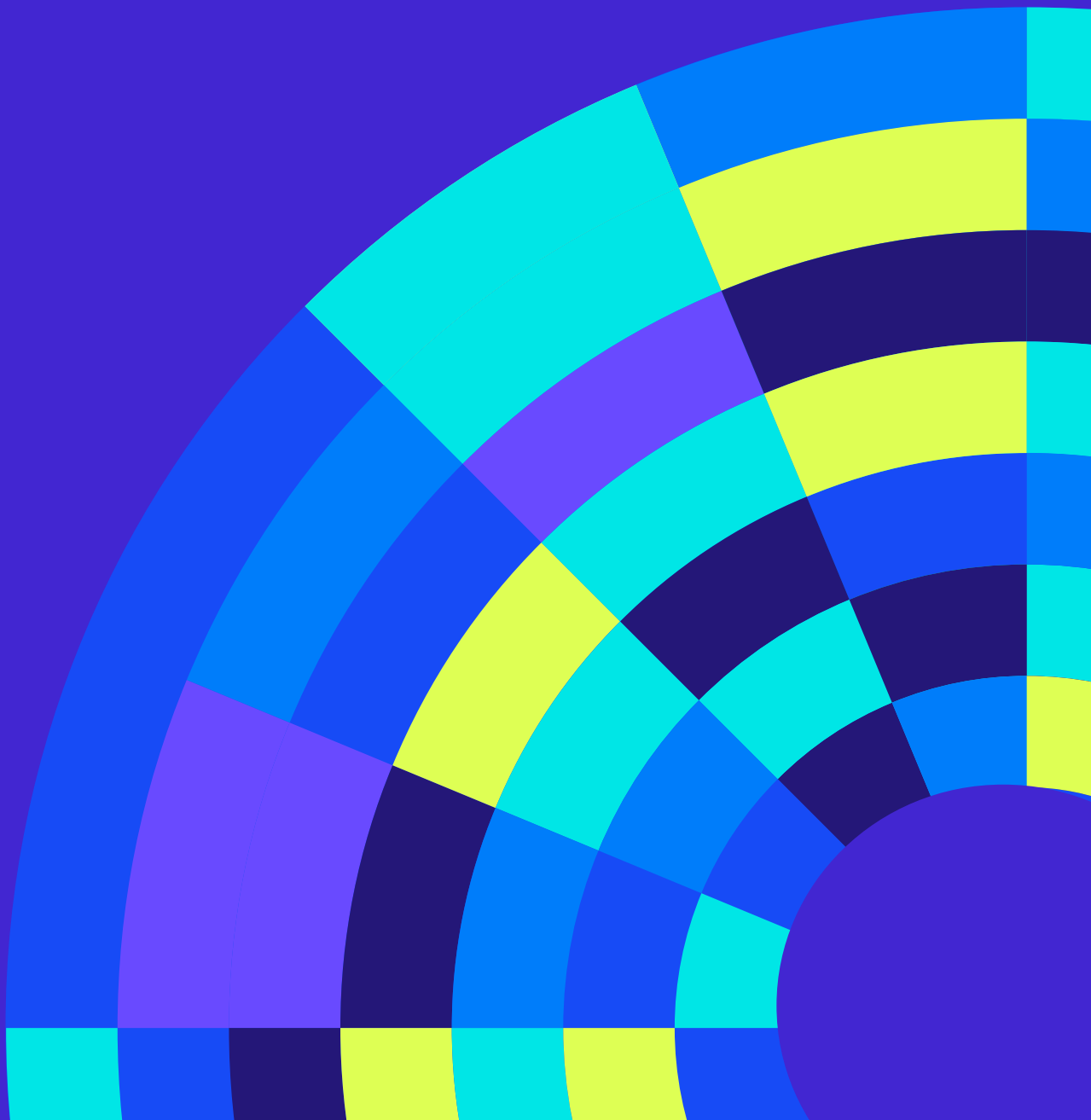


Dáil na nÓg
2026

Summary Report

2026





Dáil na nÓg

2026

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Executive Summary

Outcomes

Five priority themes identified by Dáil na nÓg delegates and ranked in order of importance through discussion and voting during the Dáil na nÓg preparation process from December 2025 to April 2026 and at Dáil na nÓg on 1 May 2026.

Preparation session vote

- Irish Language, 72 votes
- Continuous Assessment, 52 votes
- Mental Health, 51 votes
- Additional Needs Support, 49 votes
- Subject Choice, 39 votes

Dáil na nÓg vote

- Irish Language, 130 votes
- Continuous Assessment, 30 votes

Purpose of this report

This report presents the collective views of young people from every part of Ireland on their priorities for the future of education. These views were shared on the understanding that they will make a meaningful contribution to the National Convention on Education and help shape an education system that better reflects the needs, experiences and aspirations of current and future generations of children and young people in Ireland.

Context

Dáil na nÓg 2026 brought together 171 young delegates representing Comhairlí na nÓg from every local authority in Ireland to contribute directly to the National Convention on Education. Convened by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and facilitated by the National Participation Office, Dáil na nÓg provides a national forum through which children and young people can influence policy by sharing their experiences, identifying priorities for change and making recommendations to Government.

Education was selected as the theme of Dáil na nÓg 2026 following the announcement of the National Convention on Education in 2025. As the first Convention on Education in over thirty years, it represents a significant opportunity for a range of stakeholders including children and young people to shape the future direction of education policy in Ireland. Dáil na nÓg formed an important part of this wider consultation

process, ensuring that the voices of children and young people were represented alongside those of educators, parents and other stakeholders.

Preparation

Preparation for Dáil na nÓg 2026 took place over a series of structured consultation sessions facilitated by the National Participation Office and supported by a Steering Committee of young people.

Delegates participated in online discussions, facilitated debates, group activities and prioritisation exercises designed to encourage meaningful participation and informed discussion. Through these consultations, delegates reflected on their experiences of education, identified the issues that matter most to them and worked collaboratively to develop summary statements and recommendations relating to each one.

Five priority themes

Prior to the Dáil na nÓg event a total of five priority themes emerged from this process, and were ranked in order of importance through an online vote:

- **Irish Language 72 votes**
- **Continuous Assessment 52 votes**
- **Mental Health 51 votes**
- **Additional Needs Support 49 votes**
- **Subject Choice 39 votes**

The wide dispersal of votes across all five themes demonstrates that young people view education as a complex and interconnected system, with each issue influencing the others. While Irish Language and Continuous Assessment received the highest number of votes and were selected for further discussion at the Dáil na nÓg event, delegates consistently emphasised that all five themes remain important priorities for the future development of Ireland's education system.

