



## Conference Report



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A photograph of a public event, possibly a science fair or exhibition. In the foreground, a person's hand is reaching out to touch a blue cardboard box. The box has a circular logo on it that says "One" and "EXPERIENCE". The background is filled with a crowd of people, mostly out of focus. The entire image has a strong magenta/pink color overlay.

# Introduction

# Introduction

The Our Needs in Education (ONE) Conference is an annual event facilitated by the Regional Advisory Group (RAG) and Local Advisory Groups (LAG). The RAG and LAG groups advise on the regional and local delivery plans for Youth Service which, in turn, determine how resources will be deployed. These groups encompass a wide range of stakeholders including other government departments, the voluntary and community sector, school leaders, members of the wider community and most importantly, young people themselves.

The EA One Conference is organised and facilitated by young leaders who have either attended or will attend a One Young World global summit. One Young World is a global organisation which identifies, promotes, and connects young leaders from around the world who strive to create a better world, with more responsible and effective leadership. Each year, delegates from over 190 countries attend One Young World to discuss social impact projects within their communities which relate to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The workshops and activities offered as part of the ONE Conference link directly to these Development Goals.

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals:

- End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- End hunger and achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
- Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.
- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,
- Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
- Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.
- Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.
- Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.
- Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.



The aim of the conference is to provide young people with a voice to help shape the future direction and provision of education in Northern Ireland and provide an arena in which these young people can share thoughts and opinions with representatives from the Independent Review of Education. This provides a unique opportunity for the young people present and offers a space to create the waves of change they want to see in terms of educational reform.

## Key themes of the Conference

- The embedding of sustainable development goals into Northern Ireland.
- Pathways for employment - beyond the option of university.
- Participation of children and young people in education particularly within schools.
- The curriculum offer – exploration of the disconnect between young people’s lived experiences and the issues of health, sexual health, orientation, and identity.
- The digital divide and the impact of digital poverty as well as the key issue of online safety.
- Emotional health and wellbeing including experiential holistic approaches to the curriculum.

## Aim

The Conference aim is to provide an opportunity for regional and local advisory groups to engage on the key themes, be involved in discussions with core decision makers, inclusive of the Youth Service, and ultimately influence plans for 2022 – 2023.

## Objectives

- To provide an opportunity for participants to be directly involved in the Independent Review of Education.
- To provide an opportunity for children & young people, youth workers and decision makers to network across the sector.
- To create and explore new opportunities for young people.
- To provide support to explore key themes directly affecting children and young people.
- To provide an opportunity for children and young people to influence Youth Service plans for 2022/23.
- To prepare the participants of One Young World for the Tokyo and Belfast summits.
- To raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and their importance for the local and global economy and quality of life.

Five workshops have been designed and will be delivered by One Young World delegates. The workshops will allow participants to reflect on a range of various topics and provide feedback to help the Independent Review of Education, the Department of Education, and the Education Authority to plan future service provision.

The workshops are based on the following themes:

- **Teens and Screens: Digital Safety for All.**
  - The Digital Safety workshop explores the rising digital safety implications for young people. It examines the continuously changing landscape that is becoming increasingly difficult to monitor and regulate. It outlines how young people need to be aware of the dangers, how they can enhance their digital awareness and the steps required to be safer online.



- **Be Here, Be Heard: Voice, Rights, Space!**
  - This workshop explores the idea of how young people participate in decision making, have their voice heard and create change.
- **Environmental Education.**
  - This workshop focuses on the importance of environmental education. It provides participants with opportunities to discuss how they can help tackle the climate, nature, and biodiversity crises by using education as a tool for change.
- **How Youth Work Can Aid in Pathway into Education.**
  - This workshop provides young people with an opportunity to explore the Youth Service and what it has to offer. It will discuss innovative opportunities that young people can pursue in a non-formal educational setting.
- **The Wonders of Wellbeing.**
  - This workshop allows participants to explore music and art therapy and to hear from young leaders who have established a social action project to support the wellbeing of young people in Northern Ireland.







# Conference Organising Committee

## Conference Organising Committee

Arlene Kee	Education Authority Youth Service
Paul Deighan	Education Authority Youth Service
Stephanie Craig	Education Authority Youth Service
Gareth McCauley	Education Authority Youth Service
Chris Mercer	Education Authority Youth Service
Conor Forker	One Young World
Nicole Parkinson-Kelly	One Young World
Arón Hughes	One Young World
Lauren MacAreavey	One Young World
Alana Cahoon	One Young World
Philip Black	One Young World
Jenny Rogan	One Young World
Adam Willis	One Young World
Joel White	One Young World
Rosalind Skillen	One Young World
Dakota Reid	One Young World
Frances Logan	One Young World
Torrie Canning	One Young World
Conor Fitzpatrick	One Young World
Aaron Smith	One Young World
Cliona Deeds	One Young World
Matthew Taylor	One Young World
Caitlin Morgan	One Young World
Aine Linden	One Young World
Kristy McCann	One Young World
Aimee Clint	One Young World





A woman in a blue sweater is pointing towards a presentation screen during a conference. She has a surprised or excited expression on her face. In the background, other attendees are visible, some looking towards the screen. The entire image has a green color overlay.

