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Rural Youth Assembly Summary Report 2024

Department of Rural and Community Development

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Section 1: Introduction	6
Section 2: Assembly Discussion Findings	8
Section 3: Recommendations	25
Section 4: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence	27
Appendix 1: National Rural Youth Assembly 2023 Recommendations	33
Appendix 2: Preparation Session Agenda	34
Appendix 3: National Rural Youth Assembly 2024 Agenda	35
Appendix 4: Information about Assembly Delegates	36
Appendix 5: Assembly Methodology	38

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National Rural Youth Assembly 2024 –
'Learning in rural Ireland', and 'Living and working in rural Ireland'

Executive Summary

The National Rural Youth Assembly took place on the 27th of November 2024 in Miesian Plaza in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in Dublin. The National Rural Youth Assembly is a collaboration between the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

In total, 49 delegates aged 12 – 24 years attended the National Rural Youth Assembly. Of these, 25 delegates were sitting delegates and 24 were guest delegates. Delegates came from 20 different counties around Ireland and were nominated by 13 different Comhairle na nÓg (child and youth councils) and 25 youth and community organisations.

The main topics for the 2024 Assembly were *'Learning in rural Ireland'*, *'Living and working in rural Ireland'* and *'Wildcard'*, which gave delegates the opportunity to discuss any other issues on the day. The DRCD was also interested to hear about the experiences of those living on islands, in remote rural areas and from Gaeltacht areas. The main methodologies used at the Assembly to discuss these topics were Round the Houses, Moving Debate, Individual Lifelines, World Café and Priority voting.

Recommendations

The recommendations agreed by delegates at the National Rural Youth Assembly are set out below.



National Rural Youth Assembly 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Programme for Government committed to the establishment of a Youth Assembly for rural young people. In addition the Department of Rural and Community Development made a commitment in Our Rural Future; Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 to establish a Rural Youth Assembly to allow young people living in rural Ireland to make an on-going contribution to issues that impact on them and their future.

The National Rural Youth Assembly took place on the 27th of November 2024. 49 delegates aged 12-24 from across Ireland attended, representing Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Councils), youth and community organisations and other interested organisations. The delegates attended a preparation session in advance of the Assembly and then took part in a day of discussion. They have produced twelve key recommendations for the Government to consider. These are outlined below:



Living and Working in Rural Ireland

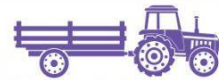
Companies/Clubs in rural areas should take on an **initiative** for younger people to be able to **train and work** with them, so they can **earn money**, without having to move from their communities.



There needs to be **dedicated spaces** for teenagers with ongoing **funding support**. Currently youth spaces become spaces for younger children and teenagers are **pushed out** of those spaces as a result.



Allocate more **funding** towards the **healthcare sector** to facilitate the increased provision of ambulances, emergency services, community-based emergency care centres and training courses in **first aid and AEDs**.



The government should create **more support** and **incentives** for **young farmers** who have inherited a farm or those who want to go into the **agriculture sector** so that farms aren't left derelict when aging farming communities can no longer work.



Learning in Rural Ireland

Increase funding for rural schools to expand the range of subjects offered to students. Additionally, provide **hybrid classes** and **online classes** to allow people in rural areas to come together and support homeschooled people.



Increase funding for **education** for people with **disabilities** who need **special support** and are unable to attend school due to their disability.



Additional support should continue in **education** after secondary school.



Mental health

issues in schools: **Mandatory courses** for teachers to complete during college and bi-annually which **discusses the signs** of struggling with mental health in **young people** and the support they can provide to students or places to direct them.



Politics and Society

should be **mandatory** as a class to all students around the country as not enough young people understand what is going on during **elections**. It should also be mandatory to have political education in workplaces to incentivise **rural voters**.



Wild Card

Move to **lower prices** of **period products** and aim to ensure that they become **free** and **accessible** in all public spaces, especially schools.

Provide **education** about periods to **reduce stigma** around **women's health** in rural areas.



Increase funding into **healthcare** to support **regional centres** and **local services**; that provide supports like physiotherapy, GP appointments etc. as well as making **health management** accessible to rural communities.



Appoint a **community liaison**

person for **contact** between youth in rural areas and government departments to open channels of communication between the general population of **young people** away from just those with access to membership of a youth group or council. This would allow **young people** to have **influence** in rural policy and decision-making without **selectivism** of youth groups.



Development of **docklands** and piers for those who live on **islands** and need **access** to the mainland in all weather conditions.



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Delegates and representatives from the DRCD and the DCEDIY at the National Rural Youth Assembly at Miesian Plaza, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in Dublin.

Section 1: Introduction

Background information

The National Rural Youth Assembly took place on the 27th of November 2024 in Miesian Plaza, in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in Dublin. The National Rural Youth Assembly is a collaboration between the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

Preparation session

A preparation session was held online on the 9th of November 2024. A total of 27 delegates attended the preparation session as well as 11 adult attendees. Of the 27 delegates, 21 were young people from rural areas and six were from urban areas. Delegates were from 14 counties across Ireland, seven different Comhairle na nÓg (child and youth councils) and 16 youth and community organisations.

A number of guest speakers provided information to young people at the preparation sessions including, Alannah Wrynn, a 19-year-old climate activist from Cork who is currently serving as Concern Worldwide's Youth Climate Ambassador; Stephen Carolan, the National Hub Network Manager at the Western Development Commission; and Róisín Lennon, CEO of Offaly Local Development Company.

About the delegates

A total of 49 delegates aged 12 – 24 years attended the National Rural Youth Assembly on the 27th of November 2024. Of these, 25 (51%) were sitting delegates and 24 (49%) were guest delegates. In terms of gender, 28 (57.2%) delegates identified as female, 17 (34.7%) as male, (2%) one as other and 3 (6.1%) preferred not to state their gender. See Appendix 4 for more details on what counties, Comhairlí na nÓg and youth and community organisations delegates represented.

Assembly Topics

The main topics of the 2024 National Rural Youth Assembly were:

- **Learning in rural Ireland** - This included discussions about early years education, primary school, secondary school, college, trades, courses and apprenticeships.

- **Living and working in rural Ireland** - What are the benefits and challenges of living and working in rural Ireland and what are the benefits for young people? This included discussions around day-to-day life, health, hobbies, well-being, services etc. The DRCD was also interested to hear about the experiences of those living on islands, in remote rural areas and from Gaeltacht areas.
- **Wildcard** – There was also space for delegates to raise any other issues they would like on the day.

Transport

Transport has been a focus of discussion at many Assemblies and consultations, particularly at the Rural Youth Assembly. For the first time a dedicated Transport Assembly will take place in 2025. This has resulted directly from engaging with young people and shows the value of their voice and that Government is listening. The young people were provided the opportunity to share their thoughts on transport using whiteboards provided at the Rural Youth Assembly. These will be shared with the Department of Transport during discussions about identifying a theme for the Transport Assembly.

