



**Comhairle na nÓg**  
Young Voices. Local Issues.

**MAKING OUR VOICES  
HEARD** Young people's  
views on having their  
voices heard

*Report of the  
workshop  
discussions at  
the Comhairle  
na nÓg  
Showcase  
2014*

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## Introduction

**What** A national event took place

**Where** Croke Park, Dublin

**When** On the 20<sup>th</sup> November 2014



**Who** 500 young people and Youth workers from around Ireland (members of Comhairle na nÓg)<sup>1</sup>, the Taoiseach, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs-Dr. James Reilly, members from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children.

**Why** The young people talked about the opportunities and challenges they experience in having a say in decisions on issues that affect their lives. They voted on the parts of young people lives that they need to have a say.

**How will this make a difference?** The outcome of the vote will be followed up at the next session of Dail na nÓg, which is the Irish national youth parliament.

## Children and young people's participation in decision-making

The National event was at the same time as the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This convention calls on Governments to ensure that the rights of the child are promoted and respected.

It also states that *children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.*



For more information on the articles in the UNCRC see this [youth friendly document](#)<sup>2</sup> produced by the DCYA.

## Comhairle na nÓg Showcase

At the national event there was a Showcase of the Comhairlí na nÓg' work over the years 2012-2014. There were pop-up stands which were decorated by each of the Comhairlí. Some groups presented their work through videos.

There was plenty of space around the room for the young people to talk to each other and to the adults on what worked well for them and also to get ideas for future projects.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.comhairlenanog.ie/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/unrightsofchild/rights\\_leaflet1.pdf](http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/unrightsofchild/rights_leaflet1.pdf)

## Opening Ceremony

Drummers led people from the Showcase into the main hall and Kathryn Thomas (the presenter) welcomed everyone. 42 young people marched through the hall carrying placards displaying the children's rights from the United Nations Convention. Each right was read out from the stage by two members of Comhairle na nÓg and this was followed by speeches.



## Workshop discussions

All the young people took part in a workshop to discuss the themes that were identified by young representatives before the event. There were 7 themes:

- ❖ Education and school
- ❖ Being myself
- ❖ Life at home
- ❖ Social life
- ❖ Community and facilities
- ❖ Transport and travel
- ❖ Health and well-being



The **500 young people** who attended were assigned to tables based on the theme they were most interested in. They **wrote** on the placemat about the theme under the headings '**already have a say**' '**have a bit of a say but needs improvement**' and '**don't have a say**'. Once they were finished discussing and writing, the placemats were swapped between tables and the next table were able to add to the placemat if they wanted.



## Voting

Each young person voted twice, first on what they thought was most important on their own placemat and then on which theme was most important to them overall.

## Analysis

A research team from Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway managed the analysis. There was a lot of text from the placemats, the researchers collected all of them with the votes. They read all the comments on the placemats, then grouped similar comments together and then counted the number of votes. A more detailed process of how the text was grouped is available from a more detailed report on '[Making our voices heard](#)'<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> <http://dcya.gov.ie/documents/publications/20151009MakingOurVoicesHeard.pdf>

## Findings

### Placemats summary

**Table 1: Number of placemats by theme**

Theme	Number of placemats
Being myself	10
Education and school	9
Life at home	9
Social life	8
Community and facilities	6
Transport and travel	5
Health and well-being	3
Total number of placemats	50



**Table 2:** Education and school received the highest number of votes. This showed a change from the themes chosen before the event compared to during it

**Table 1** shows the number of tables that looked at each of the 7 themes. Young people chose the theme they wanted to discuss before the event

### Voting summary

During the Workshop, young people voted which of the themes they felt was most important. **Table 2** shows the result of this vote

**Table 2: Final count from the voting for themes**

Theme	Votes
Education and school	121
Being myself	76
Transport and travel	67
Health and well-being	57
Community and facilities	49
Social life	33
Life at home	16
Total number of votes	419

There is **overlap** of issues under the three levels of having a say as there were some young people at the tables that felt they had a say and others that didn't.

There is also overlap of issues between themes, for example school is named under more than one theme.

To view the full list of issues under each theme read **Appendix 10** in the [full report](#)

## Results of the analysis



### Education and school

Education and school was discussed at 9 tables and Table 3 shows the results of what the young people voted for as the most important issues

**Table 3: 'Education and school' (121 votes): the most popular issues**

Already have a say	No.	Have a bit of a say, but needs improvement	No.	Don't have a say	No.
Subject choice	37	Subject choice	37	Subject choice	50
Student council	29	What happens in class	22	School timetable	25
Extra-curricular activities	24	Food	14	Dress code/ uniform	22
Transition year	11	Student council	11	Individual appearance	20
Subject level	9	Extra-curricular activities	11	Teachers	19

