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# NESC@50: A Thriving Ireland

## The Views of Young People on Policy Priorities and Participation



RESEARCH PAPER

No.29 March 2024

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta  
National Economic & Social Council

An Oifig Náisiúnta um Fhorbairt Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta  
National Economic & Social Development Office NESDO





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# NESD@50: A Thriving Ireland

## The Views of Young People on Policy Priorities and Participation

A Report for NESD by Young People facilitated by the National Participation Office, and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth.

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>iii</b>
1. Background and Process	5
NESC@50 Consultation with Young People	5
2. Policy Priorities for Young People	8
Approach to Identifying Priorities	8
Priority 1: Housing and Poverty	9
Priority 2: Transport and Accommodation	10
Priority 3: Health and Wellbeing	11
Priority 4: Education	13
Priority 5: Discrimination and Equality	15
Priority 6: Climate Action	16
3. Participation in NESC@50	17

# Executive Summary

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was established in 1973 and the 50th anniversary was marked by a dedicated NESC@50 programme of research and events in 2023.

From the onset, the meaningful participation of young people was sought in the NESC@50 programme. Assistance on this aspect of the programme was provided by the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) and the National Participation Office (NPO). NESC followed the Lundy model of engagement throughout the process.

The purpose of the consultation process was to ascertain from young people their views of:

- i The key policy issues the Council should address in their work;
- ii How they should participate in the NESC@50 programme; and
- iii How, in the longer-term, the opinions of young people can feature in NESC's work.

This report focuses on **policy priority areas** for the attention by NESC and the wider policy system. In no particular order, these are:

- Housing and Poverty;
- Transport and Accommodation;
- Health and Well-being;
- Education;
- Discrimination and Equality; and
- Climate Action.

The young people also outlined some challenges in these areas, and some potential solutions.

The remainder of this report details the outcome of the consultation with young people under the NESC@50 programme, as follows:

- Section 1 - Background and Process;
- Section 2 - Policy Priorities for Young People; and
- Section 3 - Participation in NESC@50.

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## 1. Background and Process

### NESC@50 Consultation with Young People

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was established in 1973 and provides research, dialogue, and advice to the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social, and environmental development in Ireland.

From the onset, the meaningful participation of young people was sought in the NESC@50 programme. Assistance on this aspect of the programme was provided by the Department of Children, Disability, Equality, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY) and the National Participation Office (NPO). NESC has followed the Lundy model of engagement throughout the process.<sup>1</sup>

The NPO drafted an interactive youth friendly methodology to hear the views of young people. The participants of the Youth Advisory Group were recruited from Comhairle na nÓg and the National Youth Assembly of Ireland.<sup>2</sup> Online forums were held with young people on May 17<sup>th</sup> and May 24<sup>th</sup>, and an in-person roundtable workshop hosted by NESC on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The roundtable provided a valuable and enjoyable opportunity for the Secretariat to meet the group and hear their views.

The purpose of these sessions was to ascertain from young people their views of:

- The key policy issues that the Council and the policy system should address in their work;
- How they should participate in the NESC@50 programme; and
- How, in the longer-term, the opinions of young people could feature in NESC's work.

The process also used Padlet (including voting on options), World Café maps, and Jamboard.

<sup>1</sup> The Lundy model of child participation describes a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements are: space, voice, audience, influence. See here.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.comhairlenanog.ie](http://www.comhairlenanog.ie) and [www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/cea81-national-youth-assembly-of-ireland](http://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/cea81-national-youth-assembly-of-ireland).

