



Youth Work Ireland

Press Release
Youth Work Ireland
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"Sinn Fein's Seanad Bill on Votes at 16 worthy of All Party Support" Says Leading Youth Organisation

Youth Work Ireland has today called on all parties in the Seanad to support a Sinn Fein bill extending the franchise to 16 year-olds for local and European Elections. The organisation, which works with over 100,000 young people around the country, see this as a key initiative in engaging young people at an early age in the political process and establishing a habit of engagement. 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 bill also recognises that much change can be achieved without a referendum in this area serving as a "pilot" for constitutional change in the future if things work well in the locals and European elections.

"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 recent Scottish referendum illustrated how powerful an engagement tool extending the franchise can be with record turnout levels among 16 and 17 year olds, politicians had to engage with these voters in that process. The arguments about turnout are spurious 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. This bill is an opportunity 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. 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 can make critical changes without having a referendum. The franchise for local and European elections is not a constitutional issue so the Government can make changes here by legislation in the Oireachtas. Clearly if there were a pilot or "staging post" of votes at 16 for local and European elections we could see how the change worked and if it were successful constitutional change would be easier soon after. This is the route set out in the bill and the Government should now commit to" Mc Loughlin added

ENDS

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