committee¹².

In an underfunded sector, youth work organisations have limited opportunities to provide improvements in conditions, and the nature of funding means contracts are often short-term. Recruitment issues were bubbling under the surface before the crises of the

pandemic and inflation, and as early as 2017, young people surveyed for DCEDIY’s “Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes” identified the need for more investment in staffing and training.

These challenges have dramatically disimproved in recent months, however. The cost-of-living crisis is squeezing youth worker incomes, while many are dealing with greater deprivation, food poverty and reports of homelessness among young people.



The sector is finding it hard to hire youth workers as there are better incentives elsewhere, if this is addressed, the youth workers can do more quality work with the young people with less fear of burn out.



Youth work service manager

We are receiving reports of many youth workers leaving the sector for state bodies, and from Higher Education Institutions of fewer graduates entering the workforce because of pay and conditions.

In Dublin city alone, in April it was estimated that 9% of youth work posts were vacant¹³.

While NYCI receives first-hand reports of the loss of many youth workers to the sector, there is limited data available to understand current, let alone future, workforce challenges, both for paid staff and the large numbers of volunteers who form the bedrock of the sector.

To address the immediate challenge of recruitment and retention, NYCI calls on Government to increase funding across the board in Budget 2024 for youth work organisations to ensure young people continue to get the best quality youth work.

Broader recruitment challenges must be dealt with into the long-term by preparation of a Workforce Development Plan to support delivery of the Action Plan on Youth Services.



Address Cost-of-Living Pressures

Youth work organisations are struggling to provide the level of services that young people need due to rising cost-of-living pressures. NYCI and its members fear that without Government support, many will struggle to meet growing demands at a time when young people need support most.



Rising energy impacts on our direct costs which in turns means a reduction in our programme budget and that has a huge effect on how we plan and deliver our programmes. The increase in food also shrinks the programme budget. Both mentioned are basic needs that take priority regarding costs.



Youth work service manager

NYCI has consistently engaged with members over the past year in relation to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on young people and their ability to deliver youth work in a challenging environment.

Rising costs are not only impacting on recruitment but are limiting the ability to deliver programmes.



Due to the increase in cost of living, there is very little programme budget within services and a lot of the focus for the youth workers is ensuring that young people have enough food to eat and are warm and safe



Youth work service manager

Almost 3 in 5 of our members who responded to a recent survey (April 2023) on the cost-of-living said rising inflation has negatively impacted on

their organisation’s ability to deliver youth work, while 95% said their organisation’s income has been affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

This comes at a time when 2 in 3 reported an increase in demand from young people for their services, while 3 in 4 saw an increase in deprivation among young people in their communities.

Despite the relief the Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme (CVES) provided to some youth work organisations, Budget 2023 provided limited additional support for youth work organisations in dealing with rising inflation.

NYCI believes that the challenges its members are facing must be addressed through additional funding in Budget 2024 to bring funding in line with rising costs.

“We cannot offer as much diversity in what we deliver because we cannot afford the materials. We are spending majority on just keeping the building running. As a result, the ‘fun’ in youth work has been vastly minimized, and inflation has reduced us to just providing a basic service.



Youth work service manager

Responding to young people’s challenges and supporting social cohesion

Many of the social challenges we are currently faced with, including those driven by the cost-of-living crisis, are landing at the door of youth work organisations.



Young people in the community are asking more to eat and cook meals at the youth centre than ever before. They are also bringing home more food each time for their families.”

“In three specific cases in the recent months, we have had three young people made effectively homeless due to the rising cost of living and inability to afford accommodation.



Youth work service manager

Youth workers are on the frontline in addressing and identifying critical policy challenges. Youth work organisations are increasingly grappling with supporting young people with the most basic of needs, including food, housing and mental health, as well as emerging issues around integration.



Most young people are experiencing food poverty at home and come to the centre hungry. When a young person's basic needs are not being met at home, it's very hard to deliver youth work. We are finding we are tending to these basic needs first before any youth work can take place.



Youth work service manager

Youth work is stepping in to support young people at times of crisis, but they are not funded to fulfil this role. Rather than focusing on youth work and young people's development, the heightened deprivation youth workers are dealing with sees more and more of their time and resources are pulled away from youth work.

While it is not their primary function, NYCI recognises the reality that youth work organisations are often forced to step in and deal with immediate challenges.

Equally, Government needs to recognise this by:

- **Providing additional short-term support in Budget 2024 towards food budgets**, recognising the impact rising food poverty, in particular, is having on the sector, and;

- **Adequately fund youth information centres** to provide practical advice and information.