Assembly methodology

Information on the methodologies used at the National Rural Youth Assembly can be found in Appendix 5.



Section 2: Assembly Discussion Findings

Introduction

This section of the report details the main findings arising from delegates' discussions during the National Rural Youth Assembly. In terms of how the Assembly topics were selected, firstly the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) identified a list of potential topics and issues. The Assembly delegates voted on their top issue and the DRCD then selected an issue from the list. The Wild card was a joint decision to ensure people had space to bring up issues they brought on the day.

Issues affecting young people in rural Ireland

The most common issues affecting young people in rural Ireland identified by delegates through the 'Round the Houses' exercise included:

- **Lack of youth facilities and spaces** e.g., youth centres, community spaces and places to hang out.
- **Lack of youth services and activities** e.g., access to youth work in rural areas, lack of non-sporting activities for young people i.e., other than GAA.
- **Lack of sports facilities** e.g., swimming pools, leisure centres, tennis courts.
- **Broadband** e.g., poor quality broadband which affects young people's education, employment and connectivity.
- **Transport** e.g., lack of reliable/affordable public transport and school buses, having to rely on car usage in rural areas.
- **Education** e.g., rural schools closing due to small numbers/emigration, poor facilities and resources in schools i.e., libraries, lack of funding for rural schools/Gaelcolaistí, lack of subject choices in rural schools i.e., new Leaving Cert curriculum.
- **Healthcare** e.g., lack of access to healthcare in rural areas i.e., GPs, cost of healthcare, travelling long distances to access healthcare, long waiting lists, missed diagnosis, busy A&Es in hospitals.

- **Lack of job opportunities** e.g., having to travel long distances for employment, lack of variety of jobs, exploitation of underage workers i.e., underpaid and working long hours, lack of third level education to access job opportunities.
- **Young people not having a voice** e.g., young people's voices not being heard in rural areas.
- **Infrastructure issues** e.g., lack of street lights, lack of traffic lights, lack of footpaths which affects safety in rural areas, lack of places to exercise i.e., drive to go for a walk, lack of shops.
- **Housing** e.g., lack of access to affordable housing in rural areas, holiday homes lying idle and derelict houses.
- **Disconnection between rural youth and politicians** e.g., politicians not consulting with young people which means what is being implemented in rural areas is not what is needed.
- **Lack of opportunities** e.g., lack of funding for cultural activities rural areas.
- **Lack of mental health supports** e.g.; lack of mental health supports for young people in rural areas and young people in isolated areas being at risk of mental health issues.
- **Disability issues** e.g., lack of access to disability services in rural areas i.e., for people who are neurodivergent.
- **Irish language issues** e.g., lack of Irish language use in rural areas.
- **Equality issues** e.g., traditional mindsets, stereotyping in rural areas.

The following quotes are from delegates in relation to some of these key issues affecting young people living in rural areas:

- *“Lack of job opportunities, too far, not able to get to them.”*
- *“Rural emigration is closing down local primary schools.”*
- *“Holiday homes – should be rented and not owned to avoid wastage”*

- *“Lack of safety e.g. street lights, traffic lights and poor pavements, accessibility. No bus shelters, no 24 shops.”*
- *“Hospitals in rural areas serve too big communities and so are overworked. Waiting lists are long and A and E is always packed.”*
- *“Mental health supports are lacking in areas especially where there is taboo, isolated areas particularly at risk.”*
- *“Lack of funding for cultural activities.”*

Challenges for young people living in rural areas

All delegates completed an individual lifeline called ‘*Lifeline in Rural Ireland*’, which asked them to identify ‘*Challenges where you live*’ as well as ‘*Ideas, solutions and recommendations*’. The most commonly identified challenges for young people living in rural areas are outlined in table 2 below, from the most to the least frequently mentioned.

Table 1: Challenges for young people living in rural areas

Challenges	No. of mentions	%
Transport	32	65.3%
Education	28	57.1%
Lack of activities	25	51%
Lack of youth facilities	24	49%
Healthcare	21	42.9%
Employment	19	38.8%
3 rd level education	13	26.5%
Mental health	9	18.4%
Isolation/socialising	9	18.4%
Childcare/early years	9	18.4%
Housing	8	16.3%
Discrimination/racism	7	14.3%
Lack of non-sporting activities	6	12.2%
Infrastructure	6	12.2%
Broadband	5	10.2%

Transport

Transport was the most commonly mentioned challenge for young people living in rural areas. The key challenges identified by delegates related to transport in rural areas were lack of reliable public transport, the cost of transport, having to rely on cars which impacts on the environment, lack of secondary school buses, long driving test and NCT waiting times and lack of transport which impacts on young people's social lives. Ideas, solutions and recommendations for transport in rural areas included increasing and improving public transport e.g., more Local Links, reduced or free fares, more secondary school buses, more grants for electric cars, more bus shelters, better information on public transport and building underground transport.

- *“Improve rural public transport - more buses, more regular, stop train being late.”*

Education

The main challenges highlighted by delegates, related to education in rural areas, were primary schools with small numbers which can result in a lack of social interaction for pupils, primary schools closing due to low numbers, schools being long distances away, no school buses, lack of resources and facilities, lack of supports e.g., for learning disabilities, supports for transition between primary and secondary school, lack of subject choice in secondary schools, poor teaching of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), bullying in schools, lack of religious diversity in schools and lack of student voice. Ideas, solutions and recommendations for education included more funding for rural schools, incentives to recruit more teachers, national programmes for issues such as the transition between primary and secondary school/bullying, better trained SPHE and RSE teachers, better healthy eating and anti-bullying policies and listening to student voices more in schools.

- *“More funding for rural schools and more investment to make educational facilities/resources more available in rural Ireland.”*

Lack of activities

The key challenges highlighted by delegates included lack of access to activities for young people in rural areas, having to travel long distance to take part in activities, lack of free or affordable activities, lack of non-sporting activities and lack of activities for girls e.g., sports teams. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included more funding for youth friendly activities in rural areas e.g., youth work, sports teams, increased funding for youth work, increase pay for

youth workers, more non-sporting activities e.g., drama, Scouts, more activities for girls and more after school clubs.

- *“Only hobbies/sports available to me is football, only a boys team too ☹️”*

Lack of youth facilities

The main challenges identified by delegates included lack of youth facilities in rural areas, lack of facilities and safe spaces for young people to hang out, lack of sporting and non-sporting facilities and lack of playgrounds and parks. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included more funding for youth work facilities, facilities and spaces for young people to hang out e.g., community centres/hubs, more non-sporting and sporting facilities e.g., pitches, gyms and outdoor gyms, playgrounds for teenagers and more accessible youth facilities.