Outcome of the Dáil na nÓg vote

The Dáil na nÓg event took place in Leinster House on 1 May 2026. Through workshops, structured debates and an allocation of funds exercise, delegates examined the potential impact, feasibility and importance of the two priority themes before participating in a formal vote to identify their top priority in the Dáil Chamber. The result of the vote was as follows:

- **Irish Language 130 votes**
- **Continuous Assessment 39 votes**

Irish Language

Throughout the preparation process and at Dáil na nÓg, delegates expressed strong and consistent support for prioritising reform of Irish language education. Delegates repeatedly described feeling disappointed that, despite spending years studying Irish at both primary and secondary level, many students leave school unable to communicate confidently in the language. They argued that the current curriculum places too much emphasis on literature, memorisation and written examinations, rather than developing practical communication skills.

Delegates called for Irish to be taught as a living language, with a much greater emphasis on spoken Irish, conversation and everyday use. They highlighted the importance of creating more opportunities to use Irish both within and beyond the classroom and suggested that the curriculum should better reflect the way languages are taught internationally. Some delegates proposed separating the study of spoken Irish from Irish literature, allowing students to develop fluency while still providing opportunities for those wishing to study Irish literature in greater depth. The importance of Irish as a central part of Ireland's cultural heritage and national identity was strongly emphasised throughout discussions.

Continuous Assessment

Continuous Assessment was the second priority theme selected by delegates for discussion at Dáil na nÓg. During the preparation sessions and at the Dáil na nÓg on 1 May 2026, delegates expressed widespread concern regarding the current reliance on high-stakes examinations and questioned whether the Leaving Certificate accurately reflects students' abilities. Many felt that performance over a small number of examination days cannot adequately capture two years of learning and may disadvantage those experiencing illness, anxiety, personal difficulties and other challenging circumstances.



Delegates supported greater use of continuous assessment throughout the school year, believing that a broader range of assessments would provide a fairer reflection of students' knowledge, skills and progress while reducing the pressure associated with final examinations. However, they also stressed that recent reforms have tended to add project work to existing course requirements rather than replacing examinations, thereby increasing workload instead of reducing it. Instead, delegates advocated for genuine assessment reform that serves to reduce the extent of the curriculum assessed by means of examination.

Discussion of Continuous Assessment also extended beyond examinations. Delegates questioned the fairness of the CAO points system and suggested that higher

education admissions should assess students in the round by introducing interviews, extracurricular involvement, previous academic achievement and other indicators alongside examination results. They also highlighted concerns regarding socio-economic inequality, noting that access to private grinds and additional educational supports can significantly influence educational outcomes.

Mental Health, Additional Needs Support and Subject Choice

Although Mental Health, Additional Needs Support and Subject Choice were not selected as the final debate themes for Dáil na nÓg, delegates regarded each as a significant priority for future education policy.

During the preparation process, discussion of Mental Health highlighted growing concern regarding the impact of educational pressures on student wellbeing. Delegates called for increased funding for mental health services, greater availability of trained professionals within schools, improved teacher training and earlier intervention for students experiencing difficulties. They also advocated for a healthier balance between academic expectations and personal wellbeing through practical measures such as reduced homework, increased physical activity and greater opportunities for social connection.

Discussion of Additional Needs Support focused on creating a more inclusive education system capable of meeting the needs of every learner.

Delegates highlighted the importance of increased funding for Special Needs Assistants, earlier assessments and interventions, improved understanding of neurodiversity and greater access to specialist supports, assistive technologies and appropriate educational facilities. They also emphasised the need to remove financial barriers to education by improving access to school materials, technology and transport.



Under the theme of Subject Choice, delegates called for a broader and more flexible curriculum that better reflects the wide interests, talents and career goals of young people. They called for increased access to practical and vocational subjects, greater promotion of apprenticeships and alternative educational pathways, stronger life-skills education, and more equal access to subjects regardless of the school a student attends. Delegates consistently argued that education should encourage understanding, creativity and practical application of knowledge rather than prioritising learning-by-heart.

Alongside these five themes, delegates also reflected on wider developments within education. They welcomed increased opportunities for student participation in decision-making with regard to their own learning and how their schools are run. They also welcomed improvements in digital learning technologies and greater recognition of alternative educational pathways. At the same time, they highlighted continuing challenges including teacher shortages, bullying, socio-economic inequality, the impact of the housing crisis on students and wider social factors that influence educational participation and achievement.



1. Introduction

1.1 Background and context

The Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) ensures that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of Government policies, programmes and services, at national and local level, and is committed to including seldom-heard children and young people in participation structures and initiatives. A dedicated Participation, Play and Recreation Unit (PPRU) delivers this commitment through funding and supporting Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg (Youth Parliament), Seanad na nÓg (Youth Senate) and the National Youth Assembly of Ireland.

Comhairle na nÓg was established as the permanent structure representing young voices in decision-making at local and national level in Ireland in response to Ireland's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since 2002, Comhairle na nÓg (local youth councils) have been giving young people a voice on the development of local policies and services in each of the 31 Local Authorities. Young people aged 12-17 become members of their local Comhairle na nÓg through their schools, youth organisations and community groups.

Dáil na nÓg is the national parliament for children and young people in Ireland. Held every two years, it brings together representatives from Comhairle na nÓg (local youth councils) across the country to discuss issues of importance to young people and to make recommendations for change. Dáil na nÓg provides a national platform through which children and young people can share their views directly with decision-makers and contribute to the development of public policy.

The theme of Dáil na nÓg 2026 was Education. This theme was selected in light of the National Convention on Education, announced in July 2025 by the then Minister for Education and Youth, Helen McEntee. The Convention on Education was established as a once-in-a-generation opportunity for children, young people, parents, educators and wider society to help shape the future of education in Ireland. The last Convention on Education took place in 1993.

The 2026 Convention brings together a range of stakeholder groups to examine key issues affecting education and to develop recommendations for the future of the education system. The outcomes of the Convention will inform the long-term strategy of the Department of Education and Youth set out in the policy document Our Schools, Our Future.

As the national participation structure for children and young people, Dáil na nÓg formed an important part of this wider consultation process. The event provided young people from all over the country with an opportunity to explore, reflect on and make recommendations for the future of education in Ireland and to identify issues that they believe should be considered by the Convention. Throughout the preparation process and during Dáil na nÓg itself, delegates explored their experiences of education, discussed challenges and opportunities within the current system, and developed recommendations for change.



1.2 Preparation of themes

Preparation for Dáil na nÓg involved the following steps (see also ANNEX 1 Dáil na nÓg Timeline):

- **Establishment of a steering committee of 10 Comhairle na nÓg members**
- **Nomination of 174 young Dáil na nÓg delegates**
- **First Online preparation session attended by all delegates;**
- **31 Comhairlí review outcome of online preparation session;**
- **Second preparation session (in person) attended by one delegate from each Comhairle plus the steering committee**
- **Third and final preparation session (online)**

The three preparation sessions were facilitated by Participation Officers from the National Participation Office and supported by the Dáil na nÓg Steering Committee,

whose members worked alongside the National Participation Office and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality to help shape the preparation process and ensure that the views of young people informed discussions throughout the programme.