Medium- to long-term strategic investment must also begin to address growing issues of food poverty, homelessness and mental health challenges through:

- Development of the Child Poverty Programme in the Department of the Taoiseach;
- Adequate investment in the National Youth Homelessness Strategy;
- Continued supports to local youth services who provide counselling services.

Government must also recognise the significant role the youth work sector has to play in supporting social cohesion at a time of growing division by empowering young minority ethnic people, challenging all forms of racism and countering disinformation.

NYCI is calling on Government to support youth work organisations through adequate resourcing of initiatives aimed at empowering young people to understand and challenge racism, as set out in the National Action Plan Against Racism. This includes:

- Ensuring the inclusion of minority ethnic young people in mainstream youth work and other state funded youth initiatives, and;
- Supporting targeted minority ethnic group youth initiatives.

Bring Universal Youth Work funding in line with Targeted Youth Work

Universal youth work is intended to provide services and support to all young people in a particular community, regardless of their individual needs or circumstances. It is open to all young people, and its purpose is not aimed at addressing specific issues or problems, as defined by policy makers¹⁴.

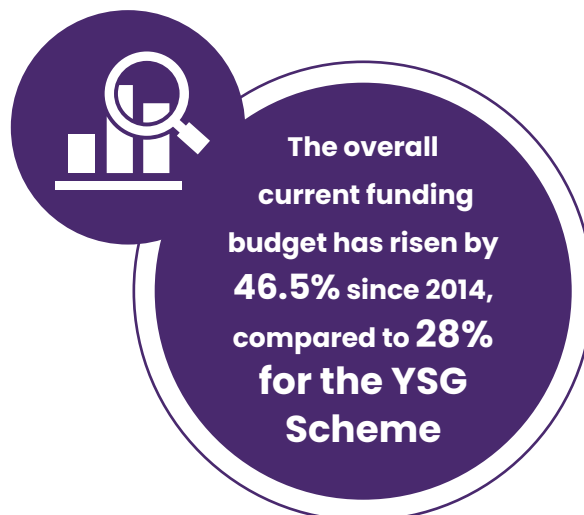
Universal youth work tends to be volunteer-led, whereas targeted youth work is mostly staffed by professional youth workers¹⁵.

Despite not adopting a focus on pre-defined outcomes, a recent review of evidence of the benefits and outcomes of universal youth work carried out on behalf of DCEDIY¹⁶, showed meaningful outcomes and benefits for young people and society, across a range of areas from wellbeing to employment, skills development, social cohesion and provision of safe spaces, among many others.

Volunteer-led youth clubs are crucial for many young people in communities where there is little or no provision to allow young people to come together outside of school. This is particularly true in rural communities where the infrastructure and demand are not present to support targeted groups.

Despite this, funding for the Youth Service Grant Scheme (YSG), under which universal services are primarily funded by DCEDIY, has not kept track with increases in current funding across the sector. The overall current funding budget has

risen by 46.5% since 2014, compared to a 28% rise for the YSG Scheme. This is having a detrimental impact on universal youth work, which was hard hit by COVID, particularly in respect of volunteer recruitment and retention.



To mitigate this, **NYCI is calling for a significant increase in funding for the Youth Service Grant Scheme to make up for underinvestment in recent years.**

This will see:

- A 10% rise in funding for YSGS in 2024 (€1.3million), in line with NYCI’s broader proposal to increase funding for the sector, along with;
- The introduction of a one-off “transformation fund” of €2.1million to bring universal youth work funding in line with increases elsewhere in the sector since 2014.

As well as supporting core costs for its recipients, it will help to meet increasing volunteer training and expenses costs, support local and national youth work recruitment campaigns which are much needed post-Covid, and identify challenges and solutions to decreased volunteer engagement.

Capital Funding

The existing capital budget is limited in scope and can prove difficult to access for smaller organisations without own-door facilities, while the current application process can be ad hoc and requires clearer structure and planning.

NYCI hears from its members that short application timelines for capital funding streams can often leave limited time to make meaningful applications. The nature of capital funding fulfils short-term, one-off needs, but does not allow youth work organisations, both large and small, to plan strategically or make long-term infrastructural investments that will benefit young people, their communities and youth work organisations.

