



Youth Work Ireland

Press Release
Youth Work Ireland
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"Ireland May Become an Outlier on Votes at 16, as Belgium begins to register 16- and 17-year-olds for Euro elections" says leading youth organization.

Youth Work Ireland has today reacted to Belgium opening the electoral register for 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in European elections, warning that Ireland was in danger of becoming an outlier on the issue of Votes at 16 as momentum grows around the world. The organisation, which works with over 100,000 young people around the country, sees 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. Belgium follows New Zealand as the latest country to propose votes at 16 and Germany is set to introduce it for the European elections too and it will be allowed for the Welsh Parliament.

“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-olds, 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, and several other bills have been voted down but the tide is turning internationally and in the UK.” 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” Mc Loughlin added

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Contact: Michael Mc Loughlin 087 6677499