



NYCI Pre-Budget Submission 2009

'..A focus on young people and their needs will be a particular priority for the Government...' Brian Cowen (7th May 2008).

From Commitments to Action

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National Youth Council of Ireland

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Dublin 2

Budget 2009: NYCI Submission

Summary of Recommendations

Implement Government Commitments

As we enter into the third year of the Social Partnership agreement and the second year of the implementation of the Programme for Government, NYCI urges the Government to honour its commitments in both agreements. Of particular concern to NYCI is the need to ensure sustained investment in the areas outlined below to ensure that we continue to address and improve the well being and lives of children and young people in 2009.

1. Address Educational Disadvantage

- Adequately Resource the Nationwide Education Welfare Service.
- Establish a €20million Scheme for Approved Part-Time Courses.

2. Invest in Youth Work

- Build on the investment of the last number of years and ensure we maintain the levels of services and supports for young people.
- Meet the cost of living increases of youth organisations by increasing the funding for the youth service grant scheme and the youth work sector by 5% (€2m) in Budget 2009.

3. Promote Young People's Health

- Implement the commitment in the Programme for Government to double the income threshold limits for the full medical card for the parents of children under 6 in Budget 2009.
- Increase funding to the National Office for Suicide Prevention.

4. End Child Poverty

- Increase Qualified Child Allowance by €4 to €8 per week and by a further €4 per week to €32 for children aged 12 +.

5. Protect the rights of Young People within the Private Rented Sector

- Abolish the current differential in the rent tax relief available to those under and over 55 by providing the same tax relief to all claimants.
- Invest adequate resources for inspections and enforcement of regulations to ensure greater compliance with the revised standards for the private rented sector.

6. Encourage Active Citizenship

- Invest in the implementation of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship, with a particular emphasis on actions and measures to promote and foster active citizenship amongst young people.

Introduction

Budget 2009 must deliver on a number of priority issues that affect the lives of young people in Ireland. There is a growing realisation that the choices we make today will in effect create the future in which we and coming generations will live. We acknowledge the current challenging economic conditions where growth and exchequer resources are reduced. However it is vital that in a period when resources are less abundant, that we ensure the most vulnerable in society are protected, and that resources are invested in our citizens that will enable them to deal with and address the current challenges now and into the future. The decisions taken now which impact on the lives of children and young people will have a long term effect and it is therefore vital that the correct decisions are taken.

The Taoiseach acknowledged this in his address to the Dáil on the day of his election as Taoiseach¹.

“It is the youth of this nation who will determine that our peaceful island remains a safe and secure place for all our people to live. It is our youth who will determine how 21st century Ireland meets the challenges of an increasingly globalised economy. It is our young people who will help to shape the environmental destiny of our island, this Continent and the wider world”

We also welcome his comments on that day that for his administration that;

“..a clear signal that a focus on young people and their needs will be a particular priority for the Government”

NYCI will be expecting evidence of this in the forthcoming Budget. We expect Government to put their commitments into action. For NYCI young people must be valued and given every opportunity to flourish. Not only does our society depend on State investment in services and supports for young people, so too does our economy in order to ensure sustained prosperity. Young people have a right to benefit from an adequately resourced and equitable education system (both formal and non-formal) and health care system. They also deserve the right to essential supports within their communities, decent facilities and greater financial supports for those residing in the private rented sector. The priority policy areas we have identified are of paramount importance to young people. We believe that such policy changes, if implemented, will contribute towards the personal, social and economic well being of young people which in turn will benefit Irish society as a whole. This is particularly true of the most vulnerable, disadvantaged young people who are most prohibited by inequities in current social policies and practice. As a result they are often prevented from achieving their full potential and engaging fully in Irish society.

Investing in the lives of children and young people is important. The significance of enhancing a young person’s confidence and capacity to participate more fully in society cannot be understated. Such investment will lead to a more culturally enriched, fairer and integrated society which will benefit all. Failure to address the policy areas identified in an adequate manner will

¹ An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D. Dail Eireann May 7th 2008.

undoubtedly jeopardise the future prospects of many young people - having profound repercussions for Irish society in the future.