# Conference Programme



# Conference Programme

- 09:15 – 10:00      **Arrivals & Breakfast**
- 09:15 – 10:00      **Marketplace open around Renaissance Suite**  
(Employers who can provide opportunities for young people aged 16+)
- 10:15                **Main stage welcome – 2 hosts (Arón & Nicole)**  
Introduction & Purpose of the Conference  
Health & Safety brief  
Outcomes to be achieved from the conference
- 10:30                **Keynote Speeches**  
Arón Hughes – RSE  
Lauren MacAreavey – Youth Voice  
Niall McGhee - Pure Mental NI  
*Theme: Dreams, hopes and aspirations for the education of children & young people in Northern Ireland*
- 11:15                **Roundtable reflection and postcards** complete on our personal dreams, hopes and aspirations
- 11:30 – 12:15      **Workshop 1**  
- Digital  
- Environment  
- Youth Voice  
- Leadership/Pathways  
- Mindfulness  
(Each workshop will end with participants agreeing a summative statement representing their needs within Education)
- 12:15 – 13:15      **Lunch in Renaissance Suite**
- 13:15 – 14:00      **Workshop 2**
- 14:00 – 14:10      **Keynote Address by Matthew Taylor**
- 14:10 – 14:30      **Roundtable discussions on personal learning** for the day and key actions for the Regional Youth Development Plan
- 14:30 – 14:40      **Summative Statements** communicated to the conference (10 in total)
- 14:40 – 15:15      **Panel Discussion**
- 15:15 – 15:20      **Highlight video**
- 15:20 – 15:30      **Closing statements** from Barry Mulholland, Chairperson of the Education Authority Board



A man wearing glasses and a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt is standing at a podium, looking down at a tablet device. The podium is a tall, thin metal structure. In the background, there are large windows with blinds, and two chairs are visible in the foreground. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

# Keynote Addresses

# Keynote Addresses

## **Arón Hughes**

### **Relationship and Sexuality Education**

Arón spoke about the challenges he faced growing up as a young gay person in West Belfast and the lack of support he received from his school.

Arón explained that Relationship and Sexuality Education was an element of the education curriculum which was optional for schools and that some schools refuse to teach it as it goes against the school ethos.

Arón elaborated on the importance of educating children and young people about Relationship and Sexuality as it focuses on topics ranging from consent to sexual health awareness; digital safety; understanding different types of relationships; and allowing young people to explore their sexual identity.

## **Lauren MacAreavey**

### **Youth Voice, Youth Participation, Youth Rights**

Lauren spoke passionately about her experience of learning about and campaigning for youth voice, youth participation and youth rights.

Lauren drew upon her own personal circumstances to illustrate a time when she felt unheard in relation to her own health. Lauren felt she was not being listened to by the adults and health care advisers around her during her two year diagnosis journey.

This journey taught her that all young people need to have a voice that is listened to and respected. This in turn encourages positive change and could lead to the creation of safe spaces for other children and young people to learn and grow and discover their own values and beliefs.

## **Niall McGhee**

### **Mental Health**

Niall spoke candidly about the death of his father from suicide when Niall was 11 years of age and his own battle with mental health following this life altering event.

Niall articulated how the school and his teachers struggled to adequately support him after the death of his father, which in turn resulted in the decline of his own mental health.

Niall stressed that both schools and education systems need to address the lack of mental health support available to children and young people and emphasised the need for better training for all teachers to support these vulnerable children and young people.

Niall also highlighted the importance of counselling and having counsellors more readily available within school settings to support children and young people.





## **Matthew Taylor**

### **Pure Mental**

Matthew discussed his time at school when he struggled with his personal identity and the feeling of not fitting in with his peers. As a result, he set up a wellbeing council in his 6th year which led to the creation of what is now Pure Mental NI which is the only youth led mental health charity in NI.

Matthew spoke about the work carried out by Pure Mental NI which includes providing resources for primary schools to support vulnerable children. Matthew also referred to the research paper published by Pure Mental which influenced the Department of Education primary school counselling policy.

