

Comhairle na nÓg

Your Local Youth Council

Regional Networking Events Report 2024



Introduction

The National Participation Team for Comhairle na nÓg facilitated three Comhairle Members' Regional Networking Events in July 2024. The events took place in Sligo, Limerick, and Dublin respectively and were attended by a total of 93 participants representing 28 Comhairlí na nÓg across the country.

The purpose of the Regional Networking Events is to provide Comhairle members with an opportunity to come together to share information and best practices while informally addressing the challenges they face and overcome. Throughout the day, participants engaged in ice-breaker games, which helped everyone get to know each other and have some fun.

The Sligo event was attended by Comhairle na nÓg members from Donegal, Galway City, Galway County, Leitrim, Longford, Sligo and Roscommon; the Limerick event by members from Clare, Cork City, Cork County, Kerry, Limerick and Tipperary, and the Dublin event by members from Carlow, Cavan, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Meath, Monaghan, South Dublin, Westmeath, Waterford, Dublin City Louth and Offaly.

The Purpose of this Report

This report documents all of the engagements with Comhairle members over the three days and gives a run down of the schedule. The report will be circulated to all participants and made available to all stakeholders on the Comhairle na nÓg website.

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Agenda for all three Regional Networking Events

Group Contract	11.30
Icebreakers	11.40
Networking Carousel	11.45
Discovering Our Comhairle	12.15
Lunch	13.00
Comhairle in the Future	14.00
Feedback	14.45
Review Anonymised Survey	15.00
Evaluation and Close of Events Shared Learning/Peer Support Activity	15.15



Photos and Venues



Regional Networking Delegation in Dublin DCEDIY



Regional Networking Delegation in Sligo Glasshouse Hotel



Regional Networking Delegation in Limerick Absolute Hotel

Icebreakers and Networking

The participants engaged in an Icebreaker activity in the beginning of the events. First they learned each others names and then they got to know each other in a Networking Carousel.



Discovering Our Comhairle

The Comhairle na nÓg delegates were asked to discuss and describe their Comhairle from their perspectives and their thoughts are compiled in this report under the following sections:

- *What do you love about your Comhairle*
- *The strengths of our Comhairle*
- *What do we do at our meetings*
- *What we would improve about Comhairle*
- *Who we have we met (or are planning to meet)*
- *Highlights of the year so far*



“What do you love about your Comhairle?”

Members highlight community and friendships built in Comhairle na nÓg, as well as the environment and sense of purpose.

The responses painted a vibrant picture of the aspects they value most in their experiences. The most common response across the country was “the people,” highlighting the strong sense of community and friendship that members develop within their Comhairlí. Many young people also praised the dedication and support of their coordinators, with participants acknowledging this as one of the most cherished aspects of their involvement.

The activities organised within Comhairle were another highlight, with participants enjoying the fun and variety of experiences offered. The food, unsurprisingly, was also mentioned as an enjoyable aspect of their gatherings.

A sense of purpose was evident in several of the responses. Young people spoke about how much they appreciate being able to improve things and create opportunities for other young people. The ability to gather and deliver young people’s voices to decision-makers was particularly important, with many expressing pride in being part of a system where their voices truly matter.

Comhairle’s inclusive and welcoming environment was a key feature. Many participants mentioned how comfortable and valued they feel, reflecting on how they’ve been able to meet other Comhairlí, network, and attend national events.

The enthusiasm shared among members was also a recurring theme. For many, Comhairle was not just a place to participate in activities or voice opinions but a space where everyone shares the same energy, enthusiasm, and desire to make a difference.

Lastly, some young people mentioned that hosting the Youth Conference was a significant highlight of their Comhairle experience, showcasing their leadership and ability to contribute meaningfully to broader discussions.

“The Strengths of Our Comhairle”

Welcoming and inclusive environment, teamwork, innovativeness, national representation and respect were highlighted as strengths of Comhairle na nÓg.

When asked about the strengths of their Comhairle, the young people identified several key attributes that contribute to their success. The most frequently mentioned strength was the welcoming and inclusive environment, where all members feel comfortable and valued. This sense of belonging fosters a space where young people can have great discussions on important issues, with many participants emphasising the quality of the ideas and conversations that take place within their Comhairlí.

Teamwork and collaboration were recurring themes in the responses. Young people appreciated how they achieve great things by working together and how playing games helps strengthen their team bonds. This camaraderie, coupled with the friendliness of both staff and participants, contributes to a positive and productive atmosphere.