In this submission, NYCI outline what we believe to be priorities for Government action and spending:

- Address Educational Disadvantage
- Invest in Youth Work
- Promote Young People's Health
- End Child Poverty
- Protect the rights of Young People within the Private Rented Sector
- Encourage Active Citizenship

Subject	1. ADDRESS EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE
Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately Resource the Nationwide Education Welfare Service. • Establish a €20million Scheme for Approved Part-Time Courses.
Rationale	<p>Tackling Educational Disadvantage is recognised as a key challenge by Government and other bodies. Ireland’s level of early school leaving remains high and will contribute to ongoing social and economic problems in the years ahead.</p> <p>Despite Government policy focusing strongly on addressing educational disadvantage and early school leaving over the years, a significant proportion of young people continue to leave upper second level without a qualification.</p> <p><i>A National Education Welfare Service</i> The work of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is vital in tackling school absenteeism and early school leaving. It is imperative that there is sustained commitment and investment in the National Education Welfare Service and other significant educational programmes to ensure significant progress is made to combat early school leaving, increase the number of young people successfully completing second level education and retain young people in education and training.</p> <p>The Social Partnership Agreement ‘Towards 2016’ acknowledged the need for additional resources to be allocated to the NEWB and NEPS and committed to provide 100 extra staff for both agencies by 2009. To date only an additional 15 posts have been allocated to the NEWB and there are 25 posts outstanding. It is vital that Budget 2009 provides funding to fully roll out the commitment in Towards 2016 to provide for an additional 25 EWO’s.</p> <p><i>Establish a €20million Scheme for Approved Part-Time Courses</i> In the current economic climate, there is a need to improve, promote and resource a range of education and training opportunities for young people with poor or redundant qualifications and skills. Such measures include second chance learning opportunities, and the provision and promotion of up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities for young workers vulnerable to redundancy and unemployment.</p> <p>Furthermore the existence of part-time fees means that for many further and higher education is not an option. The cost of financing a part-time course places a considerable burden on a student, many of whom struggle to balance work and family life and in some cases the cost of child-care.</p> <p>“Towards 2016” committed to the “establishment of a fund to abolish part-time fees for students in employment attending public institutions who have never previously pursued third level education” (2006, 82). The current Government also committed in the Programme for Government 2007 – 2012 to introducing “a new system of means-tested free fees for approved part-time courses. Together with incentives for colleges to offer more flexible and diverse course structures, this will enable more people with work or family commitments to avail of opportunities at third level” (2007). No date, however, no progress has been made to advance/progress this commitment.</p>

	NYCI is calling on Government to honour its commitment in “Towards 2016” and in the current Programme for Government to establish a €20million scheme for free fees for approved part-time courses for employees attending public institutions who have never pursued third level education before.						
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Responsibility	Office of the Minister for Education and Science						

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Subject	2. INVEST IN YOUTH WORK
Proposal	<p>Build on the ongoing investment to ensure an incremental structured commitment of funding to the Youth Work Sector: Commit to making an allocation of an additional 2 million minimum on the 2008 allocation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate the required ongoing funding to continue the Implementation of key agreed priorities of both the Youth Work Act 2001 and the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003-2007. • Progress the implementation of the funding review of the sector and establish a structured funding mechanism that recognises the core funding needs of organisations. • Provide the resources necessary to deliver on the commitment in the NDP and the Programme for Government to develop a successor to the National Youth Work Development Plan for the period 2008 – 2012.
Rationale	<p>Youth Work represents huge value for money and makes a vital contribution to the education of our young people. By giving young people the opportunity to participate in a range of non-formal, but structured activities, Youth Work fosters the social and personal skills that young people need to face key challenges in the transition from childhood to adulthood. More than 50 Youth Organisations operate in Ireland run by a combination of paid staff and volunteer leaders. Currently the ratio is some 1,000 paid staff to 40,000 volunteers.</p> <p>NYCI welcomed the improved allocations made over the 4 years between 2003 and 2007 but whilst recognising the different economic climate that now faces us, were still somewhat disappointed at the 3% allocation made for 2008. It is now even more vital in the economic climate that we now face, that investment in support services for young people is maintained. NYCI and its member organisations are key to this process and it is therefore paramount that the allocation made to the Youth Affairs budget for 2009 provides funding that at least matches the increase in inflation and cost of living. This we calculate to be in the region of 2 million euro. It is essential that in the current climate the Government delivers on its commitment to support the youth sector and not see it as an easy target for possible cut-backs.</p> <p>It remains a concern that the current process of funding provision to Youth Affairs still operates on an ‘ad hoc’ basis. The lack of a structured funding mechanism means that organisations and the sector are unable to develop even medium term capacity building plans due to the uncertainty of future funding. It is essential therefore that the Government commit to an incremental funding structure for the youth work sector to enable capacity and development planning to take place.</p> <p>Despite the improved allocations received in previous years, there are still issues relating to the implementation of the Youth Work Act and Development Plan. The current plan due to be completed in 2007 still has a number of key priorities not implemented. A commitment to providing the required funding in a staged process over the next 5 years to put in place an updated and revised Development Plan would be a significant indication of Governments</p>