### Demographics of the Youth Advisory Group:

Age	Location
14 years old	Cork
14 years old	Tipperary
15 years old	Laois
16 years old	Roscommon
16 years old	Mayo
17 years old	Dublin
17 years old	Donegal
19 years old	Laois
19 years old	Donegal
19 years old	Dublin
20 years old	Tipperary
21 years old	Dublin
21 years old	Cork

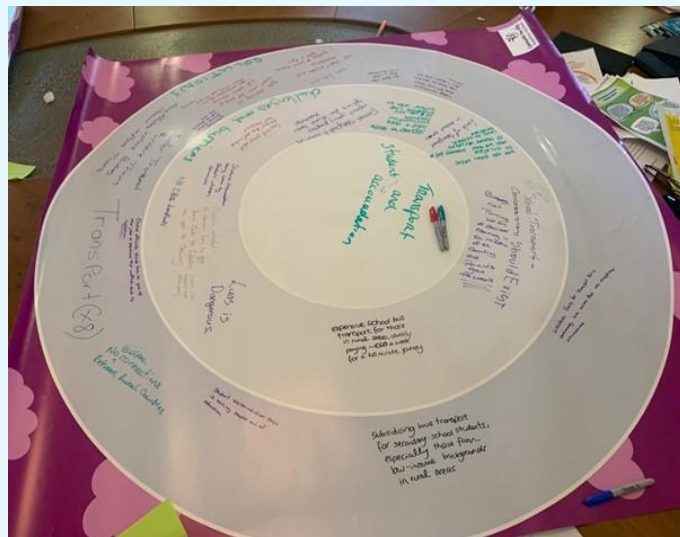
### All-Island Considerations

The NPO recruitment process was via the 31 Comhairle na nÓg youth councils in the 31 Local Authorities in Ireland (including Donegal, Monaghan, and Cavan). The Secretariat engaged bilaterally with a small number of additional youth delegates to ensure there was all-island input. The NESC Secretariat cross-referenced the outcomes of this process with that of a survey of attitudes carried out for European Movement Ireland, which included young people in Ireland and Northern Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Though not scientific, that cross-check suggested some overlap in the priority topics, and some differences. 'Housing', 'Health/Well-Being', and 'Climate' were common. 'Migration' and 'Defence and Security' were highlighted in Northern Ireland, while 'Transport/Accommodation', 'Education' and 'Discrimination/Equality' featured in Ireland.



Figure 1: NESCF@50 Consultation with Young People



## 2. Policy Priorities for Young People

### Approach to Identifying Priorities

The National Economic and Social Council consulted with young people to ascertain their views on the key challenges and opportunities facing Ireland now and in the future. Because young people had given their views on the challenges and opportunities facing Ireland as part of a number of consultations and engagements, it was decided that the Youth Advisory Group would begin their deliberations by discussing the views of children and young people that were captured in a [report](#) and [video](#) for input into Ireland's reports to the:

- UN Committees on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD); and
- UN Human Rights Council under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

In 2021, over 1,200 young people and children throughout Ireland were consulted on what issues were important to them as part of the above processes. Taking this into account, the Youth Advisory Group then worked over three sessions (two online, one in-person) to agree on the key topics that need to be addressed and explored in Ireland by NESC and the policy system.

Those sessions resulted in the young people identifying six policy priority areas for attention. In no particular order, these are:

- Housing and Poverty;
- Transport and Accommodation;
- Health and Well-being;
- Education;
- Discrimination and Equality; and
- Climate Action.

These policy areas are expanded upon in the sections below.

## Priority 1: Housing and Poverty

The Youth Advisory Group identified 'Housing and Poverty' as a priority policy area. A full listing of related policy challenges and solutions are below but those highlighted by the group are:

- Government funded and run public transport in rural areas;

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- 100% redress for mica affected families; and

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- A national building company rather than contract-build, and more high-rise instead of single.

