



Youth Work Ireland

Press Release  
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### **"Ireland at Risk of Being Left behind if UK Embraces Votes at 16 for December Election" Says Leading Youth Organisation**

Youth Work Ireland has today expressed concern that Ireland may be left behind if the UK agrees to votes at 16 for a General Election in December, on foot of a potential SNP amendment this week. The organisation, which works with over 100,000 young people around the country, has pointed to more and more countries embracing this change and the upsurge in Climate activism amongst teens while politicians still appear steadfastly against any change here. It also believes there could be great potential for the reinvigoration of political participation, for example through voting in schools and associated political education. The group has welcomed the possibility of an SNP amendment in the commons this week particularly as Scotland has led the way for the cause of votes at 16.

*"There is already a lot of cynicism about politics and the machinations of those in power among young people who believe their voices are completely ignored in important decisions day in day out. Extending the franchise to 16 is a concrete way to involve these people in the process and highly symbolic. The Scottish independence referendum illustrated how powerful an engagement tool extending the franchise can be with record turnout levels among 16- and 17-year old's, politicians had to engage with these voters in that process. The arguments about turnout are weak as the experience in Scotland shows. Voting in schools for example would certainly increase turnout. The Constitutional Convention which was a unique exercise in involving citizens in shaping our constitution recommended this change for all elections, but it was ignored. We now need to examine how to set this right, said Michael Mc Loughlin from Youth Work Ireland*

*"The Government needs to devise a plan to enhance the engagement of young people in the political process if it is not to be left behind in this growing movement. Constitutional change can be difficult particularly winning referendums. The increasingly normal process now is to deal with as many issues in advance of any referendum. The Government here can make critical changes without having a referendum. The franchise for local and European elections is not a constitutional issue so the Government could make changes here by legislation in the Oireachtas. Scotland, Austria, Brazil, Malta have already made this move and more countries are examining it. The Government and indeed some opposition parties blocked a move to make this change for the local and European elections her. They need to pay attention to what is happening in other countries" Mc Loughlin added.*

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