Matthew explained that in the early days of Pure Mental NI, there was a strong need to raise awareness of mental health in schools and the wider education system. This led to a decision to protest and advocate these needs in Belfast City Centre. This act supported a key aspect of Pure Mental NI to lobby and influence politicians in NI to ensure positive and effective change.





A young woman with dark hair is shown in profile, focused on writing in a notebook. She is holding a yellow highlighter in her right hand. The notebook is open, and she appears to be writing on a page with some text and a small diagram. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The text "Young People's Needs in Education" is centered over the image in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

# Young People's Needs in Education



# Young People's Needs in Education

Participants at the conference were offered the opportunity to convey their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the education of children and young people in Northern Ireland.

The following is a summary of the responses which have been broken down into a range of categories identified by the participants.

## Learning and the Curriculum

Young people noted that there is a need to address the focus on academic achievement based on exam performance. Some participants suggested that assessing course work is fairer than using exams as a measure of success. One young person noted that schools need to adapt and be practical in how they teach young people and recognise that exams do not suit everyone.

It was also noted that the current education system does not provide young people with opportunities to acquire valuable life and career skills as there were limited or no vocational courses for them to study in their school.

Some participants remarked on the narrow focus of the current curriculum and how it did not meet the needs of many children and young people. It was suggested that the curriculum should be developed and informed by specific issues facing children and young people. These included a greater focus on Relationship and Sexual Education, Environment and Climate Education, Health and Safety Education, Mental Health programmes, Skill Development, and Outdoor Learning opportunities.

It was also noted that teaching and learning should be adapted to meet the needs of individual learners, catering for all learning styles. One participant noted that "*the curriculum needs to be able to evolve and grow with the times*".

## Youth Service

Some participants noted that there should be more informal learning opportunities available to children and young people and youth workers should have a greater presence in schools working alongside teachers and other educational professionals.

It was suggested that informal learning opportunities and a greater presence of youth workers, would provide better opportunities for young people to enhance their personal and social development, as well as allowing them to acquire a range of life and employability skills. Several participants suggested that every school in Northern Ireland should have a youth worker.

Informal learning opportunities, and the support provided by youth workers, would give children and young people more freedom to be creative, innovative, and achieve their potential. It was also noted that children and young people may be better able to engage through informal learning.

It was also suggested that the youth work curriculum should be adapted and developed to allow children and young people to participate in alternative learning opportunities including digital/online learning, employability programmes and environmental and climate education.



## **Voice of Young People**

Participants noted that young people should have a voice in the decisions being made in relation to educational reform in Northern Ireland. This type of engagement will ensure that young people's needs are being adequately considered and addressed.

It was suggested that future reform should provide young people with a platform to express their views. These views should be listened to and acknowledged, therefore showing young people that their opinions are both respected and matter and will inform future decisions.

It was suggested that this will provide an innovative education system that understands and acts upon the needs of children and young people. Curriculum development should also reflect the opinions of young people and be reviewed regularly to ensure that it is accessible for all learners and learning styles.

Policy makers, the Education Authority and other educational professionals must engage with young people on any future reforms so that the education system and curriculum meet the needs of learners and is fit for purpose.

## **Mental Health**

Covid-19 and lockdowns have exacerbated the mental health issues facing children and young people in Northern Ireland. It was noted that schools and youth centres were safe spaces for children and young people where these issues could be supported and managed.

Many participants noted the importance of incorporating mental health wellbeing and awareness programmes into all aspects of the formal and non-formal curricula, especially in areas around coping and resilience skills.

It was however recognised that teachers, youth workers and other educational professionals urgently require training in dealing with the multi-faceted mental health concerns facing children and young people. Young people noted that the appropriate support or counselling was not always available when it was needed most.

Participants also noted that mental health was not discussed in schools and that additional support varied depending on where one lived. This was a key concern for the young people, who noted that mental health support services should be available in every school in Northern Ireland and any reform of the education system should reflect this.

## **Equality and Diversity**

A key message from the participants was that any reform of the education system should be inclusive and value everyone, regardless of their learning style, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality, or additional needs.

Young people noted that barriers to learning were many and varied and that inclusion and diversity were not always visible in schools or the curriculum. Some reported that all children and young people should be able to avail of shared education opportunities and that the segregated education system should be reformed to reflect this.



Equality of provision in all aspects of education was a concern for many participants. It was noted that there was a lack of inclusive provision, especially support for Autistic or ADHD pupils or those that were deaf or blind. It was suggested that schools could learn from Youth Services how to respond to the needs of more vulnerable and excluded children and young people.