At the first (online) and second (in person) preparation session, delegates answered a range of questions relating to their experiences of education, the challenges facing children and young people, and their hopes for the future of the education system. Through the use of creative and age-appropriate consultation methodologies, delegates were supported to identify five key themes that they believe should be considered by the National Convention and to prepare brief statements summarising the views and recommendations brought forward in relation to each theme. These themes identified were:

- **Continuous Assessment**
- **Irish Language**
- **Subject Choice**
- **Additional Needs Support**
- **Mental Health**

At the final (online) preparation session, delegates were invited to review the summary statements prepared during previous sessions and vote on the two themes they wished to bring forward to Dáil na nÓg 2026.



The results of the vote were as follows:

Irish Language	72 votes
Continuous Assessment	52 Votes
Mental Health	51 Votes
Additional Needs Support	49 Votes
Subject Choice	39 Votes

The results demonstrated strong support across all five themes and highlighted the wide range of issues that young people consider important for the future of education in Ireland. Irish Language and Continuous Assessment received the highest number of votes and were therefore selected as the two priority themes for discussion and debate at Dáil na nÓg 2026. While Mental Health, Additional Needs Support and Subject Choice were not brought forward to the national event, delegates identified these themes as significant priorities that should continue to be considered within discussions on the future development of Ireland's education system.

1.3 Outcome of the Dáil na nÓg vote

On 1 May 2026, delegates gathered in Leinster House to participate in Dáil na nÓg 2026. A total of 171 delegates attended the event. Throughout the day, delegates explored both of the priority themes through workshop activities, discussion and debate (see ANNEX II Dáil na nÓg Running Order). They examined the potential impact, feasibility and importance of each theme. The day culminated in a vote in the Dáil Chamber, where delegates were asked to select the issue they believed should be prioritised. Irish Language education received 130 votes, while Continuous Assessment received 39 votes.

1.4 Report outline

This report presents the views, discussions and recommendations developed by delegates throughout the Dáil na nÓg 2026 process. It outlines the consultation and preparation activities undertaken by delegates, the methods used to facilitate participation, and the key findings that emerged from discussions.

Sections 2 sets out the views expressed by delegates on the theme of Irish Language as they emerged throughout the preparation process and at Dáil na nÓg itself. Section 3 likewise sets out the views expressed by delegates on the theme of Continuous Assessment. Sections 4, 5 and 6 address the themes of Mental Health, Additional Needs Support and Subject Choice. Each section opens with the relevant summary statement developed by delegates during the preparation process as well as the number of votes obtained in the final preparation session.

Section 7 presents the views expressed by delegates on the future of education more broadly. Section 8 is structured around the Lundy Model of Participation and examines the extent to which delegates were provided with space to express their views, opportunities to have their voices heard, an audience for those views, and influence within decision-making processes. Section 9 presents a list of the recommendations made by delegates under each of the five priority themes.

2. Irish Language

Introduction

"We believe that the Irish Language should be taught through the medium of the Irish language. Increase the value of conversational Irish such as with the oral exam. The Irish language should be used more both in non-Gaelscoil schools and in everyday life. Teaching of the Irish language should be less focused on literature and more so on achieving advanced proficiency if not fluency." Summary statement on Irish Language education prepared by delegates (72 votes)

Delegates presented strong and consistent views on the theme of Irish language education throughout the preparation process and at Dáil na Óg itself. They have a clear vision for the way in which they want to see Irish taught in school, as a living language, and they asked for this repeatedly throughout the process. They spoke with passion about the keen sense of loss they feel as result of not being able to speak Irish with confidence and their desire to reclaim it as a living language. The strength of feeling on this topic was clearly demonstrated by the cheers and standing ovation with which the vote in favour of the Irish language as the top priority for Dáil na nÓg 2026 was greeted.

Conversational Irish

Many delegates expressed frustration that the education system prioritises examination performance over practical language use. Delegates said that many students complete their education without being able to speak Irish confidently and highlighted the need for greater emphasis on conversational skills.

Delegates repeatedly emphasised the need for Irish to be taught as a living language. Many said that students spend years studying Irish but leave school without being able to use it in everyday situations. Delegates called for a greater focus on speaking, conversation and practical communication skills rather than memorisation and examination preparation.

Delegates also highlighted the importance of increasing opportunities to use Irish both inside

and outside school and expressed a desire for students to leave education with genuine fluency in the language.





Irish language teaching

Delegates expressed strong support for reforming how Irish is taught within the education system. While recognising the value of Irish literature, Delegates suggested creating two separate Irish language subjects, one focused on the study of spoken Irish and the other on the study of Irish literature. Delegates said this approach would allow students to choose to focus on developing their fluency without the need for compulsory literary study.

Delegates also suggested the study of Irish History through Irish as a possible exam subject and called for the introduction of beginners Irish as a subject at second level for those studying Irish for the first time.

Cultural heritage

The importance of Irish as a key part of Ireland's cultural heritage and national identity was also a recurring theme. Delegates expressed shame at not being able to speak their own language and said that protecting, promoting and revitalising the Irish language was both an educational and cultural priority.

Allocation of funds exercise

The priority afforded to the Irish language was also reflected in the outcome of the allocation of funds workshops which delegates participated in at Dáil na nÓg. A total of four workshops took place with three groups in each workshop. Each group discussed the themes of Irish language and Continuous Assessment scoring them against a number of criteria, including for

example cost vs impact and number of total student population affected before completing an exercise which required delegates to allocate funds to each theme on the basis of the scores achieved. Of the fifteen completed and legible worksheets produced, ten prioritised Irish Language. Delegates expressed the view that Continuous Assessment reform was already well funded and spoke of Irish language acquisition as a 'right'.



3. Continuous Assessment

Introduction

"Students feel as though there should be more flexibility towards their learning and towards their assessments and how they're assessed. Right now, they're adding continuous assessment onto course work which is making finishing the course inaccessible. The CAO lottery is not a fair way to determine the suitability of a student for a course, instead we need to acknowledge the student as a whole and not the course work." Summary statement on Continuous Assessment prepared by delegates (52 votes)

Discussion on the theme of continuous assessment was wide ranging with a variety of views expressed on topics such as workload and stress as well as a broader critique of assessment and university admissions practices. Overall, Delegates advocated for a more flexible, fair and student-centred education system that recognises individual talents, learning styles and backgrounds.

Flexible learning and assessment

Delegates expressed strong concerns about the current examination system and its reliance on a small number of high-stakes exams. They said that the Leaving Cert does not accurately reflect students' abilities, as two years of learning should not be reduced to performance during a few examination days.

A recurring theme was the pressure associated with final exams. Delegates described the current system as stressful and unforgiving, noting that illness, anxiety, personal circumstances or simply having a bad day can have a significant impact on results. Delegates said that one poor examination performance should not have the ability to significantly affect a student's future opportunities.