	<p>commitment to delivering on its Programme for Government.</p> <p>Furthermore the Government must support the ongoing development of capacity within the youth sector to enable the effective implementation of the Act and any Development Plan that is in place. This cannot happen in the current funding climate where organisations and programmes come under increased pressure due to the uncertainty of future funding. Additional sustained core funding must be made available to ensure that essential programmes involving thousands of young people are not lost, and that organisations are able to build on current capacity to improve their service to the sector.</p>				
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Responsibility	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs				

Subject	3. PROMOTE YOUNG PEOPLE’S HEALTH
Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the commitment in the Programme for Government to double the income threshold limits for the full medical card for the parents of children under 6 in Budget 2009 and extend this provision to all families with children under 18 years. • Provide the resources to the National Office for Suicide Prevention to ensure the full implementation of the “Reach Out” Strategy.
Rationale	<p><i>Medical Cards</i></p> <p>Currently, the number of children and young people under 18 covered by the General Medical Services Scheme is 315,505. ² The number of people on the scheme has declined in the last 25 years from 39% to under 28%. Despite an increase in the eligibility level in 2005, the means test eligibility level has not kept pace with rising inflation and incomes over the last ten years.</p> <p>Many low income families do not have access to a medical card. This in turn is creating a barrier to the uptake of medical services due to an inability to pay. A study by the Combat Poverty Agency³ found that up to a quarter of a million people at risk of poverty were unable to get a medical card because their incomes were slightly above the eligibility threshold. One of the main principles of health promotion is the reduction of health inequalities and yet the most significant factor affecting health and the promotion of health is one’s socio-economic status. This inequity is reflected in the long waiting lists for public hospital care and in the uncovered costs of primary health care for the vast majority of Irish children and young people.</p> <p>NYCI strongly supports the commitment in the Programme for Government with respect to medical cards and the doubling of the income thresholds for the full medical card for families with children under 6 years. We want to see this commitment implemented as soon as possible. NYCI also believes that Government should extend this provision, not only to children under 6, but to all families with children under 18 years.</p> <p><i>Mental Health needs of Young People</i></p> <p>The Mental Health needs of young people must become a priority for Government. Increased funding of the National Office for Suicide Prevention is essential to the welfare of young people. Ireland currently has the 7th highest rate of Youth Suicide in the EU. ⁴ Research on Form 104 has suggested that the level of under reporting of suicide is estimated at 6% however, research conducted by Senator Mary White suggests that the real measure of suicides in Ireland would be about one quarter higher than the official figures for suicide when account is taken of suicides contained in “undetermined” deaths and road traffic fatalities.⁵</p>

² Response to Dáil Question by Minister Mary Harney T.D. 10th July 2008.

³ Combat Poverty Agency June 27th 2007 <http://www.cpa.ie/press/index.htm>

⁴ National Office for Suicide Prevention, 2008.

⁵ What we can do about Suicide in the New Ireland, Senator Mary White, July 2008.

	<p>Since the publication of the <i>Reach Out</i> strategy document three years ago €3.5m. has been made available to the NOSP as opposed to the initial costing of €5.5m. A further €1m from within the HSE has been made available to fund existing projects. Although the NOSP did not seek bids for funding in 2008, 26 bids were received from statutory and non-statutory organisations totalling €3.8m , which demonstrates clearly the need for greater resources to develop specific suicide prevention initiatives.⁶</p> <p>A fund of €2m should be allocated to the NOSP in order to facilitate the work of agencies in suicide prevention initiatives.</p> <p>The funding for dedicated suicide resources officers (SRO) appears also to be lacking. Currently, there are only 8 SRO's out of a total of 11 in post.⁷ The presence of a SRO is vital to the local community, offering support, information and training to both professionals and the public. They also offer crucial support to the community in times of crisis. The Programme for Government includes a target of reducing the rate of suicide by 20%, for this target to be met it is imperative that the NOSP receives adequate funding to ensure a full compliment of SRO are available throughout the country.</p>								
<p>Cost for Medical Card provision</p> <p>Cost for Mental Health Funding</p>	<table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="365 1031 1266 1113">Extending Medical Card Coverage⁸</td> <td data-bbox="1266 1031 1494 1113">€80m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="365 1113 1266 1197">Funding for NOSP for 2009 to be increased to €5.5M.</td> <td data-bbox="1266 1113 1494 1197">€2m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="365 1197 1266 1281">Funding to resource further suicide specific prevention Initiatives</td> <td data-bbox="1266 1197 1494 1281">€2m</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="365 1281 1266 1388">Total</td> <td data-bbox="1266 1281 1494 1388"><u>€84m</u></td> </tr> </table>	Extending Medical Card Coverage⁸	€80m	Funding for NOSP for 2009 to be increased to €5.5M.	€2m	Funding to resource further suicide specific prevention Initiatives	€2m	Total	<u>€84m</u>
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<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>Office of the Minister for Health and Children</p>								