The Comhairle's ability to tackle challenges creatively was also noted as a strength, with participants highlighting their capacity to find innovative solutions to problems. Additionally, the structured nature of Comhairle, including clearly defined roles and responsibilities, helps to keep the group organised and efficient.

A number of young people also mentioned the importance of their National Executive representative, who plays a vital role in keeping them informed about national projects. The diversity within Comhairle, along with its regional representation—such as ensuring transport for meetings—helps to ensure that a wide range of voices and perspectives are heard.

Respect and mutual listening were also highlighted as central to the Comhairle experience, with participants appreciating the culture of understanding that allows them to engage in meaningful work. The group's enthusiasm and efficiency enable them to take on large projects, while their community presence and public engagement further strengthen their impact.

Finally, the regularity of their meetings was noted as a key factor in maintaining momentum and keeping the group focused on their goals.

“What we do at our meetings”

At their local Meetings, members discuss topics important to them, strategise on how to create change, set goals and track their progress.

At their meetings, Comhairle na nÓg members engage in a variety of activities that help them stay informed, plan, and take action on issues that matter to them. A common activity across many Comhairlí is providing general updates, where members catch up on progress and developments. Much of the focus in meetings is on planning for the year ahead and discussing ways to raise awareness of the chosen topics that are important to local young people. This topic-focused work often includes creating surveys to better understand the issues facing their peers, allowing the group to gather data and make informed decisions.

Meetings also provide an opportunity for members to strategize on how to improve things for young people in their communities, with a focus on setting clear progress goals and milestones to track their impact. To keep the energy and morale high, many Comhairlí include games and icebreakers in their sessions, ensuring that members stay engaged and continue to build strong relationships within the group.

Meeting frequency varies from group to group—some meet once a week, others fortnightly, and some monthly. Many groups have adopted a hybrid approach, combining online and in-person meetings to ensure flexibility while maintaining regular contact and collaboration.



“What we would improve about Comhairle”

Young people hoped for more in-person meetings, more national and international opportunities, transparency on their influence and better visibility and communication.

When asked what they would like to improve about their Comhairle experience, many young people expressed a desire for more in-person meetings. They felt that gathering face-to-face helped strengthen their bonds and enhanced the overall effectiveness of their work. Transport was mentioned as an ongoing challenge, with some members finding it difficult to attend due to limited transportation options.

There was also a strong interest in accessing more national and international opportunities, with members eager to broaden their horizons and connect with youth councils beyond their own communities. In terms of productivity, some young people expressed frustration with decision-makers not always acting on the ideas and suggestions raised by Comhairli. They also wanted greater transparency regarding where their work goes and how their contributions are making an impact.

A common theme was the need for better visibility and communication, both within and outside their Comhairle. Some young people felt that Comhairle isn't well-known, and they suggested more advertising to raise awareness of its purpose and achievements. Improved communication, particularly outside of meetings, was also identified as an area for growth, with some groups wanting clearer and more consistent updates.

Members highlighted the importance of better topic progression, ensuring that discussions lead to tangible outcomes, as well as increasing attendance at meetings. A desire to link up more with other Comhairli across the country was also frequently mentioned, emphasizing the value of shared learning and collaboration.

Some participants suggested making it easier to join Comhairle and expressed an interest in taking on bigger or more ambitious projects, believing that their Comhairle has the enthusiasm and capability to create even greater change.

“Who have we met (or are planning to meet)?”

Decision-makers that the delegates listed when they were asked who they have or are planning to meet:

- *Simon Harris (Taoiseach)*
- *Leo Varadkar (When he was Taoiseach)*
- *Minister Rodric O’Gorman*
- *Minister Norma Foley*
- *Minister Eamonn Ryan*
- *Jigsaw*
- *People in the steering committee; Local Authority representatives, County Councillors, HSE, Spunout, Drugs and Alcohol Services, Gardai, App developer, CYPSC coordinator.*
- *City Mayors*
- *Local TD’s*



“Highlights of the year so far”

Young people highlighted Dail na nÓg, local Comhairle na nÓg Events, Networking Events and Youth Conferences

When reflecting on the highlights of their year so far, many young people pointed to Dáil na nÓg as a standout experience. This national youth parliament was a memorable event for many, offering a unique platform for discussing important issues and representing the voices of young people. Another highlight mentioned frequently was the opportunity to interact with other Comhairlí, whether through national events or regional networking opportunities, which fostered valuable connections and learning from peers across the country.

