Giving Young People a Seat at the Table

NYCI's Programme for Government Priorities

The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) is calling on the next Government to ensure that all young people have access to the youth work provision they need, to create opportunities for young people where they live and to rebuild the youth work workforce.

Youth Structures and Policy

The next Government should ensure that youth work and young people are prioritised by ensuring that there are Government, Departmental and Oireachtas structures for youth, to improve the lives of young people now and in the future.

1. **To address the needs and significant challenges facing young people, NYCI is calling for the next Government to commit to:**
   - **Establishing a Ministry for Youth**
   - **Establishing a Cabinet Sub-Committee for Youth**
   - **Establishing an Oireachtas Committee for Youth**

2. **Within the new Government, Departmental and Oireachtas structures for Youth, the challenges being faced by youth, including those comprehensively laid out in NYCI's "State of our Young Nation" Report, and the need to extend the voting age to 16 and 17 year olds, must be addressed.**

Rationale: Having 'youth' in a ministerial title, and 'youth work' as a core component of a minister's brief, is key for securing the prioritisation of the agenda and sufficient resources to mobilise 'Young Ireland' and National Youth Work Strategy. The first 100 days of a new government are an opportunity to implement new policies and set out a long-term plan to address the range of challenges facing young people living in Ireland across financial and mental wellbeing, the housing crisis, employment opportunities, gender inequalities and the cost-of-living. Youth work is not an 'optional extra' or a sticking plaster when other services cannot meet young people's needs; it is a crucial preventive tool for young people at risk of social and educational exclusion, harm, and exploitation. So, the role of Youth Work as a place of safety, belonging and growth for young people, is a key protective factor for all young people and must be prioritised and resourced.

Cabinet level oversight of youth work and youth affairs through a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Youth would provide cross-Governmental focus and resources to address cost-of-living impacts, including those related to housing and transport, threats to the viability of services and structures that support young people. Moreover, Oireachtas oversight of Departmental and Government structures through an Oireachtas Committee for Youth will ensure accountability in the delivery of Young Ireland, the new National Strategy for Youth Work, and other key relevant policies.

Youth Work Funding and Pay Parity for Youth Workers

The next Government must increase investment in the youth work sector, investing in the power of youth work to support young people achieve their full potential. Funding youth work and youth services is not just the morally right thing to do, it also saves the taxpayer money – young people are an investment, not a cost.

3. **The next Government must restore youth work funding to pre-austerity levels, adjusted in line with inflation, population growth and factoring in the increased cost of service delivery, including the cost to provide pay parity for youth workers.**

Rationale: Ireland has a vibrant, dynamic, and resourceful youth work sector, with higher than EU average participation. Investment in the youth work sector is a significant opportunity for the next Government: a thriving sector would result in greater social cohesion, improved mental well-being, better opportunities for young people and a boost for the economy in the long term, amongst many other benefits. Yet, it is a sector that is increasingly doing more with less, and modest state investment has not kept pace with inflation, increased demand and increased needs of young people presenting to youth work services.

Furthermore, the National Youth Work Strategy cannot be achieved without the workforce to deliver it. There is a worsening recruitment and retention crisis within the youth work sector. There is no common pay scale for youth workers, funding is unstable, and contracts are often not long enough to provide security within the career. Youth work staff are currently employed using a variety of terms and conditions, and with different rates of remuneration, depending on which Government funding stream covers their salary. This means that there is not pay parity within the sector, and more broadly with similar sectors. Loss of youth workers to other roles with higher renumeration such as social care is a big issue for the sector at present. Youth work organisations must be funded to improve the pay and conditions of those staff on less competitive wages.

The call to restore youth work funding was included as a key recommendation in the Oireachtas Committee report on the Future of Youth Work, following an intensive consultation process and hearings by Committee members. Rising costs, issues with recruitment and retention, and lack of adequate infrastructure are just some of the core issues facing the youth work sector that the next Government can and should address through strategic investment, beginning in the first Budget delivered by the new government.

NYCI National Youth Council of Ireland

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 on young people. www.youth.ie

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