Policy Challenges	Policy Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intersectionality and how minority groups are generally more impacted by poverty and homelessness.</li> <hr/> <li>• The focus is on luxury apartments instead of affordable.</li> <hr/> <li>• Testing for Mica costs over €3000.</li> <hr/> <li>• Certain apprenticeships don't qualify for when it comes to your mortgage application.</li> <hr/> <li>• Support for single parent families trying to afford rent or mortgage payments.</li> <hr/> <li>• More consideration needed for how we use our lands for different means e.g. housing, farming, and businesses; refurbish derelict businesses.</li> <hr/> <li>• Housing is a huge issue especially with mica affecting so many homes and families in Ireland.</li> <hr/> <li>• While we must act and take in refugees, it is important it doesn't cause huge ramifications for our tourism and hospitality sector.</li> <hr/> <li>• Direct provision services are not built for long-term living, we have accepted these people into our country. They deserve to have a sustainable place to live that is safe.</li> <hr/> <li>• It is cheaper to holiday abroad in wider EU than to go in Ireland. Many people do not get to travel within the country; lack of transport means it's inaccessible if you cannot drive.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create more opportunities for those who wish to go on and do apprenticeships.</li> <hr/> <li>• Vocational college so that people can start younger if formal education is not for them.</li> <hr/> <li>• Affordable group accommodation for youth organisations.</li> <hr/> <li>• More apprenticeship opportunities especially for early school leavers.</li> <hr/> <li>• Affordable and safe student accommodation.</li> <hr/> <li>• Means tested rent support.</li> <hr/> <li>• 100% redress for mica affected families.</li> <hr/> <li>• Begin building council houses again that are accessible.</li> <hr/> <li>• Eliminate the special sub-minimum wage for 18-year-olds-same work same pay.</li> <hr/> <li>• Legislate that new houses or apartments must be affordable to the average industrial wage person.</li> <hr/> <li>• Rent caps.</li> <hr/> <li>• Honour the commitment to end direct provision by 2024.</li> <hr/> <li>• Reinstating the eviction ban.</li> <hr/> <li>• Reform on the inheritance tax.</li> <hr/> <li>• Higher tax for people with multiple properties.</li> <hr/> <li>• Renovate and refurbish derelict buildings.</li> <hr/> <li>• Build modest accommodation near college campuses that the average student can afford.</li> <hr/> <li>• Government funded and run public transport in rural areas.</li> <hr/> <li>• More high-rise instead of single.</li> <hr/> <li>• National building company rather than contract builds.</li> <hr/> <li>• Better paid and supported builders would lead to less leaving the country.</li> </ul>

## Priority 2: Transport and Accommodation

The Youth Advisory Group identified ‘Transport and Accommodation’ as another priority policy area. A full listing of related policy challenges and solutions are below but those highlighted by the group are:

- Create bus/rail connections between rural and urban areas;

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- College accommodation should fall under rental caps, should not cost more than a student could earn in a part time job; and

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- More student purpose-built accommodation.

Policy Challenges	Policy Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student accommodation is being taken by students who can afford to pay for accommodation and live close by to college.</li> <hr/> <li>• Poor transport services limit young people’s options for third level knowledge.</li> <hr/> <li>• Dublin model - A young person has to travel through Dublin if going from Cork to Galway.</li> <hr/> <li>• Lack of transport in rural areas.</li> <hr/> <li>• Ireland’s youth have a huge accommodation problem; 20% of UCC students are living within 10km of the University.</li> <hr/> <li>• Buses not turning up on a school morning and parents have long gone to work.</li> <hr/> <li>• Expensive school bus travel for rural students especially paying €65 a week for a 45-minute round trip.</li> <hr/> <li>• The Luas is dangerous.</li> <hr/> <li>• Why are rural areas so isolated? In 1901 we had the highest rate of trains in Europe - limits of electoral outreach.</li> <hr/> <li>• School transport concessionaires shouldn’t exist.</li> <hr/> <li>• Student accommodation cost is locking people out of the education system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subsidise school transport for secondary school students - especially those from low-income backgrounds.</li> <hr/> <li>• Create bus/ rail connections between rural counties.</li> <hr/> <li>• Introduce fines for transport that is late except for exceptional circumstances.</li> <hr/> <li>• College accommodation should fall under rental cap- it should not cost more than a student could earn in a part time job.</li> <hr/> <li>• More bike racks.</li> <hr/> <li>• More student purpose-built accommodation.</li> <hr/> <li>• More legislation to protect student rights in digs.</li> <hr/> <li>• Better advertising in transport routes and methods.</li> <hr/> <li>• More communication between colleges and schools with transport companies.</li> <hr/> <li>• Safer, more affordable transport.</li> <hr/> <li>• More trains, more buses, more trams.</li> <hr/> <li>• Elected officials should have to put forward their assets in an open forum and recognise conflicts of interest.</li> </ul>