⁶ Presentation to Joint Committee on Health and Children Sub Committee on Suicide Prevention by Geoff Day, 25th July, 2008.

⁷ There is a 9th SRO due to commence in post shortly, however, this still leaves a shortage of 2 SRO's in areas of need.

⁸ The Department of Health & Children estimated that the cost of extending full medical card coverage to all children and young people aged 0 – 17 would be approximately €16m based on figures from the HSE and the CSO. However they also stated that this figure does not take into account a number of cost factors which may increase this figure. We estimate that our proposal would bring another 200,000 young people into the medical card scheme costing the state in the region of €80m.

Subject	4. END CHILD POVERTY						
Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Qualified Child Allowance by €4 to €28 per week and by a further €4 per week to €32 for children aged 12 +. 						
Rationale	<p>NYCI believes that income support is essential to eliminate child poverty in Ireland and to ensure that those most at risk of poverty are provided with adequate income supports to allow them to live with dignity and engage fully in society.</p> <p>Although Ending Child Poverty is committed to in numerous Government Strategies, to date it remains a substantial concern for Irish society. The statistics are alarming and reflect the brevity of the situation in respect of the prevalence of child poverty in Ireland:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One in nine children in Ireland is living in consistent poverty (CSO, 2005). • 10.7% of children under 18 years are living in consistent poverty – that is over 111,000 children living in households on an income below the poverty line and experiencing deprivation such as having to go without heating due to lack of money or experiencing debt problems arising from ordinary living expenses (EU SILC, 2005). • Just under 240,000 children were living in relative poverty in 2005 (a rate of 23.1%) (EU SILC, 2005). <p>Last year’s Budget was no exception with child related payments receiving only marginal increases - school-going children under 6 received less than €6 a week, and children in secondary school received less than €4.</p> <p>As we enter into an economic recession and the prospect of increased unemployment rates, children living in low income families will be first to suffer financial pressures. Children living in families below the income threshold are extremely vulnerable to poverty. To protect these vulnerable families, Budget 2009 needs to increase the rate of Qualified Child Allowance by €4 to €28 per week for all children and a further €4 per week to €32 for children aged 12 + to remove the poverty trap that exists among low-income parents in receipt of Qualified Child Allowance.</p>						
Cost	<table> <tr> <td>Increase Qualified Child Allowance by €4 to €28 per week</td> <td style="text-align: right;">€71m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Increase Qualified Child Allowance by a further €4 per week to €32 for children aged 12 +.</td> <td style="text-align: right;">€32m</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td style="text-align: right;"><u>€103m</u></td> </tr> </table>	Increase Qualified Child Allowance by €4 to €28 per week	€71m	Increase Qualified Child Allowance by a further €4 per week to €32 for children aged 12 +.	€32m	Total	<u>€103m</u>
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Total	<u>€103m</u>						