The National Development Plan sets out that continued capital investment is needed for youth services, yet this has not yet been addressed in a meaningful way. Own-door facilities and the provision of funding for “bricks and mortar” infrastructure are vitally important in providing a safe space for young people within their community, especially in the context of shifting demographics with a growth in the youth population (10–24-year-olds) of 123,000 (14%) between 2016 and 2022. The ambition to deliver high-quality capital projects on a multi-annual basis in formal education has received real commitment from Government¹⁷. This ambition must be matched in the non-formal education sector, to secure the future of youth work and ensure it has a greater foothold in communities.

Investing in appropriate and adequate capital infrastructure over time, will provide greater stability to communities and to youth work organisations.

NYCI proposes that DCEDIY works with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, the Department of Rural and Community Development, other partners in Government, local Government and youth work organisations to examine the needs of the sector and **establish an investment fund for youth work facilities and infrastructural improvements.**

This should form part of the design of the Action Plan for Youth Services to support future Budget planning, work in tandem with workforce planning and give certainty to the youth work sector.



Securing a brighter future for young people

The NYCI seeks the emergence of a society in which young people are valued and supported to achieve their full potential.

Unfortunately, the young people we engage with tell us there is a real fear about what the future holds for them.

Rising inflation is having a severe impact on them, and that ranges from food poverty to housing insecurity to homelessness, and even mental health, with 1 in 2 18-24-year-olds telling us their mental health is worse now than six months ago, within the context of the cost-of-living.

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Many say they're struggling to make ends meet and quality-of-life considerations mean more than 7 in 10 18-24-year-old respondents to a recent NYCI survey carried out by RED C feel they need to consider a future outside of Ireland.



The cost-of-living crisis has impacted me in terms of disposable income and saving. I no longer feel I can do this. I am planning to leave Ireland in the next 6 months due to this. The majority of my friends have plans to leave Ireland before the end of [the year].



Young respondent to NYCI and RED C survey, Autumn 2022

NYCI fears that without real action from Government for young people to improve their financial and wellbeing situations and the quality of employment, we may be faced with an exodus of young people. Anecdotal reports suggest this is already coming to pass.

We believe opportunities exist in Budget 2024 to demonstrate support for, and re-build a social contract with, young people, many of whom believe they are not experiencing the same quality of life, including in real wages and housing security, as previous generations. They are supported in those assertions by research from the ESRI¹⁸.

We believe that through immediate investment, supported by commitment to longer-term infrastructural change in areas like housing, climate and employment, we can use Budget 2024 to build a better Ireland for young people.

That is why, NYCI is calling on Government to invest upwards of €244 million in:

Financial supports for young people through the cost-of-living crisis:

- Extend the Young Adult Travel card to 24-year-olds and make fare reductions for young people permanent;
- Introduce a Culture and Media Card worth €200 to 18–24-year-olds to engage with cultural activities;
- Reduce contribution charges for students by a further €1,000 and abolish charges for apprenticeships.

Strategic supports to improve wellbeing and provide for basic needs:

- Fully fund the National Youth Homelessness Strategy.

Achieving equality for young workers and jobseekers:

- Ending sub-minima rates of pay for young people aged under 20;
- Equalise rates of Jobseekers' Allowance between under 25s and over 25s.

Financial supports for young people through the cost-of-living crisis

Extend the Young Adult Travel card to 24-year-olds and commit to making scheme permanent

Estimated Cost: €5 Million to Department of Transport

The introduction of the Young Adult Travel Card in Budget 2022 was very welcome, and the continuation of this scheme in Budget 2023 was an important indicator of the Government's commitment to reducing public transport costs and encouraging young people to make more public transport journeys.

It enables anyone aged between 19 and 23 years old to avail of an average fare discount of 50% across all public transport services, as well some private providers.

However, this does not go far enough and, **in Budget 2024, NYCI is calling for an extension of the scheme to 24-year-olds and a commitment from Government to making public transport fare reductions for young people permanent.**

The extension of this scheme and the reduction of fares would help ease the cost-of-living impact on young people. Results of a Red C survey commissioned by NYCI in Autumn 2022 highlighted

that almost 8 in 10 (77%) of the general population were supportive of the extension of the travel card to more young people. Despite the introduction of the scheme, this survey showed 18–24-year-olds still spend a much larger proportion of their income on public transport than the general population¹⁹.

Along with acting as a practical measure to provide support to young people struggling to deal with the soaring cost of living, combined with continued investment in public and active travel infrastructure, it will:

- Help establish strong sustainable mobility habits, and;
- Support the Climate Action Plan's target of 500,000 public transport and active travel journeys per day by 2030.