### Priority 3: Health and Wellbeing

The Youth Advisory Group identified 'Health and Well-Being' as another priority policy area. A full listing of related policy challenges and solutions are below but those highlighted by the group are:

- Increase support for young people with invisible disabilities and dyslexia;

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- Eating disorder treatment and care protocols need to be updated to ensure they can be autism friendly, gender aware and recognised all body types;

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- Non-clinical listening service counselling sessions for all second level students in schools; and

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- More courses for psychology to help meet the demand for counsellors.

Policy Challenges	Policy Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Supports for people with non-life-threatening conditions e.g. Eczema - Prescribed Cosmetic Products, Moisturisers, Steroid Creams, Ointments, and other Medicinal Products to treat non-life-threatening conditions are not on any Drugs Payment Scheme or covered by Medical Cards.</li> <hr/> <li>• Healthcare inequality.</li> <hr/> <li>• CAMHS needs more empathetic counsellors - REFORM!</li> <hr/> <li>• Lack of access to youth mental health facilities.</li> <hr/> <li>• Invisible disabilities - how are we at recognising them?</li> <hr/> <li>• Every year for the past two years, there have been fewer inpatient beds for the treatment of people with eating disorders in Ireland. This is despite the number of people with eating disorders is on the rise and the typical age bracket is growing to include much younger children. Not only are there not enough beds to treat people, they are also not local and most people have to give up seeing their family regularly so as to go through treatment.</li> <hr/> <li>• Waiting lists are too long and people need help.</li> <hr/> <li>• Unpaid internships are making it impossible for young people to get experience in the jobs that they are interested in especially those in charities and NGOs, People are overlooked, especially the youth.</li> <hr/> <li>• Healthcare training needs to change.</li> <hr/> <li>• Sexism, racism, transphobia, homophobia, and not believing people's symptoms - an overall lack of empathy.</li> <hr/> <li>• Disability and poverty, Ireland has the worst employment record in the EU because of lack of support. The employment gap between those with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of toilets in the cities so people don't have to pay for a tea or coffee to use the toilet when out in public.</li> <hr/> <li>• Increase public spaces with more benches; replace any benches that currently employ hostile architecture such as large bars so people can sleep on them.</li> <hr/> <li>• Increase support for young people with invisible disabilities and dyslexia.</li> <hr/> <li>• Fund youth work in the next budget.</li> <hr/> <li>• More teen safe areas where teens can go relax with their friends.</li> <hr/> <li>• Provide more information to young people about their condition so that they understand what is going on when they become adults.</li> <hr/> <li>• Look to the German model of inpatient care for mental health, filled days of different activities and therapies.</li> <hr/> <li>• Non-clinical listening service counselling sessions needed for all second level students in schools.</li> <hr/> <li>• More funding for youth work.</li> <hr/> <li>• More courses for psychology to help meet the demand for counsellors.</li> <hr/> <li>• We need more eating disorder treatment options in the local community. We also need to start addressing the issue that eating disorders affect people at any weight and that doctors should not wait until someone is critically ill before providing treatment. Eating disorders can be fatal and so intervention should be early.</li> <hr/> <li>• Update eating disorder treatment and care protocols to ensure they can be autism friendly, gender aware so that doctors can recognise the signs in boys / girls / men / women / nonbinary people. It needs to be recognised that people who are fat can have eating</li> </ul>

<p>disabilities and those without currently sits at 37% the highest in the EU.</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eating Disorder centres, nowhere to send people who need help and compassion, and some have to go to the UK - this is simply unacceptable.</li></ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More recognition needed for two newer eating disorders: orthorexia, an obsessive need to eat only healthy things; and Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)- much more common in the autistic community, especially in women or those assigned female at birth, but boys and men can also have it.</li></ul>	<p>disorders and should still be able to get treatment without judgement.</p>
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## Priority 4: Education

The Youth Advisory Group identified 'Education' as another priority policy area. A full listing of related policy challenges and solutions are below but those highlighted by the group are:

- Overhaul the education system to reflect the changing world. Students should be centred in this reform. Life skills and being an active citizen should be important. End written learning and memorising as a means of testing. Move to multi-choice assessment continuous assessment and project work;
- Create effective and strategic guidelines for schools so that they can run student councils more effectively; and
- Involve young people in the decision-making process in any decisions made about policy or curriculum.