Responsibility	Office of the Minister for Social and Family Affairs Department of Finance.
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Subject	5. PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITHIN THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR
Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double Rent Relief for all claimants under 55 • Provide additional resources for ensuring compliance with new standards.
Rationale	<p><i>Double Rent Relief</i></p> <p>After a decade of spiralling house prices, house prices have stabilised or have come down in some parts of the country, however many young people and families with children who were previously unable to afford a home are now unable to get mortgages due to the restrictions imposed by the banks in light of the global credit crunch. Therefore contrary to opinion many young people are still finding it very difficult to purchase a home. Those who aspire to buying a home find it difficult to save given the high cost of renting. The latest figures from the CSO indicate that rents increased by 7.8% in the 12 months to July 2008.⁹ This was on top of a 10.8% increase last year. While the headline figure last year in the Budget was that rent tax relief increased by 11%, in real terms the increase in rent tax relief was worth just €40 per annum for single people under 55 which is only €0.77c per week.</p> <p>The tax system currently provides relatively generous tax relief (tax forgone) to some landlords as the rent a room scheme allows them to earn €10,000 tax free, while offering minimal tax relief to the tenant. The current rent relief amounts to a tax credit worth €400 per annum for single persons and €800 per annum for widowed persons and married couples under 55. Based on the average rent across the State the current tax relief for a single person is equivalent to about 2 weeks rent. In order to provide some support to young people who cannot afford to buy a house or who are struggling to save to buy a home, we believe the Government should double the rent tax relief to a more realistic level. The current system differentiates between those under 55 and those over 55, single persons under 55 are eligible for a tax relief of €400 (€2000 x 20%) while a single person over 55 is eligible for a relief of €800 (€4000 x 20%). In 2005 only 2% of recipients¹⁰ qualified for the over 55 rate. Therefore we propose that the Government remove this differential and allow all claimants irrespective of age to claim the same tax relief. Therefore a single person of any age would get a relief of €800 while a married/widowed person would qualify for a relief of €1600.</p> <p><i>Ensure compliance with new Standards</i></p> <p>We welcome the recent commitment of Government to revise the standards and regulations for the private rented sector. It is important that tenants are not paying high rents for low standards which impact on their health and reduce their quality of life. The new standards will be meaningless unless they are enforced. Some local authorities have a good record in this regard, some do not and have inspected no or very few properties. We acknowledge that the funding increased from €2m in 2007 to €3m in 2008. This is still inadequate given that there were up to 132,843 properties registered up to December 2006. We believe that funding for greater enforcement should be doubled from €3m to €6m. .</p>

⁹ Central Statistic Office, Prices Division 8th August 2008.

¹⁰ Revenue Commissioners, 2005 data, August 2008

Cost	Rent Tax Relief	€48m
	Increase funding for enforcement and inspections	€3m
	Total	<u>€51 m</u>
Responsibility	Office of the Minister for The Environment, Heritage and Local Government.	

Subject	6. ENCOURAGE ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP
Proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding and implementation of recommendations as made by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.
Rationale	<p>We believe that young people are central to the challenge of active citizenship. We need to build a society that values young people as active contributors to our society ‘in the present tense’, as well as nurturing their ability in playing a positive role throughout their lives. Already many young people contribute to the health of their communities through their involvement in positive and developmental activities in youth organisations in practically every part of the country. This work is supported by tens of thousands of adult youth leaders who give considerable time on a voluntary basis every week of the year. It is crucial to the development of youth services that the recommendations as made by the Taskforce are funded and implemented.</p> <p><i>Electoral Commission</i></p> <p>Of particular importance is the recommendation by the Taskforce of the establishment of an Independent Electoral Commission.</p> <p>In the Local Government Act of 2001, Section 64 (2) (d) it states that Local Authorities should “<i>promote interest among young people in democracy and local government and in community and civic affairs generally</i>”. We believe that introducing an Electoral Commission would go some of the way to meeting that commitment in that registration would not be an obstacle to young people voting. Many of the decisions taken by local authorities’ impact directly on young people. Aside from the obvious matters such as community facilities and amenities designed for teenagers and young adults, other matters to do with social inclusion, housing, public transport, and planning are of real relevance to young people, therefore it is important that they are encouraged to use their vote.</p> <p>According to the CSO¹¹, significant differences were revealed in voter participation in the May 2002 General Election between younger and older persons. Just over 40% of young adult respondents aged 18-19, and only 53% of those aged 20-24, indicated that they voted in the election. For those under 25, not being registered was the biggest factor in not voting. Of the 18-19 year olds, 39.4% did not vote because they were not registered compared to just 10.8% of 45-54 year olds, and of 20-24 year olds, 25.5% did not vote because they were not registered. Therefore registration is the most significant factor which inhibits young people from voting.</p> <p>An Independent Electoral Commission would address this and encourage everyone who is eligible to register and vote in elections. NYCI suggest a fund of €1m Euro to be set up in order to implement this recommendation.</p>
Cost	Total €1m
Responsibility	Office of the Department of the Taoiseach.

¹¹ Central Statistics Office, Quarterly National Household Survey, *Voter Participation and Abstention*, Third Quarter 2002.