Delegates expressed strong support for a more flexible assessment system that provides greater opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities. They expressed the view that students learn and demonstrate knowledge in different ways and said that greater use of continuous assessment would create a fairer system by recognising a wider

range of skills and achievements rather than rewarding memorising and exam technique above all else. They suggested that regular assessments completed throughout the school year would provide a more accurate picture of student performance and reduce the pressure associated with a single examination period.

They called for a system that values students as individuals, reduces unnecessary pressure, and provides a more accurate reflection of their abilities, efforts and potential.

Fairness

Delegates highlighted the potential benefits of continuous assessment for students facing additional challenges. They noted that students experiencing mental health difficulties, health complications or unidentified learning needs may be particularly disadvantaged by a system that relies heavily on final examinations.

Many delegates viewed continuous assessment as being more reflective of different learning styles and circumstances, particularly for students who may struggle in traditional exam settings.

Concerns were also expressed by delegates about the impact of socio-economic inequality on educational outcomes, particularly where access to private grinds and additional educational supports can influence exam performance.

University admissions

Delegates said the current points-based system and CAO process can disadvantage certain students, particularly those who may not perform well in examinations or who do not have access to additional supports such as private grinds. Some argued that college admissions should take a broader view of student achievement by considering factors such as interviews, recommendations, previous academic performance, extracurricular involvement and personal achievements alongside examination results.

Project work as an additional burden

A recurring concern was that recent reforms had added elements of continuous assessment onto already demanding course requirements without reducing existing workloads. Delegates highlighted that this approach increased pressure on students rather than improving the assessment experience. Instead, they called for a more balanced model that would genuinely distribute assessment across the learning process and reduce reliance on final examinations.

Skills relevant to employment

Delegates also considered the relationship between assessment and employment. They expressed the view that project work, ongoing assessment and independent learning more closely reflect the skills required in higher education and the workplace. Continuous assessment was therefore viewed not only as a

fairer means of evaluating students but also as a way of better preparing young people for life beyond secondary school.

Allocation of funds exercise

Of the 15 completed and legible worksheets produced, a total of five favoured investment in Continuous Assessment above the Irish Language. During discussions around the allocation of funds exercise, one group prioritised Continuous Assessment over Irish Language because of its broad reach and potential impact on students, stating that “much broader scope and therefore needs more funding”.

Groups also highlighted the wide-ranging impact such reform could have, noting that it would affect students across all schools and subject areas. Some groups also acknowledged that implementing a greater level of Continuous Assessment would require significant resources and changes.



4. Mental Health

Introduction

"We hope for more funding on mental health services and improvements in the following sectors: more availability for mental health services, more trained specialists in schools to help children with mental health and teachers should be trained to know what to do if a student is struggling, encouraging good mental health and socialising to discourage anti-social behaviours and focusing on students at risk by interventions and adding more facilities catered to mental health. From the evidence we've gathered we can conclude that these supports would help immensely to tackle the ongoing mental health crisis in the education system." Summary statement on Mental Health prepared by delegates (51 votes)

Mental health emerged as a theme of significant importance to delegates from the outset. Delegates discussed the impact of the education system on students' mental health and wellbeing as well as considering mental health difficulties as a barrier in education. Overall, delegates called for an education system where wellbeing is prioritised alongside learning and where all students have access to the supports they need. They expressed a strong desire for practical supports including qualified counsellors in every school, earlier mental health education, and initiatives to help students manage stress such as reduced homework and more opportunities for physical activity.

Stress and anxiety

Many delegates identified stress, anxiety and poor mental health as major barriers to educational participation and achievement. Delegates frequently linked these difficulties to the pressure associated with the Leaving Cert, CAO points and high-stakes examinations. The education system was described as placing excessive emphasis on academic performance, leading to burnout, anxiety and significant pressure on young people.

While some recent reforms were intended to reduce this stress, delegates noted that uncertainty surrounding new projects, assessments and course requirements could sometimes create additional anxiety.

Mental health supports in schools

Delegates highlighted concerns regarding the availability and quality of mental health supports within schools.

Delegates frequently linked these difficulties to the pressure associated with the Leaving Cert, CAO points and high-stakes examinations. The education system was described as placing excessive emphasis on academic performance, leading to burnout, anxiety and significant pressure on young people. While some recent reforms were intended to reduce this stress, delegates noted that uncertainty surrounding new projects, assessments and course requirements could sometimes create additional anxiety.

While delegates said that awareness of mental health issues had improved, some felt that schools still lacked adequate structures to support students experiencing difficulties. Mental health support was frequently discussed alongside broader concerns relating to neurodiversity, additional needs and access to appropriate educational supports.

Delegates stressed the importance of providing more specialist mental health support within schools. They advocated for greater access to trained professionals who could support students experiencing difficulties. There was a strong view that schools should play a more active role in supporting wellbeing and intervening early when concerns arise.



Positive developments

Delegates recognised a number of positive developments. It was noted that wellbeing has become a more visible part of school life through dedicated wellbeing classes, movement breaks, guidance counselling services and increased discussion of mental health. Delegates said that teachers are becoming more understanding of student stress and that schools are making greater efforts to promote wellbeing and create supportive environments. School counsellors and information on managing stress were highlighted as examples of progress already taking place within the education system.

When discussing changes already visible in education, delegates said that wellbeing is now embedded more formally within the school curriculum, while workshops, guest speakers, movement breaks and other initiatives are increasingly used to support students' emotional wellbeing. Many delegates expressed the view that schools have become more empathetic and responsive to the mental health needs of young people than in previous years.

Training for teachers

Concerns were also raised about insufficient understanding of neurodiversity, stress, anxiety and mental health challenges among some educators. Some delegates said that teachers and school staff required further training and awareness in these areas. They said it was essential that teachers should know how to recognise when a student may be struggling and how to respond appropriately.

Focus on wellbeing

Delegates also advocated for a healthier balance between school and personal life through practical, easy to implement measures such as reduced homework, greater opportunities for physical activity and more time for hobbies and family life.

Funding for mental health services

Discussions highlighted a strong belief that greater investment was needed in mental health supports for children and young people across the board. Delegates repeatedly emphasised the need for increased funding and improved availability of mental health services. Delegates felt that many students were unable to access support when they needed it and that additional resources were required to address growing mental health challenges among young people.

Students at risk

Particular attention was given to supporting students who may be at greater risk of experiencing mental health difficulties, with delegates calling for earlier interventions and additional facilities and supports specifically designed to meet mental health needs.



5. Additional Needs Support

Introduction

"We believe that the most pressing issues under the theme of Additional Needs Support are: A bigger budget for SNAs to increase the availability for students who need them, more awareness and acceptance of learning differences and neurodiversity, including adapting systems for different learning types, more mental health supports that are different to neurodivergent supports, and finally truly free education with no hidden costs to improve accessibility for everyone. We hope to see an education system that includes all of these additional needs supports." Summary statement on Additional Needs prepared by delegates (49 votes)

Additional Needs Support emerged as an important theme throughout the Dáil na nÓg 2026 consultation process. Delegates recognised positive progress in recent years, including greater awareness of neurodiversity, increased supports for students with additional needs, and improvements in accessibility within schools.