### Quotes from young people on education and school<sup>4</sup>

*have a choice in subject choices but some schools don't provide subjects wanted, ... sometimes you may have to choose between A & B but may not be able to do A & B, religion is mandatory and no choice not to do it as an exam choice, gender oriented subjects, i.e. no woodwork in an all-girls school/ no home ec. in an all-boys school, project maths*

**Subject choice**

**Teachers**

*what teachers we have, teachers that aren't good at what they do should really be let go, style of learning that we acquire from teachers!, ...some teachers are not up to scratch with their teaching skills – there is no process for complaint and improvement – if someone has a bad teacher they just have to deal with it, cannot give feedback on opinions or make changes in regards to teaching quality*

**Student participation**

*student council needs to do more and have more of an impact, choices of which poem/novel/play that we study for leaving and junior cert!, where school money goes—students should have a say in where it is spent*

**Structural matters**

*length of classes, transition year programme, leaving cert, new junior cert, healthy canteens, Less homework – more time for exercise and more time for activities outside school, socialising with family—this all affects wellbeing*

**Uniforms**

**wearing uniforms**

<sup>4</sup> Quotes left in original text from placemats no corrections made of grammar or spelling

## Being myself



'Being myself' was discussed at **10 tables**, and Table 4 shows the results of what the young people voted for as the most important issues

**Table 4: 'Being myself' (76 votes): the most popular issues**

Already have a say	No.	Have a bit of a say, but needs improvement	No.	Don't have a say	No.
Appearance	39	School/education	39	School/education	51
Hobbies/activities	32	Peer pressure	17	Appearance	23
Friends	30	Appearance	16	Family	18
Youth groups	25	Internet and media	14	Politics	16
Opinions/say	22	Family	11	Judgement	15

### Quotes from young people on being myself

*people judging each other, other people's opinions/ views/ assumptions of you (prejudices), judgements based on looks, gender stereotypes, how LGBT community are accepted/perceived in Ireland, we have a say in who we want to be, but our family may not want us to be that, being allowed/being accepted for who are, young people have the freedom to do what they want, but by doing this they may be judged and bullied person - sexuality*

**Being stereotyped or judged**

**Settings**

**Structural factors**

*public transport, politics, government decisions i.e., voting systems, serious issues, example global warming decisions that involve our future*

*where you are not always permitted to express yourself at school not always listened to, at school you can't be yourself, exams/school, school rules regarding makeup, piercings, hair dye all forbidden, schools and adults don't understand the importance of being yourself, school life -system/ uniform/*

**Social and sporting activity**

*sports/football, where I go with friends, peer pressure, social media, social life*

**Family**

*family change, home, parental views*

**Aspects of the self as an individual**

*your name, your biology, religion, sexuality/ gender identity*



## Transport and travel



'Transport and travel' was discussed at **5 tables** and Table 5 shows the results of what the young people voted for as the most important issues

**Table 5: 'Transport and travel' (67 votes): the most popular issues**

Already have a say	No.	Have a bit of a say, but needs improvement	No.	Don't have a say	No.
Nothing	17	Conditions and facilities	22	Cost	30
Options/choice	15	PT routes/access	13	PT frequency/times	26
Conditions and facilities	9	PT frequency/times	10	Conditions and facilities	24
Methods of transport	8	Cost	10	PT routes/access	20
PT routes/access	5	Options/choice	5	Age	9

PT = Public transport

### Quotes from young people on transport and travel

#### Access

*lack of bus stops in rural areas, routes/stops not frequent or enough, Not a lot of opportunities to go places!, transport times are limited in rural places, routes, timetables, timetables don't always suit the needs of young people*

#### Costs

*age classification, 16/17 year-olds charged as adults, prices should be the same for a child up to 18, still refused to extend Leapcards to all rural children because of cost – what do we pay tax for?*

#### Miscellaneous

*conditions of the roads, time not dependable, not consulted on anything, special needs facilities*



**Health and well-being**



Health and well-being was discussed at **3 tables** and Table 6 shows the results of what the young people voted for as the most important issues

**Table 6: ‘Health and well-being’ (57 votes): the most popular issues**

Already have a say	No	Have a bit of a say, but needs improvement	No.	Don’t have a say	No.
Physical activity	9	Mental health services	5	Access to health services	1
Diet	8	School	5	Diet	5
Access to health services	8	Sexual health/sexuality	4	Cost	5
Mental health services	6	Facilities/services	4	Sexual health/sexuality	5
Seeking support	6	Physical activity	3	General health	4

**Quotes from young people on health and well-being**

**Access**

*health service – what is available, doctors not available without parents if your under 16, the way doctors treat young people and how difficult to access them (money etc.)*

*alcohol and drugs – a lot of young people find it hard not to fall into peer pressure, what facilities are available for people with mental health issues!*