For many, attending and organising their own events within Comhairle was a source of pride. The Networking Events held throughout the year were particularly appreciated, providing a chance for members to come together, share experiences, and collaborate on common goals. Other significant highlights included the Garda Youth Awards, which recognised the contributions of young people, and the various youth conferences that gave participants a platform to voice their ideas.

Some groups enjoyed specific events like sports days focused on mental wellbeing, debates, and bringing new members into their Comhairle. Participating in consultations, such as the LGBTI+ Consultation YAG, and attending important locations like City Hall and Stormont were also seen as major moments of the year. Pride festivals were highlighted as joyful and inclusive experiences for many members, further adding to the sense of accomplishment and community within their Comhairle.

Future of Comhairle at the Sligo Regional

At the Sligo event, the young people were passionate about creating a more impactful and inclusive future for Comhairle na nÓg (CNN). Through in-depth discussions, three tables shared their collective aspirations for the next 5, 10, and 20 years, focusing on improving structures, increasing visibility, and giving young people a stronger voice in decision-making at both local and national levels.

In 5 Years

Within five years, the young people envision Comhairle na nÓg having a more solid structure, complete with permanent staff and clear agendas. They foresee better connections across counties through an enhanced online platform that links the work of all Comhairlí. They also expressed a need for more staff training and for CNN to be a well-known and recognizable name, both nationally and within government circles. This includes the idea of having a TD or Senator representing each province.

Many participants emphasised the importance of raising awareness about Comhairle na nÓg, not only through increased advertisement but also through more outreach in schools. They suggested holding interviews for membership and differentiating CNN from other youth organisations. Inclusivity is a priority, with a call for more accessibility for young people of all abilities, increased youth spaces, and support for those with learning disabilities. They also stressed the need for more in-person meetings, more frequent coordinator hours, and creating a better connection with local councils to ensure that the voices of young people are taken seriously.



Future of Comhairle at the Sligo Regional (Continued)

In 10 Years

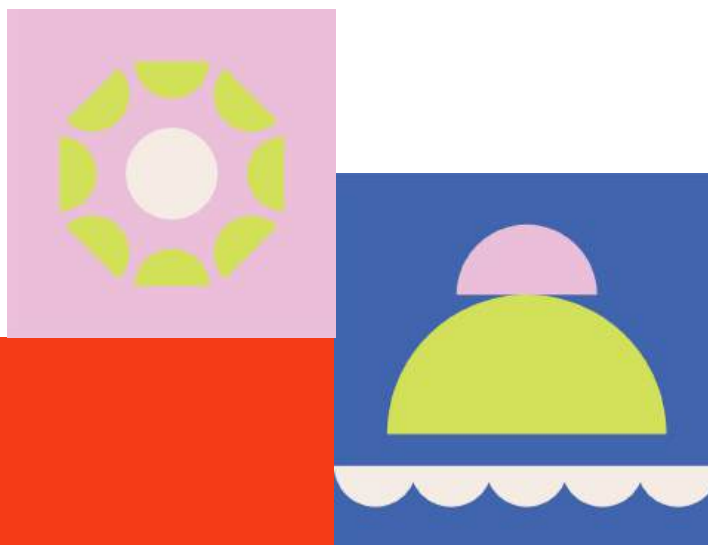
In 10 years, the vision expands to include greater networking opportunities and even more involvement for young people in key decision-making processes. One idea was to create subgroups within Comhairle na nÓg and for members to sit on boards of management or county councils. Acquiring additional funding, especially from external sources, is seen as crucial for CNN's growth and sustainability.

Participants also envision more direct communication with government bodies, including stronger connections with Dáil na nÓg, and greater efforts to address children's mental health by improving services like CAMHS / Jigsaw and offering better support and advice. They also hope to see CNN involved in more international collaborations and be recognized as a powerful voice for youth across the nation.

In 20 Years

Looking 20 years into the future, the young people attending the Sligo Regional see Comhairle na nÓg being just as influential as the government itself. They imagine a future where young people not only have a say in political matters but also hold voting power and are represented at the highest levels, including shadow ministers for various government sectors like transport and education. They also hope to establish more local CNN groups across Ireland, especially in larger counties, and to have a national youth parliament that meets regularly in the Dáil.

This vision is one where young people are fully empowered, where their voices are not only heard but are integral to shaping policies and decisions at both national and local levels. In this future, CNN is a central force in creating opportunities, leadership programs, and meaningful change for the youth of Ireland.