Policy Challenges	Policy Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rate of pay for apprenticeships is below minimum wage, but some apprentices are expected to pay for some courses. Open-up student grants so that those who cannot afford to pay the fees are eligible.</li> <li>• Gender gap in apprenticeships. Many secondary schools in Ireland are single gender. Unless promoted in the school, they are not thought of as an option for many girls. Even in mixed schools they are still very much seen as a 'boys only' option.</li> <li>• Grants or funding that falls short of minimum wage is just not good enough.</li> <li>• Political education i.e. understanding the ideals of each political party and identifying which ones do or do not align with your views.</li> <li>• Many young people who do not go on to a third level institutions are expected to contribute to the household immediately. With pay below minimum wage for apprenticeships it is a very hard sell to parents even if over the long run they will make good earnings once the apprenticeship is over.</li> <li>• Resourcing for schools.</li> <li>• Lack of subject choice; lack of equipment.</li> <li>• Lack of teachers/examiners.</li> <li>• Policy for student participation is in the Education Act 1998-student council publication not completed since 2002.</li> <li>• Multi system needed as in the rest of Europe, instead of the Leaving Certificate.</li> <li>• Lack of alternative routes to higher education.</li> <li>• Not enough funding for youth groups – e.g. Comhairle na nÓg.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand SUSI to include apprenticeships to help alleviate some of the financial burden on families who have adults living at home making below minimum wage.</li> <li>• Reform the Education Act- a reform that involves and consults young people.</li> <li>• Involve young people in the decision-making process in any decisions made about policy or curriculum.</li> <li>• To vote at 16.</li> <li>• A small quota to eliminate bias from the selection of who is granted apprenticeships, or more spaces to allow more girls to do apprenticeships.</li> <li>• Google scholarships.</li> <li>• Interns should be paid at least the minimum wage.</li> <li>• Establish specific job supports, like a jobs' website, for young people looking for work, or an introduction to work scheme for new workers or those having trouble finding jobs.</li> <li>• Overhaul the education system to reflect the changing world. Students should be centre to this reform; life skills and being an active citizen should be important. End to written learning and memorising as a means of testing. Move to multi-choice assessment continuous assessment and project work.</li> <li>• More information on HEAR, DARE or QQJ-FET routes to college.</li> <li>• Fully means tested SUSI.</li> <li>• Reintroduce technical schools.</li> <li>• Expand Home Economics to include how to budget and take care of themselves.</li> </ul>

- Unpaid internships.
- Archaic system.
- Ineffective use of student councils.
- Why is Erasmus tied to the CAO in Ireland?
- Schools do not teach much on relationships- it should be done to give students insights into possible futures.
- Lack of cultural education, language folklore, mythology and traditions.

- Create effective and strategic guidelines for schools so that they can run student councils more effectively.
- More engagement between the Department of Education and the Department for Higher and Further Education and Skills.
- Promote more languages; Irish, ISL, Braille, Other European languages.
- Reform the CSPE and SPHE Curriculum.
- More creativity.
- Student discounts.
- Diversity education.
- Easing the transition to third level education.
- Inner-city Gaeltachts.
- Irish language courses for those outside of the education system.
- More funding.
- Expand the use of the Erasmus program; untie from the CAO.
- Transport to schools.
- Educate young people on how to vote.
- Provide support for student teachers.
- Consult young people as they are the most important stakeholders in education.
- More collaboration with schools and external organisations and youth groups.