However, delegates also highlighted a range of ongoing challenges affecting students with additional needs and learning differences. Overall, delegates called for a more inclusive and accessible education system that recognises and responds to the diverse needs of all learners. They emphasised the importance of adequate support services, early intervention, greater understanding of neurodiversity, and equal access to educational opportunities.

Delegates expressed a strong desire for an education system in which every student receives the support they need to participate fully in school life and achieve their potential, regardless of their individual learning needs or circumstances.

SNAs and support services

The availability of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and other support services was one of the most frequently discussed issues within this theme. Delegates recognised the vital role that SNAs play in supporting students with additional needs and helping them participate fully in education.

Despite acknowledging improvements in support provision, delegates expressed concerns about shortages of SNAs, limited access to specialist supports, and the possibility of future reductions in services. Many felt that current provision does not meet demand and that some students are not receiving the support they need. Increased funding for SNAs was identified as one of the most pressing priorities. Delegates argued that greater investment is needed to expand availability, improve access to support services, and ensure that all students with additional needs receive timely and effective support throughout their education.

Neurodiversity

Delegates placed a strong emphasis on increasing awareness and acceptance of neurodiversity and learning differences within schools. Delegates felt that education systems should better recognise the diverse ways in which students learn and adapt accordingly.

Many delegates highlighted the importance of creating more inclusive learning environments, with greater understanding of conditions such as autism, ADHD and other learning differences. They advocated for more flexible teaching approaches that accommodate different learning styles and ensure that students are not disadvantaged by a one-size-fits-all model of education.

Delegates also called for greater teacher training and awareness in relation to neurodiversity, arguing that improved understanding among school staff would help create a more supportive and inclusive experience for all learners.

Assessment and early intervention

Delegates highlighted the importance of early identification and support for students with additional needs. Concerns were raised about long waiting times for assessments and diagnosis, with delegates noting that many students can struggle for extended periods before receiving the supports they require.

Delegates felt that delays in accessing educational and psychological assessments can leave students at a disadvantage and increase the risk of them falling behind in school. They therefore called for faster access to assessments, earlier interventions and more timely support services.

Delegates emphasised that students with additional needs should receive support as early as possible to ensure they can fully participate in education and achieve their potential.

Accessibility and equality

Accessibility and equality within education were key concerns for delegates. Delegates called for a truly free education system with no hidden costs, arguing that financial barriers can disproportionately affect students who already face additional challenges.

Delegates highlighted costs associated with school materials, technology, transport and other educational resources, and stressed the importance of ensuring that all students have equal access to the supports they need. Delegates believed that removing financial barriers would help create a more inclusive education system and ensure that every young person has an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Facilities and resources

Delegates also discussed the importance of providing appropriate facilities and resources for students with additional needs. Delegates highlighted the need for more sensory rooms, quiet spaces and assistive technologies to support students with autism, ADHD and other learning differences.

Delegates felt that access to suitable facilities can have a significant impact on students' ability to engage in learning and participate comfortably in school life. They also recognised improvements already taking place in some schools but believed that further investment is needed to ensure that all students have access to the resources and environments they require.

Overall, delegates viewed appropriate facilities and resources as an essential component of an inclusive education system that supports the diverse needs of all learners.



6. Subject Choice

Introduction

"We hope that school subjects become more accessible for all students. Changes need to be made to how subjects are taught as it may affect the likelihood of students continuing with the subject for Leaving Certificate, as a focus on rote learning instead of an understanding of the topic may lead to lack of interest at Higher Level education. Another factor being how in-depth each topic is taught, as a lack of proper teaching leads to misunderstanding. With SPHE being an example of a topic that, if taught badly, leads to students being uninterested in the topic. We want students to be educated on how CAO works and that it isn't the final decider of future job prospects and that apprenticeships are always an option." Summary statement on Subject Choice prepared by delegates (39 votes)

Subject Choice emerged as the final important theme throughout the Dáil na nÓg 2026 consultation process. Delegates discussed not only the range of subjects available within schools, but also how subjects are taught, the pathways available to students after school, and the extent to which the curriculum prepares young people for life beyond education.

Overall, delegates called for a more flexible and student-centred approach to subject choice. They expressed a desire for greater access to a wider variety of subjects, increased opportunities for practical and vocational learning, and improved education on future pathways such as apprenticeships, further education and higher education. Delegates also emphasised the importance of teaching methods that promote understanding and engagement rather than rote learning, believing that this would help students develop a stronger interest in learning and make more informed choices about their futures.

Accessibility

Delegates expressed concerns about unequal access to subjects across the education system. Delegates noted that the subjects available to students can vary significantly depending on the school they attend, with factors such as school size, resources and facilities influencing the range of options on offer.



Delegates advocated for a wider variety of subjects to be made available to all students, regardless of location or school type. There were calls for increased funding and grants to help schools introduce additional subjects and provide the facilities needed to support them. Delegates highlighted the importance of ensuring equal access to resources for new Leaving Certificate subjects and projects, arguing that students should not be disadvantaged because their school lacks the necessary equipment or facilities.

Overall, delegates expressed the belief that all students should have equal opportunities to pursue subjects that match their interests, abilities and future aspirations, regardless of where they attend school.

Practical subjects

Delegates consistently called for a broader range of practical and vocational subjects within the education system. Delegates highlighted the importance of recognising that students have different strengths, interests and learning styles, and felt that schools should provide pathways that extend beyond traditional academic subjects.

Delegates advocated for the introduction and expansion of subjects such as coding, engineering, woodwork and other practical disciplines. There were also calls for greater support for vocational education programmes and for the expansion of pathways such as the Leaving Certificate Applied. Delegates felt that practical learning opportunities can be particularly beneficial for students who learn best through hands-on experiences.

Delegates also emphasised the importance of promoting apprenticeships as a valued option alongside higher education. They believed that vocational routes should be given greater visibility and recognition within schools, ensuring that students are aware of the full range of opportunities available to them after completing their education.

Life skills

Delegates highlighted the importance of ensuring that the curriculum equips students with the knowledge and skills needed for life beyond school. Many delegates felt that

subjects such as SPHE should be strengthened and delivered in a more engaging and meaningful way.

Delegates also called for more comprehensive education on topics such as relationships, consent, sexual health and personal wellbeing. There were also suggestions that schools should place greater emphasis on practical life skills, including financial literacy, housing, careers and preparing for adulthood.

Flexibility

Delegates expressed a desire for greater flexibility within the education system and more opportunities to pursue subjects that reflect their interests, talents and ambitions. Delegates felt that students should be empowered to make choices that suit their individual strengths rather than being restricted by limited subject options or traditional expectations.

Delegates also advocated for a wider variety of subject choices and greater freedom to explore different areas of learning. They emphasised that students have diverse interests and career goals, and that education should accommodate these differences by offering multiple pathways and opportunities for personal development.