Future of Comhairle at the Limerick Regional

The young people at the Limerick Regional event expressed bold and innovative ideas for the future of Comhairle na nÓg. Across three tables, they explored how Comhairle could expand its influence, become more inclusive, and increase its visibility over the next 5, 10, and 20 years.

In 5 Years

In the next five years, the Limerick youth see Comhairle na nÓg focusing on action over discussion, aiming for real change. They emphasised the need for better outreach, particularly to young people who may not be interested in politics, by using social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram to boost visibility and engagement. There was a clear call for more public recognition, including poster campaigns, school visits, and surveys, to raise awareness about what Comhairle does and how young people can get involved.

They also envisioned more structured meetings at national and regional levels, with an emphasis on providing political education in schools and promoting respectful debates on important issues. Mental health was another focus, with young people advocating for improved mental health education and services, particularly for 16-18 year olds. Increased funding, more members, and more outreach to schools were all seen as essential for growth.

Future of Comhairle at the Limerick Regional (Continued)

In 10 Years

In 10 years, the young people want to see Comhairle na nÓg have a greater impact, not only through broader publicity but also through more direct engagement with decision-makers. They emphasised the importance of political literacy education, critical analysis of social media, and stronger partnerships with schools. They envision Comhairle as an influential platform that empowers children to have a say in what and how they learn, as well as being more involved in shaping local and national policies.

The young people also suggested creating more roles within Comhairle to promote inclusion and ensure broader participation across different regions. Additionally, they want to see Comhairle members sitting on local councils and advisory boards, as well as having a more significant presence at the national level.

In 20 Years

Looking 20 years into the future, the young people at the Limerick Regional see Comhairle na nÓg as an integral part of government structures, with a youth branch of government that has real influence. They imagine a system where young people have tangible power in decision-making processes, with Comhairle members serving as councillors or shadow ministers. They also envision creating a Comhairle-type organisation for young adults over 18, ensuring that youth engagement continues beyond adolescence.

They dream of a future where Comhairle is as well-known and respected as major institutions like the GAA, with full integration into local councils and a streamlined path for youth participation starting from primary school and continuing into adult political roles.

Future of Comhairle at the Dublin Regional

At the Dublin event, the young people were passionate about seeing Comhairle na nÓg evolve into a more prominent, influential, and inclusive force over the next 5, 10, and 20 years. With five tables of discussions, the group explored diverse ideas for how Comhairle could expand its role in society, empower youth, and strengthen connections at both local and international levels.

In 5 Years

Within five years, the young people at the Dublin Regional envision a Comhairle that is more connected, diverse, and impactful. They expressed a desire for more collaboration between Comhairlí across counties and regions, with a suggestion for yearly meetings that bring together all Comhairle groups from different provinces. Many advocated for increased visibility through social media campaigns, more school involvement, and regular interactions with county councils. They also emphasised the importance of diversity, with more representation of different nationalities, cultures, and abilities within Comhairle.

A recurring theme was the need for Comhairle na nÓg to have a physical presence, such as a headquarters in Dublin, and safe spaces where members could meet regularly. They also suggested expanding membership, hosting bigger projects like national discussions, festivals, and even protests to make a significant impact on social and political issues. Another focus was on mental health services for youth and increasing collaboration with schools to get more young people involved and aware of Comhairle's work.

Future of Comhairle at the Dublin Regional (Continued)

In 10 Years

In 10 years, the young people envisioned an even larger role for Comhairle na nÓg in both national and international politics. They hope to see Comhairle members speaking at EU and UN events, meeting world leaders, and taking part in significant political decisions. They suggested more interaction with local authorities and government bodies, including regular invitations to meet with decision-makers, trialling new technologies before they are used in government, and playing an advisory role on new policies.

They also advocated for more involvement with public media, such as regular coverage on the news, to raise awareness of Comhairle's work. The goal is to make Comhairle a household name, recognized by both youth and adults. More frequent and accessible meetings, including online options, were suggested to make Comhairle more inclusive, especially for young people in larger counties or rural areas who might have trouble attending in person.

In 20 Years

Looking 20 years into the future, the young people of Dublin see Comhairle na nÓg becoming a leading youth council not just in Ireland but on the global stage. They envision Comhairle having a direct influence on government decisions, with youth representatives working closely with ministers and decision-makers. Some even suggested forming a youth branch of the government and electing shadow ministers from Comhairle to represent young people's interests in key areas like education, transport, and mental health. International partnerships were a key focus, with suggestions for stronger ties between youth councils worldwide, including the EU, UK, and beyond.