- *“Not enough youth facilities (besides a hall) for the youth of the area to hang out – leads to isolation, turning to fields as a hang-out spot.”*

Healthcare

Challenges highlighted by delegates in relation to healthcare included lack of access to healthcare in rural areas e.g., GPs, nurses, physiotherapists, maternity services, lack of community healthcare facilities, having to travel long distances to access healthcare and hospitals, long waiting lists, lack of healthcare workers in rural areas and challenges for transgender people accessing healthcare. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included more funding for healthcare in rural areas, more GP practices, healthcare workers, community and outreach healthcare services, more funding for regional hospitals, more investment in the National Ambulance Service, quicker ambulance responses times for rural areas, reducing hospital waiting lists, better maternity services, helicopter emergency services for the islands and better healthcare for transgender people.

- *“Only one healthcare centre that is always full with long waiting periods, the closest one after is 45 minutes away.”*

Employment

The key challenges identified by delegates in terms of employment included lack of job opportunities in rural areas with most jobs centred in bigger cities, having to travel long distances or move for employment, unpaid internships and difficulties in accessing work experience. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included creating more job opportunities in rural areas

particularly for young people and graduates, better working from home policies, more online work, grants for start-up businesses and fully paid internships.

- *“Difficult to find first job as not a lot of opportunities especially with lack of experience.”*

Third level education

Challenges related to third level education included lack of access to third level education in rural areas, having to travel long distances to attend third level education, some rural students having to commute to third level education, lack of student accommodation, high cost of education and lack of supports for students. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included more accessible third level education and courses, more availability of student accommodation, more affordable student accommodation, more supports for students e.g., mental health supports and no interest loans/grants for students.

- *“College students are forced to commute a lot of the time.”*

Mental health

The key challenges highlighted by delegates related to mental health included lack of access to mental health supports for young people in rural areas and stigma related to mental health issues. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included more funding and resources for mental health services in rural areas and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), incentives for recruiting more mental health sector workers, mental health and disability services and organisations working together, reduce stigma on mental health through education in schools and provide mental health supports in schools e.g., counselling services and teacher training.

- *“School didn’t help much when I started suffering with my mental health...promote services to deal with this topic and train teachers to help.”*

Isolation

Isolation was identified as a challenge for some delegates. Delegates felt isolation and loneliness was an issue for many young people in rural areas due to lack of access to activities and facilities, lack of socialising opportunities and lack of public transport. Ideas, solutions and

recommendations included more opportunities for young people to access youth activities and services e.g., youth clubs.

- *“Young people can be isolated and lonely.”*

Childcare

Childcare was highlighted as a challenge in rural areas including access to childcare and early education services/creches/babysitting etc., lack of affordable childcare which can impact on women’s employment and childcare for school-aged children.

Ideas, solutions and recommendations included more funding for creches, more childcare places, more affordable childcare, creating more childcare jobs, better pay for childcare workers and mobile childcare solutions.

- *“Reduced costs for parents/guardians in regard to childcare/early schooling. More places made available in creches and schools – more funding for rural childcare/early schooling facilities.”*

Housing

Housing was identified as a challenge in terms of a lack of housing in rural areas, lack of affordable housing and access to mortgages. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included building more housing in rural areas, more affordable housing and cost rental housing i.e., more affordable long-term rented accommodation.

- *“Make housing more accessible.”*

Discrimination/racism

Discrimination and racism were highlighted as challenges in rural areas by some delegates, including discrimination faced by LGBTI+ people and people with disabilities. Some young people felt living in a rural area can be difficult for people who are different and racist and misogynistic ideas can often be normalised. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included better anti-discrimination and equality laws.

- *“No tolerance for diversity – queer, alt, race, disability.”*

Infrastructure

Key challenges identified by delegates in relation to infrastructure in rural areas included poor quality roads, lack of footpaths, street lighting and zebra crossings, issues related to flooding

and lack of infrastructure on islands such as piers. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included repairing poor quality roads, more funding for infrastructure in rural areas, flooding protection schemes, better all-weather piers for islands and building more footpaths.

- *“Infrastructure challenges – roads in rural area are often narrow, bumpy and occasionally prone to flooding.”*

Broadband

Broadband was identified as a challenge for people living in rural areas. Delegates spoke about a lack of good quality, fast broadband in rural areas which can affect people’s education and work. Ideas, solutions and recommendations included improving and investing in rural broadband, ensuring every rural house has broadband and better connectivity.

- *“Lack of good Wi-fi causing difficulty with education and work.”*

World Café Discussion Findings

The key issues as well as changes and recommendations related to each theme discussed in the World Café exercise are set out in the tables below according to priority voting by delegates, from the most to the least prioritised:

- Theme 1: Living and Working in Rural Ireland
- Theme 2: Learning in Rural Ireland
- Theme 3: Wildcard table

Theme 1: Living and Working in Rural Ireland		
Issue	Change	Recommendations
Mental health		<p>-Government really needs to put aside more money for mental health services. (7)</p> <p>-More funding to CAMHS to help reduce waiting list times. Make sure services are spread throughout the country in a more even manner. (5)</p> <p>-More funding for mental health services. (3)</p>
Further education / job opportunities		<p>-Provide more incentives for further education creating more job opportunities and making getting jobs easier. (5)</p>

		<p>-Companies should be incentivised by the Irish government to have bases in rural areas i.e. Apple in Cork. (5)</p> <p>-Have more job opportunities in rural Ireland, incentivise big companies to locate in rural Ireland sustainability- instead of mostly quarries. (1)</p>
Lack of shops / restaurants in rural areas - hard for young people to get job with no qualifications	Improve what's in rural areas, or make it more known to young people jobs that are available to them.	<p>-Companies/clubs in rural areas to take on an initiative for younger people to train and work with them, so they can receive money without having to move. (8)</p> <p>- Jobs online for younger people or build/improve shops etc. to get money.</p>
Youth spaces		-Youth spaces for teens need to be advertised as teen spaces are always populated with children without consequences, while when teens go into playgrounds we get into trouble. (8)
Healthcare	Increase nurses, doctors, more accessible. Hospitals, ambulances two hour wait.	<p>-More hospitals, ambulances, funding for emergency services, training for first aid and Accident and Emergency Departments (AEDs) (8)</p> <p>-More minor injuries clinics</p>
Young farmers	Add grants that young farmers can avail of so that they can better their ability to take care of their farm.	<p>-Create funding for young farmers to avail of to give them a better ability to take care of their affairs and to give the incentive to inherit the family farm so that farms don't lie derelict when aging farming community dies/can no longer work. (8)</p> <p>-Solar panel grants.</p>
Commuting to work / transport	Long drives to work, infrequent public transport – more frequent.	<p>-Build remote work hubs, provide more remote jobs in remote areas. (3)</p> <p>-More frequent public transport from rural - urban areas. (2)</p> <p>-Subsidies for community transport and car-sharing schemes. (1)</p> <p>Funding needs to be given to county councils to make roads safer. (1)</p>