7. The Bigger Picture

At the first preparation session, delegates were invited to contribute their views on education in response to four open questions:

What is working well right now in education?
What makes it harder for children and young people to take part and do well in education today?

- **What changes are you seeing (or have you seen) in education?**
- **What hopes do you have for the education system and what do you think we need for the years ahead?**

In addition to discussion of topics related to the five priority themes, delegates also referenced the following in response to the first question 'What is working well right now in education':

- **Student Voice: There is a sense that Student Councils and focus groups are finally giving young people a real say in how their schools are run.**
- **Extracurriculars: Opportunities in sports, Comhairle na nÓg, and various clubs are praised for helping students become well-rounded adults rather than just exam-takers.**
- **Collaborative Learning: Working in groups and having more interactive classes is making the school day more enjoyable and effective.**

In addition to discussion of topics related to the five priority themes, delegates also referenced the following in response to the second question 'What makes it harder for children and young people to take part and do well in education today?':

- **Inconsistent Teaching: Students report that differences in teaching styles, varying levels of staff expertise, and shortages of qualified teachers in certain subjects (such as Computer Science) hinder their progress.**

- **Peer Pressure and Bullying: The fear of being judged, labelled a "teacher's pet", or experiencing "systemic bullying" prevents many students from participating.**
- **The AI Shadow: The rise of AI has led to a lack of motivation and concerns about being falsely accused of cheating, which some students feel reduces the satisfaction of producing good work.**
- **External Life: Issues such as the housing crisis, long commutes, and the need for older students to work long hours to support their families make it difficult to focus on school.**

In addition to discussion of topics related to the five priority themes, delegates also referenced the following in response to the third question 'What changes are you seeing (or have you seen) in education?':

- **Hardware in the Classroom: The widespread introduction of Chromebooks and iPads has changed daily learning, replacing many physical books with digital resources**
- **Online Learning Tools: Platforms such as Google Classroom and Teams have become standard features of education, although some students noted that this has increased opportunities for AI tools such as ChatGPT to be used to shortcut work.**
- **Alternative Pathways: Students noted growing awareness and recognition of apprenticeships, PLC courses, and LCA as valuable alternatives to the traditional university route.**

The views expressed by delegates in response to the fourth and final question 'What hopes do you have for the education system and what do you think we need for the years ahead?' were all focused on the five themes to emerge as priorities from the Dáil na nÓg process and have been incorporated into the relevant sections of this report.

8. Methodology

8.1 Introduction

The Dáil na nÓg 2026 consultation process was guided by the Lundy Model of Participation, a framework developed to support the implementation of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The model identifies four key elements of meaningful participation: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence.

The following section outlines how these four elements were incorporated throughout the Dáil na nÓg 2026 preparation sessions and national event, ensuring that children and young people had opportunities to express their views, have them heard by decision-makers, and contribute to discussions on the future of education in Ireland.

8.2 Space

The first element of the Lundy Model is Space, which requires that children and young people are provided with safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views. Throughout the Dáil na nÓg 2026 consultation process, significant effort was made to create environments in which young people could participate meaningfully in discussions about the future of education in Ireland.

Participation opportunities were provided through a combination of online and in-person engagement. Three preparation sessions were held prior to Dáil na nÓg 2026, including two online sessions and one in-person preparation day. This blended approach ensured delegates had multiple opportunities to engage with the consultation process and reflect ahead of the Dáil na nÓg event, enabling them to make informed decisions.

The online preparation sessions provided structured opportunities for delegates to reflect on their experiences of education and to identify priorities for change. During the in-person preparation day, delegates worked in small groups, participated in facilitated table debates, prioritised issues through a voting exercise, and collaboratively developed summary statements based on the themes that emerged from the consultations. These smaller group discussions

provided opportunities for delegates to explore issues in greater depth before progressing to larger group discussions and voting processes.

At Dáil na nÓg, delegates participated in both workshop sessions and debates in the Dáil Chamber. The workshop format provided a smaller and less formal environment in which delegates could discuss issues, develop their ideas, and build confidence before the final vote in the Chamber. Results of the post-participation feedback survey showed that delegates generally felt that the environment created for participation was safe and inclusive.

Delegates frequently referenced the welcoming atmosphere, the friendliness of other delegates, and the respect shown by facilitators and staff. Comments described feeling "heard and included", enjoying the opportunity to meet young people from across Ireland, and appreciating that adults involved in the process did not "talk down" to them.

Overall, the Dáil na nÓg 2026 process created multiple safe, supportive and accessible spaces in which children and young people could discuss their experiences, share their views, and contribute to national conversations about the future of education in Ireland.

8.3 Voice

The second element of the Lundy Model is Voice, which requires that children and young people are facilitated to express their views freely. Throughout the Dáil na nÓg 2026 consultation process, a range of participation methods were used to ensure that delegates had multiple opportunities to contribute their experiences, perspectives and recommendations regarding the future of education in Ireland.



The consultation process began with three preparation sessions facilitated by Participation Officers from the National Participation Office. These included two online sessions and one in-person preparation day. During the online sessions, delegates participated using Mentimeter, an interactive digital platform that enabled delegates to respond to questions, vote on priorities and share opinions in real time. This approach allowed all delegates to contribute equally, regardless of their confidence levels or previous experience of participation.

At the first online preparation session, delegates were invited to respond to four key questions about education in Ireland: what is working well in education, what challenges children and young people face in education, what changes they are currently seeing, and what hopes they have for the future of the education system. Responses were collected and analysed before being grouped into thematic areas. These themes formed the basis of further discussions throughout the preparation process and ensured that the agenda was shaped directly by the issues raised by delegates themselves.

The in-person preparation day provided further opportunities for delegates to express and refine their views. Delegates participated in

facilitated table debates where they responded to statements by indicating whether they agreed or disagreed.

They also engaged in prioritisation exercises using sticky-dot voting, allowing them to identify the issues they considered most important within each theme.

Following these discussions, delegates worked collaboratively to draft summary statements that captured the key messages emerging from the consultation process.

Following the preparation sessions, all Comhairle na nÓg Coordinators received summaries of the five priority themes identified by delegates to ensure they had the opportunity to reflect in advance of the event: Continuous Assessment, Irish Language, Subject Choice, Additional Needs Support and Mental Health. Delegates then participated in a third online preparation session where they used Mentimeter to vote on which themes should be brought forward for debate at Dáil na nÓg. This process ensured that young people themselves determined the issues that would be discussed at the national event. Irish Language and Continuous Assessment emerged as the two priority themes receiving the highest levels of support.

At Dáil na nÓg 2026, delegates continued to express their views through workshop discussions, chamber debates and open-floor contributions. In the feedback survey, over two-thirds of respondents rated highly their opportunities to have their voice heard during the preparation sessions, while workshop-related feedback indicated that the majority felt comfortable expressing their opinions, had opportunities to contribute, and received support to ensure their voices were heard.