**Specific health issues**

*abortion, sexual health, birth control*

**Sexual health**

**Miscellaneous**

*cut to your youth services and school*

## Community and facilities



Community and facilities was discussed at **6 tables** and Table 7 shows the results of what the young people voted for as the most important issues

**Table 7: 'Community and facilities' (49 votes): the most popular issues**

Already have a say	No.	Have a bit of a say, but needs improvement	No.	Don't have a say	No.
Clubs	19	Friends	14	General facilities	23
Hobbies/activities	14	Clubs	12	School	22
Local councils	9	Voice in the community	9	Youth facilities	10
Free time	5	Local councils	8	Voice in the community	9
Voice in the community	5	Youth facilities	8	Community planning	9

### Quotes from young people on community and facilities

#### Role of young people

*improve young people's recognition in the community, have a say in school/student council – needs to be taken more serious, community councils – discuss facilities – may not include young people, need to improve how authority figures treat young people, the way our community is run and the laws that are in place for our community as we can't vote, youth workers and volunteers, the local county council*

#### Improving and increasing facilities

*facilities are damaged and work, but nothing is done to fix them ☹, need to improve what youth facilities are in town, improve the number and quality of youth spaces and facilities, more youth facilities, building new facilities*

#### Financial

*water charges coming in it hard to find the funding for cafes/clubs*

#### Miscellaneous

*what subjects are compulsory in school, victims of abuse, bus routes*

## Social life



Social life was discussed at **8 tables** and Table 8 shows the results of what the young people voted for as the most important issues

**Table 8: Number 6 'Social life' (33 votes): the most popular issues**

Already have a say	No.	Have a bit of a say, but needs improvement	No.	Don't have a say	No.
Media/Internet	23	School	16	School	21
Friends/peers	21	Going out/places	13	Legislation/governance	15
Activities and clubs	19	Media/Internet	12	Substance use	13
School	15	Friends/peers	10	Family	12
Going out/places	9	Facilities	10	Going out/places	10

### Quotes from young people on social life

#### School

*what we are taught in school, mandatory subjects in schools, education – going to college – points from leaving cert., school leaving age i.e. 16, have a say in school about our homework because we get too much in some subjects, our social life is taken up by school, study, etc.*

*don't have a say in getting permission to do things that our parents/guardians don't want us to do e.g., drug use, going out and who your with – your parents may dislike your friends, freedom of travelling to other countries*

#### Parental views

#### Locations

#### Age

*in the voting age – we're too young to vote, but old enough to pay full price in the cinema or on the train?, how I look e.g., piercings, tatoos need permission if u1- lower the consent age*

*social venues – depends on gender – more boys turned away from nightclubs, facilities for young people, where to socialise, who I stay with?,*

#### Miscellaneous

#### Money

*most things cost money and we are broke, if you have enough money to do something!*

#### Views of others

*relationships, religion, on choices in the home, communication with youth facilities/ faciliators – don't just say yes, act on it*

*what others post on social media about you, our appearance, society how people act because of appearance, what I wear*

## Life at home



Life at home was discussed at **9 tables** and Table 9 shows the results of what the young people voted for as the most important

**Table 9: Number 7 'Life at home' (16 votes): the most popular issues**

Already have a say	No.	Have a bit of a say, but needs improvement	No.	Don't have a say	No.
Hobbies/activities	39	Going places	19	Food/diet	24
Food/diet	19	Appearance	18	Money	22
School	18	Friends	18	Family	20
Friends	16	Food/diet	17	School	16
Bedroom/space	15	School	15	Where you live	16

### Quotes from young people on life at home

#### Parents

*young people should have a say in who they live with if their parents are seperated, your home situation example: if you have abusive parents – it's not your choice but you can try and stop it through different organisation, not following in our parents footsteps, spending time with parents when desired, when or if your parents are working, work/life balance*

#### Social life

*going out, going out to disco's' (x2), young people should have a say in their relationships and the freedom and restrictions that come with this, who I can invite over to my house*

#### Behaviours

*where I can't and can't go (curfew), 'what I can and can't do, alcohol and drugs, young people should have a say on how they want to dress!*

#### Education

*subjects for the L.C., what college you go to, when deciding what to do in college, special needs assistants (in education)*

#### Location

*where you live, going/where I go to school, transport especially in rural places – limited*

#### Money

*what I can spend money on, water charges, how we spend our money*

## Summary

There were 7 themes that young people discussed. There were more tables for some themes than others as this was chosen before the event. From these themes the most important issues were voted for by the group discussing them. The young people discussed the themes by filling in what they already have a say on, have a bit of a say but needs improvement and what they don't have a say on.



All of the young people voted on which theme they thought was the most important and Education and School was voted as the Number 1 theme.



Across the different themes the most popular issues were similar, for example 'education and school' was discussed under the themes of Social life, Life at home and Being myself as well as being a theme of its own. Money was also a popular issue across themes.