Introduce a pilot Culture and Media Card scheme which provides €200 to 18-24-year-olds to engage with cultural activities

Estimated cost: €87.7 million to Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

In recent years, especially after the lifting of public health restrictions, a number

of EU member states, including France, Spain and Germany, have introduced various “culture card” schemes to encourage young people to participate in cultural activities.

The National Youth Council is calling on Government to introduce a “Culture and Media Card” scheme to support young people to engage in cultural activities as part of Budget 2024.

Our call comes in light of the significant impact of lockdowns and the cost-of-living crisis on young people’s ability to experience culture, and a difficult landscape for the culture and media sectors. We believe it will also support actions under the Creative Youth Plan²⁰ to provide creative opportunities to young people.

Similar schemes have provided from €200 up to €500 to young people of various ages.

Funds are usually allocated through an app or online account after young people sign up. Guidelines are issued by the relevant Government Department on what the credit can be spent on. For example, in Spain its €400 scheme for those turning 18 is split three ways²¹ across live arts, digital arts and media and physical arts and media, e.g. books, newspapers and records, among others.

In Ireland, young people’s mental health and wellbeing suffered as a result of COVID-19 restrictions^{22 23}, with the socialisation and experience of cultural and social activities so critical to their development severely disrupted, while the cost-of-living crisis has restricted their ability to resume such activities.

NYCI believes that any such card should be supported by a targeted campaign to ensure those at greatest disadvantage are empowered to participate.

Case studies

In 2022, The Youth Cultural Bonus was introduced in Spain for all those turning 18. It was “direct aid” of €400 to those who turned 18, to acquire and enjoy cultural products and activities.

In 2021 in France, every 18-year-old was given a €300 Culture pass. Due to the success of the scheme, it was expanded to 15 to 17-year-olds who were granted smaller funds to spend on cultural interests – €20 the year they turn 15, €30 the year they turn 16 and 17, then €300 aged 18.

Germany introduced a €200 ‘Kulturpass’, made available to all 18-year-olds. The credit is available to use over a two-year period and citizens can make purchases via an app or website.

The Italian Cultural Allowance for 18-35-year-olds, originally introduced in 2016, provides €500 for spending in a range of ways including on travel, sport, culture, sustainable mobility and more.

Along with the significant benefits to young people, NYCI believes introduction of the card can:

- Support vital sectors of Irish society and economy hit by COVID;
- Incentivise the Irish media sector to reach younger audiences and provide more youth-focused and youth-representative content and address challenges highlighted in the Future of Media Commission Report;
- Provide benefit to communities, if it follows the example set by countries such as Spain, which exclude large online platforms such as Spotify from their scheme, and place an emphasis on small and medium businesses, including independent cinemas and bookshops.

Further reduction of third-level student contribution charge to €1,000 and abolition of charges for apprenticeships

Estimated cost: The cost to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science of reducing the student contribution by €1,000 is €85.3m, and to end charges for apprenticeships €6.47m.

Most third-level institutions charge an annual student contribution, which covers student services and examinations. This was subject to significant increases from 2008, rising from €900 to a peak of €3,000. It was reduced on a one-off basis by €1,000 for the academic year 2022-23.

This was followed by the introduction of a permanent new rate of student contribution support through SUSI from September, which means students whose families have incomes between €62,000 and €100,000, will receive a new grant of €500 towards the student contribution, along with a rise in the income threshold for those who can apply for a 50% student contribution grant.

These are welcome developments for young students, and NYCI believes they should set a path towards the abolition of student contributions to remove all barriers to participation.

NYCI proposes that in Budget 2024 the student contribution is reduced to €1,000 in 2024 and phased out in 2025.

Despite positive changes, students report pressures of hidden costs within courses (such as materials, placement costs and others) and severe shortages and high costs of accommodation, placing an additional financial burden, which emphasises the need for additional support in 2024.

Research by the Higher Education Authority in 2022 found that 1 in 3 of student population say they are experiencing serious or very serious financial issues, up from 1 in 4 in its previous report²⁴.



In NYCI's survey with RED C on the impact of the cost-of-living on young people, college and apprenticeship fees or other educational spending were among the highest costs borne by 18-24-year-olds.

More than 1 in 4 (27%) listed these items as among their top three areas of expenditure. This fell to just 2% in over-35s and highlights the need for targeted action to help young people with the costs affecting them most.



Like the Student Contribution Charge, apprentices face a pro-rata contribution charge if their off-the-job training takes place within a Higher Education Institute.