Lack of safe spaces	Barriers in schools when socialising, results in young people being isolated as they are unable to communicate while living in rural Ireland. (4)	-Expand transport and the Connecting Ireland initiatives. (2) -Spaces need to be expanded from parks to playgrounds/youth cafes. Youth clubs need more funding. Separate spaces from children and young people.
Access to specific job types sometimes unavailable	Change focus areas for specific job types to wider areas/online working.	-We need more opportunity to work online/work from home. (3) -Lack of workplaces means job types could be less populated. (1) -Promote work of jobs such as writers (jobs that could easily be done at home).
Youth activities / facilities	More workshops for kids to freely take part in no matter in youth group or not.	- Consult with the youth in what they want. (2) -Aim bring more workshops for rural kids who are not included in younger youth projects. -Provide areas for teenagers to hang out, Leisure centres, playground, track for teens only.
Tourism		-Tourism development (2)
Broadband access for those working at home	More networking hubs and more funding for NBI and updating homes for fibre broadband.	-Grants for those who upgrade/update homes to facilitate fibre connections (1)
Subject choice in rural schools	Open up options to rural schools with subjects and the teachers that need training in Irish also so that students do have the options that could shape the future.	-Better incentives for second-level teachers to live and work in rural areas (1) - An initiative to change how subjects are split up and if they're missing from certain school programmes or not.

Theme 2: Learning in Rural Ireland

Issue	Change	Recommendations
Subject choices in rural schools	<p>We need more access to a variety of new/different subjects to all rural schools e.g., Japanese, Politics and Society.</p> <p>Change the system to make less popular subjects available to all and more funding for schools to provide these subjects than can be available in urban schools not rural schools.</p>	<p>-We need more funding for schools to get access to new subjects like mentioned and to allocate teachers to provide such subjects. (14)</p> <p>-Increase funding for schools and more diverse policies on CAO applications for those who want to go into degrees but couldn't do those subjects. (3)</p> <p>- Places in colleges for teachers in less taught subjects so as to increase the amount of teachers in the subjects. (1)</p>
Mental health		<p>-More education on mental health for teachers to help students. Courses on mental and physical health. (6)</p> <p>-Incentives for people to go into mental health professions, add a mental health teaching course to college's plethora of courses. (5)</p> <p>- Educate teachers more on mental health and for them to be more understanding and see things from the student's perspective. (1)</p>
Education funding	<p>More advertisement for cheaper housing = more people in rural areas, bigger classes, development of social skills.</p>	<p>-Give equal funding and support to schools and educational facilities – stop forcing private and city schools over rural. (3)</p> <p>-Abolish tuition fees. (3)</p> <p>-Rural students are at a disadvantage compared to city schools. (2)</p> <p>-Abolish private schools' state funding. (2)</p>

		<p>-Support for rural schools - increase funding, clustered resources, flexible staffing. (1)</p> <p>-Digital infrastructure and access. (1)</p>
Special education and disability support	<p>More often and current giving assistance to families- stable and consistent.</p> <p>We need more access to technology etc. for physical disabilities. Great stigma around physical disabilities.</p>	<p>-More staff hired to service high demand areas for special education needs. (6)</p> <p>-More access to technology to help for people with disabilities especially physical need to be recognised. (5)</p> <p>-Give more funding and support to community groups which give support to families with children with additional needs.</p>
Leaving Cert reform		<p>-More continuous assessment in Leaving cert rather than all of it being an exam. (6)</p> <p>- Reform the Leaving Cert! More project based subjects! Modules/projects – you are already choosing your subjects that decide which college/career you're going to do. (1)</p>
Political education		-Mandatory political education to incentivise rural voters. (4)
Technology in schools		-More tech based education in like robotics and coding. (2)
Technology education for older people		-Government giving grants and running programmes which are accessible to help elderly people in isolated areas learn to use technology. (2)
2 nd level education	<p>Provide extra opportunities for schools in rural areas. Ensure there is the same subjects, extra curricular events for everyone – don't just focus on GAA. (1)</p>	<p>-Encourage singing, music, art, dancing etc.</p> <p>-Government funded transport etc. so people can get to events in Dublin. Hold more events outside of Leinster, outside of Dublin. (1)</p> <p>-Make sure students who want to do subjects unavailable to them, there is a way that they can still get to school, whether its online or not. (1)</p>

Transition Year (TY)		-Providing resouces so all students get a chance to do TY in schools and to do TY is expensive. (1)
Diversity	Teach kids about different people i.e. LGBTQ+	More education about other cultures and identities teach them young so they grow up accepting. (1)

Theme 3: Wildcard

Issue	Change	Recommendations
Access to healthcare	<p>Access to GP appointments, emergency services.</p> <p>Waiting lists shortened and non-emergency services made more accessible.</p> <p>24 hour pharmacies and medical centres.</p> <p>Emergency services – first responders, fire etc. can take long amounts of time to reach emergencies on rural areas/country roads. Ambulance can take over an hour to get to nearest hospital in Cork. (2)</p>	<p>-Increased funding into healthcare and to support regional centres and services both emergency and non and make them more accessible (13)</p> <p>-Pay health care workers more so they stay in Ireland – more staff, more hospitals, less pressure (2)</p> <p>-Build more emergency service stations, more service vehicles in rural areas. Have more medics in rural areas to respond before main ambulance crew in certain applicable situations.</p> <p>- Better helipad.</p>
Access to feminine products	<p>General cultural stigma around periods.</p> <p>Have free products in cubicles of school bathrooms. (1)</p> <p>Lower prices – more awareness for women’s physical health.</p>	<p>-More talks in schools etc., make the conversation about women’s health normal. (8)</p> <p>-Government make it mandatory for schools to have periods products for free in individual cubicles in girls’ bathrooms. (6)</p> <p>-Government and citizen’s need to actively talk and engage about periods.</p> <p>-Aim to lower prices/make tampons, pads etc. free.</p>
Youth representation	More youth reps on representative public	-Lack of youth representation in rural policy making and decision making. (5)

	boards, school boards, youthwork.	<p>-Youth rep that can work with the Minister for Education/Children. (4)</p> <p>-Nothing about us without us. (1)</p> <p>-We (young people) should be able to elect the Minister for Education.</p> <p>-Require the government to have a youth rep on any public organisation board.</p> <p>-Youth versus teacher divide - work together- young people see what works and what doesn't, or bring the age down to under 16 for voting.</p>
Climate change	The transitions that are happening in some areas. Government not helping the local communities transition from nonenvironmentally friendly activity enough- this should change.	<p>- Have a more robust consultation process for rural/local communities when it comes to just transition activities. Make certain that every community benefits from changes. Have a programme showing how they will do this. Do not row back on climate action however. The solution should not be change nothing. It also should not be "blame farmers" or just stop cutting through and leave people no other option either (4)</p> <p>- Climate/sustainability (1)</p>
Youth friendly facilities/spaces/ activities	<p>Make more youth friendly places, even if its a small youth group per week, local county council.</p> <p>Make sure there is an initiative to promote more healthy youth hang out spots. This can combat underage drinking in fields etc.</p>	<p>-Franchise for an organisation that is include in youth work e.g., Insync or government grant. (4)</p> <p>-Youth should participate in at least extra afterschool activity, could be in sports or reading club anything to help them get to know and connect with people that like the same things as or particate in projects or volunteering activities instead of just sitting at home doing nothing at all after school or in the weekend (2)</p> <p>-Funding to start up and continuation of these facilites in the area and progress report on how they're working</p>

