

Youth Work Ireland's Final Declaration

Annual General Meeting
8th November 2014



Youth Work Ireland

Be Part of It

“A Ballot Box in Every School”

The General Assembly of Youth Work Ireland meeting in Dublin on today Saturday 8th November 2014 unanimously call on the government to reduce the voting age to 16 years. Youth Work Ireland and its Member Youth Services is the largest youth organization in Ireland working with 110,000 young people, 1,100 staff and 7,000 volunteers.

Young people are making more and more decisions at a younger age. Increasingly this process is beginning to focus in on the political system. Recently we saw one of the biggest exercises in democracy with a massive turnout to vote on Scottish independence. Significantly the Scottish Government gave the vote to all those at 16 and over in this referendum and the turnout along with the debate was recognised as being hugely impressive. Youth Work Ireland's Youth Poll of over 1,000 young people in 2004 showed a clear majority of young people in favour of votes at 16.

The Constitutional Convention in January 2013 considered a question about reducing the voting age to 17 at the request of the Government. The Convention has widely been recognised as an independent and effective way to examine constitutional issues. The Convention considered the issue and voted to endorse votes for people at 16. It is noteworthy that at its very first meeting which considered this issue the Convention effectively altered the question to match the international norm of requesting votes at 16.

The political system is in need of renewal and injecting a significant new group of voters in to it has the potential to do this. As the vast majority of these voters will be in school the potential for high turnouts with voting in schools is great. We see great maturity and confidence amongst young people in our everyday work. Certainly maturity and engagement can vary but this is no different to the rest of the population. In the end of the day young people are well educated and currently make very significant decisions in their teenage years. Taxation arguments are also weak as many young people work, and pay taxes such as V.A.T., such a logic would take the vote off many like the unemployed, the ill and the elderly and nobody advocates this.

A CSO survey in 2002 showed that the main reason for low turnouts amongst young voters was not apathy or disinterest but technical barriers to voting such as timing and the nature of the registration process. Despite previous controversy Ireland remains in the past on issues like voter registration and ease of voting. These issues still need to be addressed. In the end of the day the issues that get political attention are the ones that affect those who vote. Currently voting increases with every age decade and it is highest amongst the oldest.

Other countries like Austria and Scotland have shown the way while Germany, Israel and Switzerland have partially moved down this road. However research has shown that there is considerable opposition to this change. Youth Work Ireland intends to do whatever it can to make sure this change becomes a reality. This includes campaigning in any referendum and ensuring young people's voices are heard. We resolve here today to campaign for this change that will hopefully alter for good the place of young people in our society.