## Priority 5: Discrimination and Equality

The Youth Advisory Group identified 'Discrimination and Equality' as a priority policy area. A full listing of related policy challenges and solutions are below but those highlighted by the group are:

- Action-based and a follow-up reporting system for hate speech;

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- More and better education around different cultures and ethnic minorities; and

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- More and better education around respectful and inclusive language to use.

Policy Challenges	Policy Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness of different cultures, ethnic backgrounds etc.</li> <hr/> <li>• Very few platforms for those in the Roma or Traveller communities to speak their voice.</li> <hr/> <li>• No way to respond to hate speech- when someone experiences hate speech what do we do?</li> <hr/> <li>• Micro aggression and unconscious bias.</li> <hr/> <li>• Those with disabilities sometimes aren't visible can lead to discrimination and sometimes might hinder the accessibility to opportunities.</li> <hr/> <li>• "Racism doesn't exist in Ireland."</li> <hr/> <li>• Lack of education around respectful and inclusive language that should be used.</li> <hr/> <li>• Older generations are more small-minded than younger generations and are less accepting of differences such as LGBTQIA+.</li> <hr/> <li>• Older people not believing in mental illness or other conditions such as ADHD or Autism.</li> <hr/> <li>• There's a lack of education regarding different ways of communication; most schools in Ireland teach through English but we don't learn how to communicate through ISL Braille or Irish.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More and better education around different cultures and ethnic minorities.</li> <hr/> <li>• More and better education around respectful and inclusive language to use.</li> <hr/> <li>• Give a dedicated space for those in the Roma and Traveller community within policy.</li> <hr/> <li>• Action based and follow-up reporting system for hate speech.</li> <hr/> <li>• Representation in policy making.</li> </ul>

## Priority 6: Climate Action

Finally, the Youth Advisory Group identified ‘Climate Action’ as a final priority policy area. A full listing of related policy challenges and solutions are below but those highlighted by the group are:

- Raise awareness of climate change with personal impacts e.g. islands being flooded over due to rising sea levels and wildfires wiping out whole towns due to rising temperatures;

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- A conscious effort to assist rural Ireland; and

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- Work towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’ targets properly.

Policy Challenges	Policy Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no rural access to public transport.</li> <hr/> <li>• Farming communities are asked to go green without enough support from the government to do so.</li> <hr/> <li>• Nobody knows what the SDGs are- more people should know about them.</li> <hr/> <li>• Lack of financial resources.</li> <hr/> <li>• People don’t know how serious climate change is and how fast it is happening.</li> <hr/> <li>• It detrimentally affects rural Ireland.</li> <hr/> <li>• Lack of ownership of the climate crisis and lack of leadership to fix it.</li> <hr/> <li>• Media branding “The hottest day on record” with a picture of a child eating an ice cream making it seem like a good thing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise awareness of climate change with personal impacts e.g. islands being flooded over due to rising sea levels and wildfires wiping out whole towns due to rising temperatures.</li> <hr/> <li>• A conscious effort needed to assist rural Ireland.</li> <hr/> <li>• Work towards SDGs targets properly.</li> </ul>

### 3. Participation in NESC@50

In addition to revealing the key policy issues the Council should address in their work, a second purpose of the consultation process was to ascertain from young people their views of how they should participate in the NESC@50 programme.

In response, the young people outlined four means of participation in the Council's programme:

- Being part of a section of a NESC Council Meeting and presenting on their policy priorities as revealed in the consultation;

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- Attending the NESC@50 Conference in November 2023;

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- Featuring in a video for NESC@50; and

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- Having their views, as summarised in this report, feature in some way in the NESC@50 report, which will go to government in 2024.

On these first and fourth points, this paper and the accompanying presentation to the Council have fulfilled this aspect of their participation. Regarding the second and third points, members of the Youth Advisory Group both attended the [November conference](#) and contributed to a [video](#) that was shown at the event.

Finally, a separate process is required to determine how young people could connect on an ongoing basis with NESC and the Council's work programme, and this issue will be returned to by NESC.



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