Housing	<p>Lack of housing for younger generation/staying at home with their parents.</p> <p>Vacant properties/ dereliction brings down property value. (1)</p>	<p>-Build more houses/reduce the costs of housing. People can't afford to pay for housing if they aren't being paid properly. (3)</p> <p>- Student accommodation, abolish homelessness. (1)</p> <p>-100% redress for all those affected by Mica! (1)</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Better pier - easy access during bad weather so islands can still get transportation to the mainland.</p> <p>Dangerous (roads) for disabled people.</p>	<p>-Build a bigger more sturdy pier that can be used in all/most weather situations. (5)</p> <p>State road paving company. (1)</p>
Sports facilities/ activities	<p>An introduction to more sports in areas is also a good integration and past time to healthy and safe places for youth.</p>	<p>-Funding for sport in the area to promote well being/health and sporting diversity (4)</p> <p>-More access for a variety/different types of sports in rural towns (1)</p> <p>-More girls sports teams please!!! Girls are DONE with playing on lads teams. We need our own teams!</p>
Communication between government and young people		<p>-Community liaison for contact between youth in rural areas and government departments to open channels of communication between the general population young people away from just those with access to membership of a youth group or council. (5)</p>
Irish language	<p>Gaeilge isn't really focused on in smaller rural communities. We need a higher level of Irish as a country as it is our language! (4)</p>	<p>-I think the government should implement a required level of teaching in Irish throughout primary and secondary.</p>

Disability		- Lack of supports and tests for neurodivergent young people (4)
Diversity/racism	Fund more diverse services and safe places of worship.	-Lack of spaces for diversity and religion e.g. Mosques. (1) -Educate people about different cultures and create safe spaces. Teach that racism shouldn't be tolerated. -Hold culture days in schools.
Direct Provision Centres	Change the narrative that rural areas are "traditional – encourage positive discussions within rural communities with local politicians and businesses.	-Ensure the safety of refugees in Direct Provision- positive integration of refugees in rural areas.

Section 3: Recommendations

Recommendations from the National Rural Youth Assembly 2024

The final recommendations agreed by young people at the National Rural Youth Assembly are set out below.

Living and Working in Rural Ireland

- Companies/clubs in rural areas should take on an initiative for younger people to be able to train and work with them, so they can earn money, without having to move from their communities.
- There needs to be dedicated spaces for teenagers with ongoing funding support. Currently youth spaces become spaces for younger children and teenagers are pushed out of those spaces as a result.
- Allocate more funding towards the healthcare sector to facilitate the increased provision of ambulances, emergency services, community-based emergency care centres and training courses in first aid and Accident and Emergency Departments (AEDs).
- The government should create more support and incentives for young farmers who have inherited a farm or those who want to go into the agriculture sector so that farms aren't left derelict when aging farming communities can no longer work.

Learning in Rural Ireland

- Increase funding for rural schools to expand the range of subjects offered to students. Additionally, provide hybrid classes and online classes to allow people in rural areas to come together and support home-schooled people.
- Increase funding for education for people with disabilities who need special support and are unable to attend school due to their disability. Additional support should continue in education after secondary school.
- Mental health issues in schools: Mandatory courses for teachers to complete during college and bi-annually which discusses the signs of struggling with mental health in young people and the support they can provide to students or places to direct them.
- Politics and Society should be mandatory as a class to all students around the country as not enough young people understand what is going on during elections. It should also be mandatory to have political education in workplaces to incentivise rural voters.

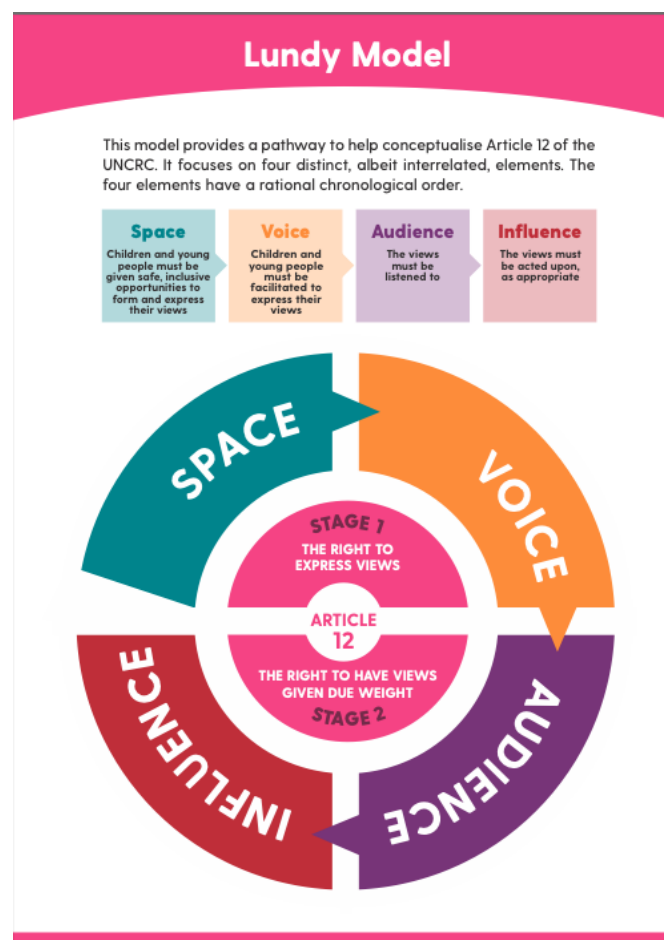
Wild Card

- Move to lower prices of period products and aim to ensure that they become free and accessible in all public spaces, especially schools. Provide education about periods to reduce stigma around women's health in rural areas.
- Increase funding into healthcare to support regional centres and local services, that provide supports like physiotherapy, GP appointments etc., making health management accessible to rural communities.
- Create a community liaison person for contact between youth in rural areas and government departments to open channels of communication between the general population of young people away from just those with access to membership of a youth group or council. This would allow young people to have influence in rural policy and decision-making without selectivism of youth groups.
- Development of docklands and piers for those who live on islands and need access to the mainland in all weather conditions.

Section 4: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence

The National Youth Assembly of Ireland is convened according to a rights-based, best practice in child and youth participation, as set out in the National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making¹. This involves the principle of participation with purpose, so that the views of children and young people are listened to, taken seriously and given due weight by decision-makers with the intention that these views will influence an outcome in relation to policymaking.