Apprentices pay the same contribution fee as full-time students, but their contribution is based on the time they spend in the Institutes. For craft apprenticeships, this is typically one third of the Annual Student Contribution paid by students attending for a full academic year, but it can be greater for certain trades where longer periods are spent on campus.

In the case of consortia-led apprenticeships the contribution varies for each programme as off-the-job training has a more flexible structure.

We believe that this acts as barrier to participation, particularly for those on low-incomes and, as such, **in Budget 2024, NYCI is calling for the abolition of apprenticeship charges by Government.**

Some progress was made last year with a reduction in charges by one third, but this needs to go further.

Strategic support to improve wellbeing and provide for basic needs

Youth Homelessness and Housing insecurity

Call: Fully fund the National Youth Homelessness Strategy in Budget 2024 and beyond.

NYCI is a founding member of the Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness, established in September 2017 to consolidate the work of a organisations trying to tackle youth homelessness. The Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness campaigned for a national strategy on youth homelessness, and this was published at the end of 2023.

Housing insecurity and homelessness are the defining issues facing young people today.



I think it's ridiculous! I'm 22, pregnant and living in an over-crowded house and can't afford to move out!



Young respondent to NYCI RED C survey

With record rents, falling home ownership among younger people, limited availability of social, affordable, and cost rental homes, and high rates of hidden homelessness²⁵, nearly all young people are impacted by housing.

The rapid rise in youth homelessness in recent years has reached a crisis point and emphasises the need for significant investment in the Government's Youth Homelessness Strategy. We have seen the number of young people aged 18-24 in emergency accommodation more than double in the past two years (April 2021²⁸ to April 2023), with a rise of 103%.

In our submission to Government, NYCI wants to place a specific emphasis on those most in need.

In Budget 2024, NYCI is calling for significant investment to support delivery of the National Youth Homelessness Strategy.

NYCI believes critical investment in needed to support young people's wellbeing and meet their most basic housing needs. The National Youth Homelessness Strategy is a critical enabler in this, alongside Tusla's recently published Strategic Plan for Aftercare Services for Young People and Young Adults²⁹.

Publication of the strategy last November was a welcome step towards the eradication of Youth Homelessness in Ireland, but it now requires significant funding to address the scale of the challenge. The Youth Homelessness Strategy³⁰ contains 27 key actions and has a welcome focus on prevention of youth homelessness, improving the experiences of young people in accessing emergency accommodation, and assisting young people in exiting homelessness.

Within this, there needs to be a specific focus on Supported Housing for Youth (SHY), a housing-led intervention, which emphasises the need to provide young people with flexible supports and which includes among its principles youth choice, voice and self-determination, and positive youth development and wellness.



We have young people choosing to emigrate to seek both financial and home/shelter security."

"In three specific cases in the recent months, we have had three young people made homeless due to the rising cost of living and inability to afford accommodation. This has been a very traumatic and harsh reality of the difficult times everyone is facing and this has had a huge negative impact on mental health both directly and indirectly related to those three specific cases.



NYCI Members, April 2023

A pilot project is due to be developed in Q3 2023, but this needs to be scaled up rapidly and NYCI is calling for significant investment to support this in 2024, alongside homeless prevention supports and supports to exit homelessness.

While this is just one element of the housing and homelessness crisis we are facing, and NYCI does not doubt the scale and complexity of challenges there are a range of tools at the disposal of Government, to support all young people into affordable and secure accommodation, including significant capital investment in social housing stock, adjustments to social housing eligibility, increasing funding for the Capital Assistance Scheme for care leavers and rent caps, among others.

“

I am 24 and I am never going to be able to buy a house. I have worked since I was 16 and I have €30,000 saved and it is still not enough to buy a house in near where I live. I will have to move abroad.

”

Young respondent to NYCI RED C survey

NYCI knows from its research with young people that accommodation costs are crippling, 39% of 18-24-year-old respondents to a survey carried out by RED C for us, saying accommodation payments (e.g. rent or mortgage) is by far and away the highest single area of expenditure for them and 48% of 18-34-year-olds saying likewise, compared to 31% in over-35s.

This strongly suggests the need for youth-focused measures on housing and homelessness.



Providing security and equality for young workers and jobseekers:

End Sub-Minima National Minimum Wage rates for u-20s

Currently, under the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, employers can pay people aged under 20 lower rates of the National Minimum Wage (NMW), termed “sub-minima rates”.

In Budget 2024, the NYCI is calling on Government to end sub-minima rates and ensure all young workers have access to the full rate of the National Minimum Wage.

Ireland is one of only four countries in the EU27 to continue to have age-based rates in place for young workers³¹.