Many delegates specifically referenced the open-floor discussions and workshops as valuable opportunities to express their views and hear the perspectives of others. Delegates described feeling “heard and included” and appreciated the opportunity to contribute directly to discussions on education policy.

Delegates also identified areas for improvement, particularly around increasing speaking opportunities during chamber sessions and ensuring that quieter delegates were given additional support to contribute during workshops. Several delegates suggested allowing more time for open debate and implementing structures that would ensure every participant had an opportunity to speak.

Overall, the Dáil na nÓg 2026 consultation process provided a wide range of opportunities for children and delegates to express their views. Through digital engagement, facilitated discussions, voting exercises, workshops and chamber debates, delegates were supported to share their experiences and contribute directly

to the development of recommendations on the future of education in Ireland.

8.4 Audience

The third element of the Lundy Model, Audience, requires that children and young people's views are listened to by the relevant decision-makers. Dáil na nÓg 2026 was designed to ensure that young peoples' views on education would reach those responsible for shaping future education policy in Ireland. The theme of Dáil na nÓg 2026 was Education, selected in recognition of the forthcoming Convention on Education being convened by the Department of Education and Youth in 2026.

As the first Convention on Education in over thirty years, the process presents a significant opportunity for young people to contribute their perspectives on the future of education in Ireland.





Delegates were informed throughout the preparation process that their discussions, priorities and recommendations would be submitted to the Chair of the Convention on Education.

Through this process, delegates were provided with a clear audience for their views, with recommendations being directed towards the Chair of the Convention on Education and feeding into the broader Convention on Education process. This ensured that the voices of children and young people were heard by those with responsibility for shaping the future direction of education policy in Ireland.

8.5 Influence

The fourth element of the Lundy Model, Influence, requires that children and young people's views are acted upon and have the potential to inform decision-making. Throughout the Dáil na nÓg 2026 process, delegates were provided with clear information about how their contributions would influence discussions on the future of education in Ireland.

At the first online preparation session, delegates heard from Shari Irfan, a law and history student at Dublin City University and Deputy Chair for Children and Young People at the National Convention on Education. Shari outlined the purpose of the Convention on Education, explained how young people's views would contribute to the process, and highlighted the importance of ensuring that children and young

people are represented in discussions about the future of the education system.

The link between Dáil na nÓg and the Convention on Education was reinforced throughout the consultation process. Delegates were informed that the recommendations and findings emerging from Dáil na nÓg 2026 would be compiled into a report and submitted to the Chair of the Convention on Education for consideration. Shari Irfan also attended Dáil na nÓg on 1 May 2026, providing a direct connection between the young people and the Convention process.

Delegates also had the opportunity to present their views in the presence of national decision-makers. Approximately thirteen TDs attended proceedings throughout the day, including the Tánaiste, Simon Harris, Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, and Emer Higgins TD, Minister of State attending Cabinet with responsibility for Disability. Their attendance provided an opportunity for elected representatives to hear directly from children and young people about their experiences of education and their priorities for change.

By establishing clear pathways for young people's views to reach policymakers and by ensuring that recommendations would be formally submitted to the Department of Education and Youth, the Dáil na nÓg 2026 process demonstrated how young people's contributions could have a meaningful influence on national discussions about the future of education in Ireland.

9. Recommendations

Throughout the Dáil na nÓg process, the following recommendations were put forward by delegates in relation to the five priority themes identified:

Irish Language

- Teach Irish as a living spoken language rather than primarily as a literature subject.
- Place greater emphasis on conversational Irish and oral communication.
- Increase the value and weighting of oral assessment.
- Teach Irish through Irish and expand immersion-based learning.
- Focus on achieving fluency and practical proficiency.
- Reduce emphasis on memorising poetry, essays and literature.
- Increase the use of Irish in classrooms and everyday school life.
- Increase opportunities to speak Irish regularly.
- Improve continuity in Irish language learning from primary to secondary school.
- Provide additional supports for students who struggle with Irish.
- Offer beginner Irish classes for exempt students who wish to participate.
- Expand the number of Gaelscoileanna nationwide.
- Use online language classes to address teacher shortages.

Continuous Assessment

- Introduce more regular, smaller assessments throughout the year.
- Increase the weighting and value of CBAs and project work in final grades.
- Reform the Junior and Senior Cycle to include more assessment-based learning.
- Spread examinations across the academic year.
- Use grading systems that reflect performance over time rather than one exam.
- Introduce more practical and project-based assessment methods.
- Incorporate oral assessments across more subjects, not just languages.
- Improve access to lessons and learning materials for students absent from school.

- Reform the CAO system and reduce reliance on the current points-based model.
- Introduce alternative admissions criteria such as interviews, portfolios, CVs, recommendations, previous achievement and aptitude.
- Replace or reform the CAO lottery system.
- Create alternative routes into higher education beyond Leaving Certificate points.
- Provide emergency opportunities to retake examinations.
- Develop multiple Leaving Certificate pathways, including greater project-based options.
- Reduce excessive homework requirements.

Mental Health

- Increase funding for mental health services.
- Improve availability and accessibility of mental health supports.
- Ensure every school has access to qualified counsellors and therapists.
- Provide confidential mental health services within schools.
- Train teachers to recognise and respond to mental health difficulties.
- Introduce regular wellbeing classes, workshops and discussions.
- Teach students stress-management and coping skills from a younger age.
- Expand wellbeing days and wellbeing initiatives.
- Improve access to supports for undiagnosed students.
- Increase movement breaks and wellbeing-focused school practices.
- Provide better facilities dedicated to mental health support.
- Improve teacher training on neurodiversity and positive student relationships.

Additional Needs Support

- Increase funding for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs).
- Expand the availability of SNAs in schools.
- Adapt education systems to accommodate different learning styles and learning needs.
- Provide more specialised mental health supports for students with additional needs.
- Create a genuinely free education system with no hidden costs.
- Increase funding for assistive technologies and ensure clarity on their use in exams.
- Expand alternative pathways such as apprenticeships and vocational options.
- Improve mental health facilities and supports within schools.
- Reduce class sizes to allow more individual support.
- Provide sensory rooms and quiet spaces in schools.
- Ensure equal access to educational facilities and resources.
- Expand free schoolbook schemes and other financial supports.
- Improve school transport accessibility.
- Increase funding for arts, creativity and self-development opportunities.
- Provide earlier assessment and diagnosis of learning difficulties.
- Increase access to qualified counsellors and support professionals.
- Increase education around disability, diversity and inclusion.
- Expand and strengthen the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.
- Introduce vocational education pathways similar to European models.
- Teach more practical life skills, including finance, mortgages, taxes and independent living.
- Improve career guidance and introduce discussions about future pathways earlier in school.
- Increase awareness of apprenticeships, PLCs and non-university routes.
- Improve education on climate change and environmental issues.
- Increase subject choice regardless of school size or location.
- Introduce ability-based supports or streaming where appropriate.
- Increase access to facilities and opportunities regardless of socio-economic background.