It also conforms to the nine key principles of participation which require that processes to include the views of children and young people are transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child friendly, inclusive, supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk, and accountable. The key approach adopts the Lundy Model (see below), which conceptualises Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in terms of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence.



¹ <https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/>

Space

Space: Children and young people must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views

Space means young people should feel listened to from the start, feel comfortable giving their opinions, feel safe giving their opinions and a lot of different voices should be included.

In relation to being listened to from the start, the National Rural Youth Assembly originated from suggestions from young people who participated in consultations as part of the development of *Our Rural Future*, Ireland's Rural Development Policy for 2021-2025. The DRCD held two consultation events in 2019 to get the views of young people living in rural Ireland. The establishment of the Rural Youth Assembly became a key commitment in the policy.

A preparation session was held online on the 9th of November 2024 before the Assembly. A total of 27 delegates attended the preparation session. Of these, 21 were rural delegates and six were urban delegates. Delegates at the preparation session were from 24 counties across Ireland, seven different Comhairle na nÓg and 16 youth and community organisations. In terms of feeling comfortable, the preparation session evaluation shows 71.4% of young people strongly agreed with the statement *'I felt comfortable at the session'* and 28.6% agreed with the statement. At the Assembly, 56.3% strongly agreed with the statement *'I felt comfortable giving my opinions'*, 37.5% agreed with the statement and 6.3% were unsure. The following quote is from a delegate at the Assembly.

- *"The best thing about the Assembly was the chance given to young people all over Ireland to voice their concerns and actually be listened to."*

A chill out space was provided for young people at the Assembly venue. This was for delegates to take a break if they needed it. It was a quiet area in which an adult was present. Delegates were told they were free to wear ear defenders, dark glasses or anything else to feel comfortable. There were also fidget toys at each table for young people to use if they wished.

As regards the inclusion of many different voices in the Assembly, young people from 13 different Comhairle na nÓg and 25 youth and community organisations across the country were nominated to participate in the Assembly which ensured engagement and inclusion of a broad range of young people who are affected by issues related to living, working and studying in rural Ireland.

Voice

Voice: Children and young people must be facilitated to express their views

Voice means that young people should be given a chance to give their opinions, given enough information to help give their opinion, given support to have their voice heard, understand what is being discussed, be able to give opinions in different ways and have enough time to talk.

Young people were given a chance to give their opinions through the Youth Advisory Group (YAG), the preparation session, participation in the Assembly and the follow up session on finalising the wording of the recommendations.

Young people who attended the preparation session were provided with information through a number of guest speakers including:

- **Alannah Wrynn:** a 19 year old climate activist from Cork who is currently serving as Concern Worldwide's Youth Climate Ambassador. Alannah first became involved in climate activism through her participation in the Future Generations Climate Justice Project with YMCA Ireland and the National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI). She was also involved in the creation of Ireland's first ever Climate Justice Charter and served as a permanent delegate on the first National Youth Assembly of Ireland.
- **Stephen Carolan:** the National Hub Network Manager at the Western Development Commission. He was involved in the establishment of the Connected Hubs platform, an initiative funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development, that seeks to create a network of over 400 coworking and enterprise hubs across Ireland. He was also involved in the roll out of Ireland's National Broadband Plan.
- **Róisín Lennon:** CEO of Offaly Local Development Company, with 27 years' experience in community and rural development. She was previously responsible for Rural Development within the Company which included the LEADER Programme and roll out of community planning, clustering initiatives and the Just Transition Programme. She is also a Director of Green Offaly CLG.

The following quote is from a young person who attended the preparation session.

- *"I enjoyed listening to the guest speakers, they spoke about a lot of different topics that I wouldn't have had a thought about before the prep session."*

Delegates were also given information by representatives of the DRCD and the DCEDIY at the beginning of the Assembly, including a video message from Heather Humphreys, Minister for Rural and Community Development, and presentations from Carol Baxter (DCEDIY), Fintan O'Brien (DRCD) and Sinéad Quinn (DRCD).

The preparation session evaluation found that 85.7% strongly agreed with the statement *'I got the opportunity to ask questions'* and 14.3% were unsure. Overall, 93.8% of delegates at the Assembly strongly agreed with the statement *'I got the chance to give my opinions during the day on placemats, through speaking etc.'* and 6.3% agreed with the statement.

Delegates were given an information booklet about the Assembly beforehand with information in it about the topic, how the Assembly works, the venue, food, what to expect etc. This included the following information for young people:

- You are not expected to be an expert in the topic area, the DRCD is interested in your lived experience, what is happening for you right now.
- Make sure you put forward your thoughts and opinions. There will be people who are very confident at speaking at the Assembly and others who are not. That is ok! There will be places for you to write your ideas and suggestions, there will also be facilitators and note takers there that you can ask to record your opinions.
- There will be staff around at all times, if you have any problems ask any of them and they will do their best to help you.

Finally, delegates at the Assembly were given the opportunity to give their opinions in a variety of different ways. This included talking about issues (Round the House), writing/drawing about issues as an individual (Individual Lifeline), debating in a group (Moving Debate), writing and drawing about issues in a group (World Café) and voting on issues (Priority Sticky Dot Voting). See Appendix 5 for more information about the methodologies used in the Assembly.

Audience

Audience: The views must be listened to

Audience means young people should know who wants to hear their opinions, why they want the opinions of young people and being honest with young people about what will be done with their opinions.

The young people were told about who wants to hear their opinions and what will be done with their opinions in the preparation session, in an information booklet they received before the Assembly and by representatives of the DRCD and DCEDIY at the Assembly. Other representatives from the DRCD, DCEDIY and the National Participation Office were also in attendance at the Assembly to listen to the views of delegates.

Delegates were also provided with examples of recommendations from past year's Assemblies and what impacts and outcomes arose from previous recommendations.

In terms of audience, 62.5% of young people strongly agreed with the statement '*I know who wants our opinions and why they want them*' and 37.5% agreed with the statement.

According to the Assembly evaluation, 62.5% of delegates strongly agreed with the statement '*I know who wants our opinions and why they want them*' and 37.5% agreed with the statement.

Finally, the views of delegates as well as recommendations arising from the Assembly will be brought forward by officials from the DRCD and they will encourage other relevant government departments to consider these recommendations as part of the development process for the annual Our Rural Future work programme.

Influence

Influence: The views must be acted on, as appropriate


Influence means young people should know where their opinions are going next, how they will be told about what happens to their opinions and that their opinions will be taken seriously.

Overall, 28.6% of young people involved in the preparation session strongly agreed with the statement '*I think our opinions will be taken seriously*', 42.9% agreed with the statement, 14.3% were unsure and 14.3% disagreed with the statement. According to the Assembly evaluation, 37.5% strongly agreed with the statement '*I think our opinions will be taken seriously*', 37.5% agreed with the statement and 25% were unsure.