As of January 2023, 16 and 17 year olds can be paid 70% (or €7.91 per hour) of the national minimum wage, 18 year olds 80% (or €9.04 per hour), and 19-year-olds 90% (or €10.17 per hour)³².

This means that based on a 35-hour working week, an 18-year-old performing the same role as a 20-year-old, will earn over €4,000 less over the course of a year. NYCI believes that sub-minima NMW rates are discriminatory, leave young workers open to exploitation, and put many young people providing for themselves and for their families in financial difficulty at a time of high costs.



An 18-year-old doing the same job as a 20-year-old, earns over €4,000 less per year.

Rates of Minimum Wage as of 1 January 2023		
Age	Minimum hourly rate of pay	% of minimum wage
Aged 20 and over	€11.30	100%
Aged 19	€10.17	90%
Aged 18	€9.04	80%
Aged 16 or 17	€7.91	70%

The latest available date (from 2019) showed 10,200 people under 20 were earning less than the minimum wage³³. This means that more than 1 in 6 people under 20 were earning less than their friends and counterparts aged 20³⁴.

Despite these worrying figures, it also means that the overwhelming majority of employers are paying young workers the full rate of the NMW or more.

As we transition to the implementation of a Living Wage, it is especially important that actions are taken now to ensure no one is left behind.

Government has to the power to Act by amending the National Minimum Wage Act 2000. The NYCI believes this must happen alongside Budget 2024, to signal support not only for equal opportunities for young people but also to help young people who are struggling with the cost-of-living now.

NYCI understands concerns around a change in the status quo, however, Government and employers should not fear the introduction of such a measure:

- Previous minimum wage increases for those over 20 had little effect on employment and reduced wage inequality³⁶;
- While some suggest the current situation restricts early school leaving, the ESRI-Low Pay Commission's 2016 report on showed little evidence of a link between the minimum wage and early school leaving³⁷;
- It will have the added benefit of increasing the amount of revenue the state can raise through taxation.

Equalisation of rates of Jobseekers' Allowance for under-25s and over-25s

Estimated cost: €64.91 million per year to the Department of Social Protection³⁸

Lower rates of jobseekers' allowance were initially introduced in 2009 for 18- and 19-year-olds and extended for older young people in subsequent Budgets.

This means that young people aged under 25 receive a rate of Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) over €90 lower (€129.70 per week) than their friends and family aged 25 and over (€220 per week).

In Budget 2024, NYCI is calling for an equalisation of Jobseekers' rates between young people aged under- and over-25.

There have been some positive developments in recent years with the removal of age-related payments for 25-year-olds, the restoration of the full JSA rate to young people engaged in education, training and work experience, and an increased rate for those on the Work Placement Experience Programme.

Despite this, however, 3 in 4 young people aged 18-24 in receipt of Jobseekers' Allowance in June 2023 were on the reduced rate, with only 1 in 20 on the full adult rate.³⁹.

The justification for introducing this policy measure was to incentivise young people to engage in employment and to counter welfare dependency, at a time of high youth unemployment. There is little evidence to support this, and the introduction of reduced rates coincided with a sharp rise in poverty indicators in younger people⁴⁰.

In 2023, we are also in a changed landscape with rates low rates of youth unemployment – in April 2023 the seasonally adjusted youth unemployment rate was 7.9%⁴¹ – while the rate of young people (aged 15–24 years) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET rate) in Ireland in Q4 of 2022 stood at 7.2%⁴². This is positive news and suggests that young people demonstrated resilience post-pandemic and are returning to work in large numbers.

It also means that the initial justification for introduction of the measure no longer applies, while the high proportion of young people in receipt of the lower rate of JSA suggests that for those furthest from the labour market, additional supports are required to support them into work.

Young people who are furthest from the labour market often have one or more significant barrier to employment⁴³ and this can include, but isn't limited to, disability, gender, mental health, low levels of education, homelessness, ethnic background⁴⁴ and coming from a low-income household⁴⁵.

More personalised supports are required to help disadvantaged young people with significant barriers to entering work or education, and positive examples of this exist in the youth sector⁴⁶. In the longer-term, additional supports are required to first tackle barriers which means that young people do not pass the necessary milestones to enter employment, education or work experience⁴⁷.

In the immediate term, however, lower rates of JSA are clearly not acting as an incentive to enter work or education. It is a punitive measure which means young people are not receiving an adequate income to survive in a cost-of-living crisis, and places practical financial barriers in the way of entering employment.

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