The report was compiled by Dr. Annabel Egan, Egan Consulting and Ms. Molly Terrins on behalf of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

Subject Choice

- Increase the range and variety of subjects available in schools.
- Introduce more practical, vocational and trade-related subjects.
- Expand access to Computer Science, Engineering, Coding and similar subjects.
- Ensure all schools have equal access to facilities required for practical subjects and project work.
- Provide funding and grants to allow schools to offer a broader subject range.
- Reform SPHE and expand coverage of topics such as relationships, consent and sex education.
- Improve Physical Education and make it a more meaningful educational subject.



ANNEX I Dáil na nÓg Timeline



ANNEX II Dáil na nÓg Running Order



Dáil na nÓg Agenda - Friday 1st May 2026

- **9-10 - Registration** of delegates in Buswells Hotel
 - Light refreshment available
- **9:30-10:15 - Transfer of delegates to Leinster House**
 - Photography for media, light refreshments available
- **11 - Opening Ceremony**
 - Opening Address by An Ceann Comhairle
 - Progress report on the work of the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive 2024-2026 on School Stress
 - Speeches on the preparation for Dáil na nÓg, the theme, and the topics under consideration
 - Open floor for delegates to comment on the theme
- **12 - Workshop Session 1 /Tour**
 - Half of the delegates will go to their workshop session, and the other half will go on a tour of the Houses of Oireachtas
- **13 - Lunch**
- **14 - Workshop Session 1 /Tour**
 - Half of the delegates will go to their workshop session, and the other half will go on a tour of the Houses of Oireachtas
- **15:10 - Voting and Closing Ceremony**
 - Summary speech of the topics and recommendations brought forward to the final vote
 - Vote on the priority recommendation
 - Results of the final vote announced by the Chair
 - Closing Remarks
- **16 - Close of Dáil na nÓg**
 - Delegates move to Buswells Hotel to collect belongings and merchandise



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ANNEX III Dáil na nÓg Allocation of Funds Score Sheet Sample

Dáil na nÓg
2026

Allocation of Funds Sheet

Dáil na nÓg
2026

Group Number : _____

As a group of TD's you must agree to what amount to split the €10 million, using the points in each category (5), with a maximum 20 points total per theme. You must unanimously agree on the points for each category in BOTH themes.

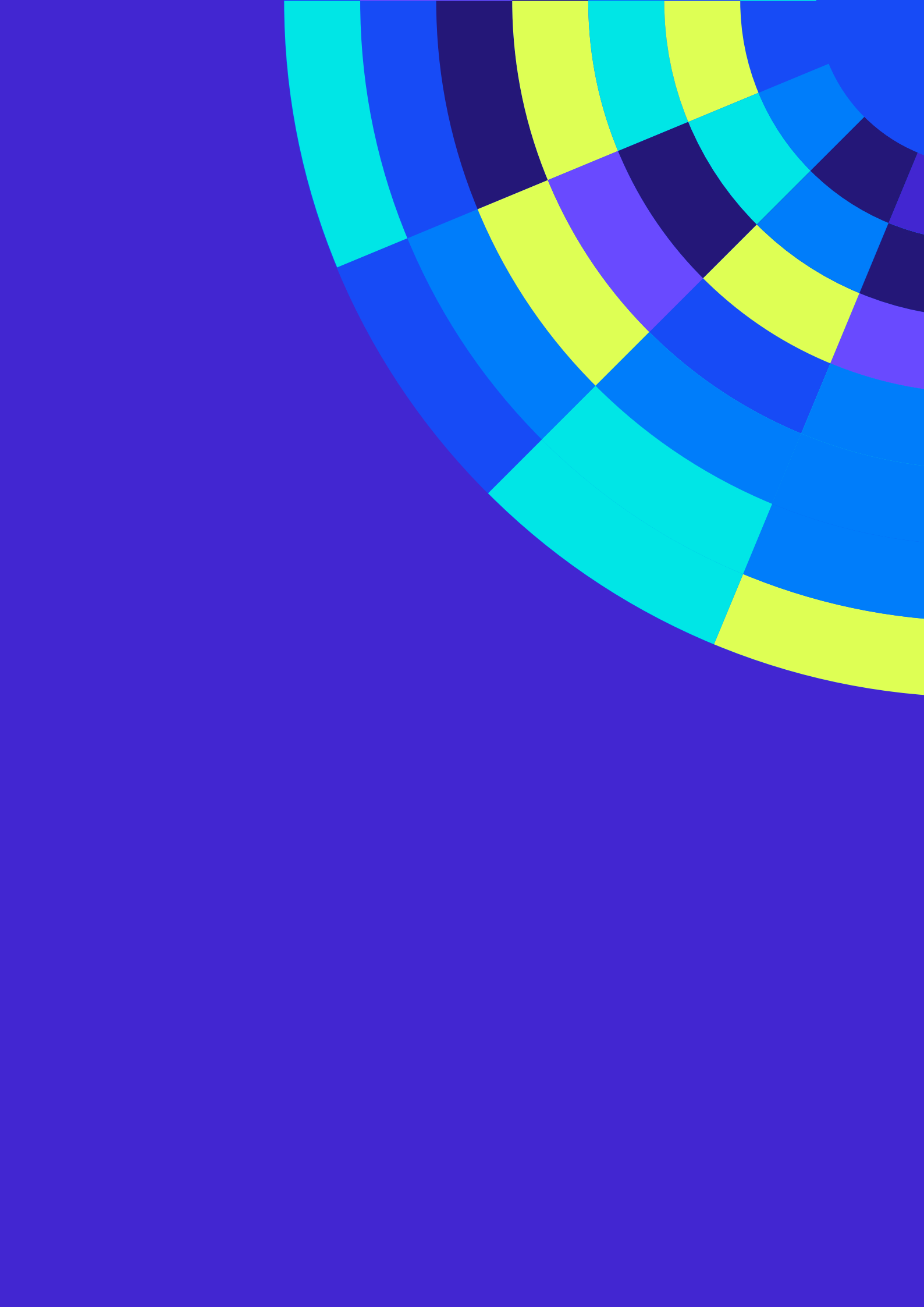
Categories Key:

Theme	A. Cost & Impact (5)	B. Number of Students Affected (5)	C. Achievable and Realistic in 5 years (5)	D. Uniqueness (5)	Total
Continuous Assessment					
Irish Language					

A. 1 = High Cost & Low Impact - 5 = Low Cost & High Impact
 B. 1 = Affected Low # of students - 5 = High # of Students
 C. 1 = Not Achievable or Realistic in 5 years - 5 = Fully Achievable in 5 years
 D. 1 = Is already fully funded - 5 = Is not funded at all

Explanation for allocation of funds for Continuous Assessment:

Explanation for allocation of funds for Irish Language:





Dãil na nŏg

2026