In terms of knowing where their opinions are going next, delegates were informed about the writing of a report on the Assembly findings, the YAG reviewing the report and the report being sent to the DRCD. Similarly, delegates were informed that the recommendations which were proposed at the Assembly were since discussed in an online evaluation session meeting which took place a few weeks after the Assembly to develop the final wording of the recommendations to be included in the report.

Other information and updates on outcomes or influence of the National Rural Youth Assembly will be provided to delegates through an annual newsletter, as well as through meetings, forums and invitations to other relevant events.

Finally, with regard to delegates opinions being taken seriously, delegates recommendations arising from the Assembly as well as other key issues raised by young people living in rural areas will be considered by the DRCD and other relevant government departments that will be developing the annual Work Programmes under the Our Rural Future policy. Representatives from the DRCD who spoke at the Assembly assured young people they will take their views seriously and they will encourage other government departments to consider and act on issues affecting young people living, working and learning in rural Ireland.




National Rural Youth Assembly 2023

Civic Participation of Young People in Rural Ireland

RECOMMENDATIONS


The Programme for Government committed to the establishment of a Youth Assembly for rural young people. In addition the Department of Rural and Community Development made a commitment in Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 to establish a Rural Youth Assembly to allow young people living in rural Ireland to make an on-going contribution to issues that impact on them and their future.

The National Rural Youth Assembly took place on the 3rd October 2023. 60 delegates aged 12-24 from across Ireland attended, representing Comhairle na nOg (Youth Councils), youth and community organisations and other interested organisations. The delegates attended a preparation session in advance of the Assembly and then took part in a day of discussion. They have produced nine key recommendations for the Government to consider. These are outlined below:




Political

Provide every rural area and island community with a **dedicated youth officer** who is employed and funded by the local county council.




Increase accessible opportunities for political engagement to young people.


This could be achieved through awareness raising campaigns and funding transport costs.



Lower the **voting age** to 16 especially in matters which affect young people in Ireland.




VOTE




Volunteering


Develop a **new policy or law** to allow younger people to participate in volunteering opportunities that are regulated and safeguarded.




In order to increase the opportunities for young people to volunteer, changes in **transport** should be made. **Expand the bus routes** to link rural areas to urban areas and expand the **free travel scheme** to all young people and provide subsidised fares across the population.




The Department of Education should include **volunteering** to be made part of the school curriculum at both Junior and Senior Cycle.






Community


Provide compulsory training courses in relation to supporting **LGBTI+ young people** for SPHE teachers. Establish and fund facilities for queer people in rural areas.




Create free, safe, accessible spaces for **young people** to interact and grow in a healthy and welcoming environment e.g. parks, centres, gyms, playgrounds, pitches. This should be included in **urban planning** within 18 months and going forward.



Increase funding for mental health services and supports for young people in the transition to adult services. Provide incentives for people to pursue a career in the mental health sector.





Riádas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Appendix 2: Preparation Session Agenda



National Rural Youth Assembly 2024 Preparation Session Agenda

Saturday 9th November 2024
10.30am-01.00pm on Zoom

10.20am	Delegates to log on to Zoom link
10.30am	Welcome and housekeeping from the Youth Advisory Group
10.40am	Amanda McLoughlin - Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) Gareth Makim - Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)
10.55am	Breakout Rooms - Delegates to meet each other
11.10am 12 mins each max	Guest Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aidan O'Hara• Roisin Lennon
11.40am	BREAK
11.50am	Guest Speakers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stephen Carolan• Alannah Wrynn
12.20pm	Panel Discussion - Questions from Delegates to guest speakers Hosted by Youth Advisory Group Members
12.40pm	Breakout Rooms - Delegates to have time to discuss speakers and discuss any more questions
12.50pm	Closing remarks and time for questions on the Assembly

Appendix 3: National Rural Youth Assembly 2024 Agenda



4th National Rural Youth Assembly 2024

27th November 2024

Agenda

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 10.00am | Registration and refreshments |
| 11.00am | Welcome and Housekeeping (YAG) |
| 11.05am | Video from Minister |
| 11.10am | Welcome from Carol Baxter & Fintan O'Brien |
| 11.20am | Icebreaker |
| 11.30am | Activity 1: Round the Tables |
| 11.55pm | Movement Break |
| 12.05pm | Activity 2: Table debate |
| 12.25pm | Activity 3: Timeline |
| 12.45pm | Lunch |
| 1.30pm | Re-Group and Ice-Breaker |
| 1.40pm | World Cafe |
| | 1. 1.40-2.00pm - Table 1 (20mins) |
| | 2. 2.00-2.15pm - Table 2 (15mins) |
| | 3. 2.15-2.30pm - Table 3 (15mins) |
| 2.30pm | Movement Break |
| 2.40pm | Review and voting |
| 3.00pm | Creation of Recommendations |
| 3.30pm | Feedback to DRCD |
| 3.45pm | Closing remarks and Evaluation |
| 4.00pm | End |

Appendix 4: Information about Assembly Delegates

As can be seen from Table 1 below, delegates were from 20 counties across Ireland, including Dublin (16.3%), Mayo (16.3%), Kildare (8.2%), Longford (8.2%), Cork (6%), Laois (6%), Tipperary (6%), Clare (4%), Donegal (4%), Kerry (4%), Cavan (2.1%), Kilkenny (2.1%), Leitrim (2.1%), Limerick (2.1%), Meath (2.1%), Offaly (2.1%), Roscommon (2.1%), Waterford (2.1%), Westmeath (2.1%) and Wicklow (2.1%).

Table 1: Number of delegates by county

County	No. of delegates	%
Dublin	8	16.3%
Mayo	8	16.3%
Kildare	4	8.2%
Longford	4	8.2%
Cork	3	6%
Laois	3	6%
Tipperary	3	6%
Clare	2	4%
Donegal	2	4%
Kerry	2	4%
Cavan	1	2.1%
Kilkenny	1	2.1%
Leitrim	1	2.1%
Limerick	1	2.1%
Meath	1	2.1%
Offaly	1	2.1%
Roscommon	1	2.1%
Waterford	1	2.1%
Westmeath	1	2.1%
Wicklow	1	2.1%
Total	49	100%

Delegates were nominated from 13 different Comhairle na nÓg including:

- Cavan Comhairle na nÓg
- Cork County Comhairle na nÓg
- Clare Comhairle na nÓg
- Donegal Comhairle na nÓg

- Kerry Comhairle na nÓg
- Laois Comhairle na nÓg
- Leitrim Comhairle na nÓg
- Limerick Comhairle na nÓg
- Longford Comhairle na Óg
- Mayo Comhairle na nÓg
- Roscommon Comhairle na nÓg
- Tipperary Comhairle na nÓg
- Waterford Comhairle na nÓg

Delegates were also nominated from a total of 25 youth and community organisations, which are outlined below:

- Amnesty International
- An Cosán, Foroige
- An Taisce
- Ashbourne Youthreach
- Balbriggan Foróige
- Belong To Youth Services
- Clare Island
- EU Youth Dialogue/ Young Voices
- Foróige
- Foróige at The Deck
- Foróige Connect
- Foróige Youth Council
- Girls Friendly Society
- Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- Irish Girl Guides
- Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB)
- Lus na Gréine Family Resource Centre (FRC)
- National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI)
- Ógras
- Tallaght Foróige
- Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)
- UNICEF
- Unity Youth Hub, Sliver Arch Family Resource Centre (FRC)
- Youth Integration Project
- Youth Work Ireland

Appendix 5: Assembly Methodology

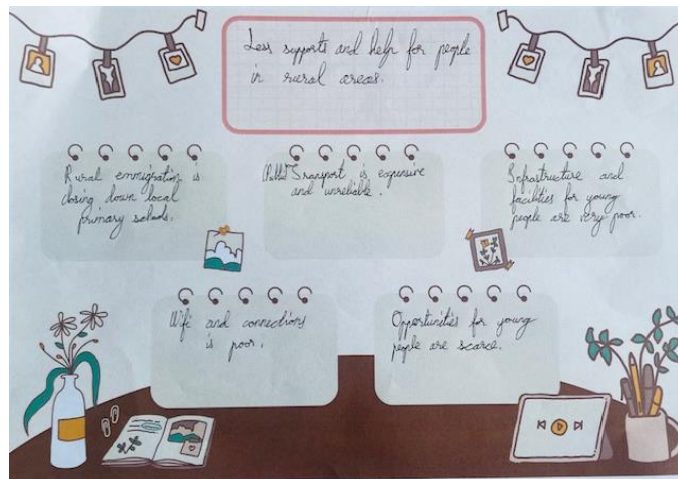
Methodology

The key methodologies used at the National Rural Youth Assembly were:

- Round the Houses
- Moving debate
- Individual Lifelines
- World Café
- Priority voting

Round the Houses

Firstly, delegates took part in a 'Round the Houses' exercise to introduce themselves and identify what are the most important issues for rural young people. If young people weren't from rural areas, they were asked to imagine what might be the key issues affecting them. If transport was the number one issue, they were asked to pick their number two issue. A 'Wall of Ideas' related to the issue of transport was included at the venue where young people could write or draw about the topic of transport in rural areas. For the Round the Houses exercise, delegates started at their own table, then moved to another table before returning to their original table to write down any issues they heard and the reasons why these issues are important. These pieces of paper were then stuck to the wall in the room.



Moving debate

Delegates then participated in a 'Moving Debate' at their tables. A moving debate sheet with 'agree', 'disagree' and 'unsure' written on it was placed on the table and delegates used objects to take part. Facilitators read out a number of statements and delegates moved their objects on the table to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Delegates were asked to share why they agreed, disagreed or were unsure about the statements and time was allowed for debate on the subject.

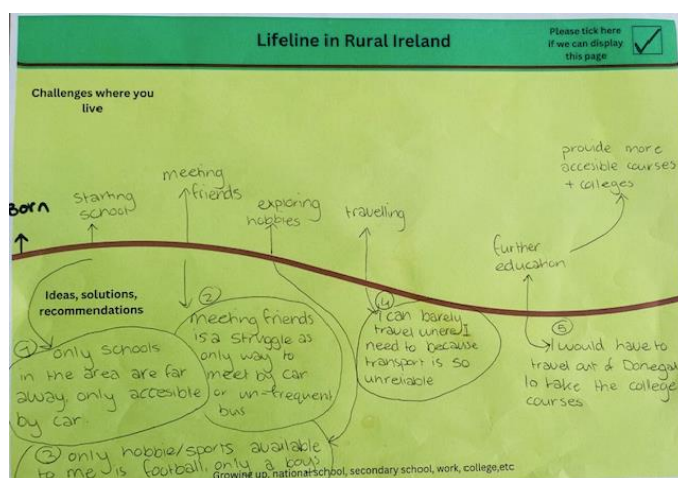
The moving debate statements included:

- There are more advantages than disadvantages to living and working in Rural Ireland.
- You can now do any job in or from Rural Ireland.
- Children in National school have the same experiences in rural and urban areas.
- You have to leave Rural Ireland to get a 3rd level qualification.
- The challenges of being a young person are the same for those living in rural and urban areas.

Individual lifelines

All delegates were asked to complete an individual lifeline called *'Lifeline in Rural Ireland'*. This exercise gave young people with a unique rural experience an opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas. The A4 lifeline sheet was divided in two sections:

- *'Challenges where you live'*
- *'Ideas, solutions, recommendations'*

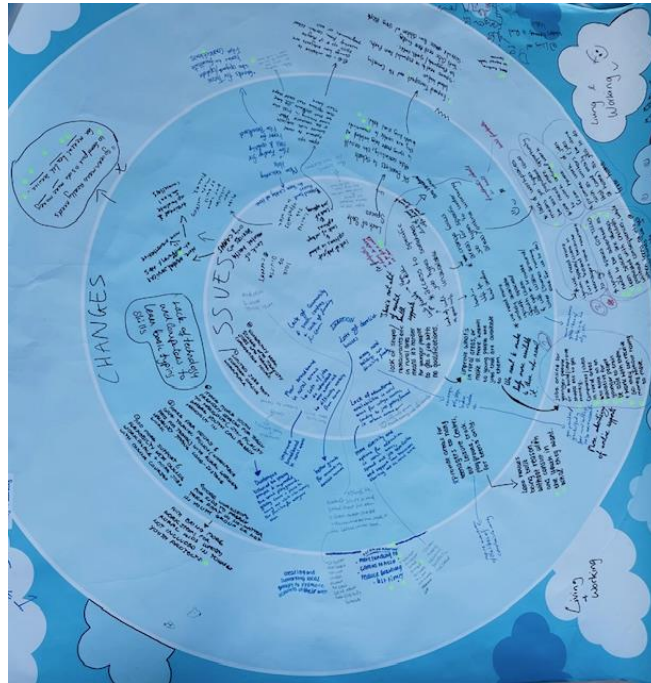


World Café

All delegates took part in a 'World Café' exercise. World Café is a methodology that facilitates people to sit in small groups and have in-depth conversations, like you would do in a café, about an assigned topic and write on a large placemat. The young people are then asked to move to another group and another topic. At every move, a facilitator remains behind to explain the outcome of the previous conversation and to see what the new group would like to add. The process facilitates the sharing of ideas and the young people get to consider a number of ideas in a short space of time.

Each placemat had a theme including:

- Living and Working in Rural Ireland
- Learning in Rural Ireland
- Wildcard table



Priority voting

At the end of the world café exercise, delegates were asked to take part in a priority voting exercise where they voted on the most important issues discussed on the world café placemats using stick dots.