They also hoped that Comhairle could be a driving force in reforming key systems such as education and transport, incorporating new technologies like AI to address emerging challenges. The young people aspire to see Comhairle as an organisation with real decision-making power, shaping the future of Ireland and serving as a model for youth engagement worldwide.



Similarities Across Sligo, Limerick and Dublin

Across all three groups, the young people shared common aspirations for Comhairle na nÓg's future. A key similarity was the emphasis on increased **visibility and public awareness of Comhairle**, both locally and nationally. Each group highlighted the need for more advertising, social media presence, and public engagement to raise the profile of Comhairle na nÓg, ensuring that more young people, schools, and communities are aware of its purpose and opportunities. Furthermore, the participants in all three regions stressed **the importance of better connections with decision-makers**.

They want **more structured involvement with local councils, government officials, and national bodies** like Dáil na nÓg, emphasising the need for youth voices to be taken seriously and consulted regularly. Another commonality was a strong **focus on inclusivity, with all groups calling for more diverse membership**, ensuring young people from different backgrounds, abilities, and regions have access to Comhairle's resources and are represented in its decision-making processes.



Differences between Sligo, Limerick and Dublin

While the groups shared many overarching goals, the differences in their visions reflect the specific needs and challenges of their regions. Sligo, being a more rural area, placed strong emphasis on improving transportation access and support for rural Comhairlí, including better connections to other Comhairlí and national events. Their focus on youth mental health services and education suggests a need for more localised support systems that cater to smaller, often geographically isolated communities.

In contrast, Limerick's participants were more focused on political education and youth empowerment, reflecting a strong desire to increase young people's political literacy and their ability to engage with political systems at both the local and national levels. The discussions also frequently mentioned social justice issues, with participants showing a deep interest in creating meaningful change through Comhairle, including organising protests and tackling environmental awareness.

The Dublin group, being in the capital, envisioned Comhairle as playing a much more prominent role in national and international politics. Their emphasis on global partnerships, international events, and the potential for Comhairle members to engage with EU and UN leaders reflects the larger scale of ambition found in urban centres. Additionally, Dublin participants pushed for Comhairle HQs and dedicated buildings, suggesting that the size and complexity of the city calls for more structured, permanent facilities to support their work.

Anonymised Satisfaction Survey

As part of the 5 year development plan, the National Participation Office were tasked with creating an anonymised survey for Comhairle members, as stated in the action 2.3.4 "Run an annual anonymised survey of existing Comhairle members to obtain member feedback on their satisfaction with CNN, assess their commitment levels and identify any issues they may have that could potentially lead to early departures." The contents of this survey were created and reviewed by the National Executive and then by the participants of the Regional Networking events in Sligo, Limerick and Dublin.

Feedback from the groups stated that the survey should find a balance between getting all the information that is required but keep it short as young people don't like filling out long surveys. The members also suggested concrete amendments to the survey questions to make it clearer, and those changes were made accordingly.

The survey asks questions in line with the Lundy Model of Youth Participation, asking young people about their challenges and barriers to attending meetings, having their voices heard, having the opportunity to give their informed decision, knowing where their work goes and to whom it will be delivered.



Evaluations and Feedback

At the end of the meetings, the delegates were asked to give feedback about the Networking Event day via an anonymous online evaluation survey. The summary of the answers show that most of the participants felt that could voice their opinions, and the open question about the day highlighted new connections made at the event.

- **91.1% of the participants stated that they felt comfortable and safe giving their opinions (gave 4 or 5 stars)**
- **86.1% felt that they had their chance to give their opinions. (Gave 4 or 5 stars)**
- **91.1% felt supported in giving their informed opinion. (Gave 4 or 5 stars)**
- **83.5% felt that they had enough time to give their opinions in a way that they chose. (Gave 4 or 5 stars)**
- **74.7% stated they know who wants their opinions and why they want them. (Gave 4 or 5 stars)**
- **5% strongly feel that their opinions will not be taken seriously. (Gave 1 or 2 stars)**

My favourite thing about today was:

- *"Meeting new people and learning about how other Comhairlí are organised"*
- *"Getting to share our ideas"*
- *"World café mat, Comhairle's future"*
- *"Facilitators and people"*
- *"There was a good balance of downtime and serious discussion"*



Comhairle na nÓg

Your Local
Youth Council



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