There was also a concern that children and young people with a disability were unable to access all areas of the curriculum or school and youth club provision which in turn had a negative impact on their learning.

Several participants noted that Transfer Test was unfair and needed to be reviewed or scrapped completely. Some noted that children and young people should attend their local/nearest school and that all schools should offer a range of subject choices to meet the learning needs of all pupils. Education, it was suggested, should not be divided by sex, religion, or academic ability.

A recurring theme from the feedback was that schools should raise awareness of LGBTQ issues and concerns. LGBTQ young people should be valued members of the school community and not stigmatised because of outdated school standards and principles. Schools should be more accepting of this vulnerable group and provide support and guidance when it is required.





A person is shown from the chest down, wearing a grey sweater and a black digital watch. They are holding a green marker and writing on a large sheet of white paper. The paper has some handwritten text and a small diagram. A lanyard is visible around their neck. The background is a light blue gradient.

# Workshop Summative Statements

# Workshop Summative Statements

## Environmental Education as a Tool for Change

- Environmental education needs to become a core subject which provides young people with the relevant knowledge, qualifications and pathways into employment that will help fight climate change.
- Environmental education should be embedded within all aspects of curriculum to help young people feel empowered towards creating change.
- All educators and those who are involved in the lives of children and young people need to place a greater emphasis on climate change and ways to live with and deal with its impact.

## Be Here - Be Heard (Youth Voice)

- Engagement of young people in the formal education sector can be tokenistic and young people need to be taken seriously.
- Relationships between young people and adults are key - without a relationship, young people will struggle to flourish.
- Co-design of programmes and policy that directly impact young people are essential. Without it there is no ownership and connection.

## Health and Wellbeing

There is a need to take more creative approaches to health and wellbeing in the curriculum. Broadening the use of art, music, and english and taking a more holistic approach, rather than seeing them as subsets, to be taught, learned and graded.

Creatively using the curriculum as a vehicle for building confidence between young people and teachers for building confidence to engage in challenging conversations relating to issues such as:

- Period poverty and ending the stigma associated with it.
- Exploring diversity and difference.
- Encourage the expression of feelings and emotions.
- Supporting mental health wellbeing.

## Teens and Screens

- Introduce awareness sessions and workshops at earlier stages in the curriculum. Solution focused rather than problem focused.
- Introduce VPN software for schools and options for personal use.
- Creation of standardised information packs for parents.
- Create an App on digital safety to be rolled out across youth clubs/societies/groups.
- Reform DoE governance to continually meet and update digital curriculum more regularly as the landscape changes.
- Schools evaluate their discipline policy to be stricter on cyberbullying cases.

## Leadership/Pathways

- Teachers are not there to teach a subject but teach young people.
- The curriculum should be more relevant and practical, addressing key concerns and issues faced by young people.
- Access to youth services should be increased as youth workers can be a significant support to young people.
- Teaching styles are important, and teachers should maximise informal learning techniques and teachers should do youth work training.









# Round Table Discussions

Young People  
are already  
Powerful!

What is one  
summarise you



## Round Table Discussions

The issue of rurality was a concern for participants. Future education reform should address issues around transport, the digital divide, and a lack of appropriate services, especially in rural communities. There was also recognition that there is a lack of knowledge of youth work opportunities in these areas.

Additional support for the most vulnerable children and young people or those from Section 75 groups was also suggested. This should address issues of discrimination and bullying, and children and young people should have regular awareness of the challenges and barriers to education faced by these young people and what support services are available to them.

Mental health should be included in any education review. More training is required for teachers, youth workers and other trusted adults to support those experiencing mental health challenges. It was also suggested that multi-disciplinary approaches to tackling mental health issues and early intervention initiatives would support this.

Youth Voice in the areas of planning, education reform and curriculum were proposed. Young people would like to access subjects or programmes that meet their needs rather than being imposed on them. Greater access to employability or life skills programmes and career pathways should also be explored.

Schools and youth centres should be more inclusive, open, safe, and fun. Young people welcomed the continuation of informal learning opportunities. It was also noted that after school activities should be more widely available to support learning and that these could also be delivered in youth centres or other community facilities.

The young people called for greater engagement with policy makers and the Education Authority. Communication and transparency were key to ensuring that the reform of education in Northern Ireland would involve young people and their voice would be heard and respected.

The issue of poverty was also discussed and how it negatively impacted on children and young people's academic progress. More co-ordinated support for those young people and the schools they attend is required and it was suggested that Youth Services had a greater role to play in these schools providing creative alternative learning opportunities.

What has your key learning takeaway been?

- Environment and climate awareness
- Youth Voice
- Young people in leadership roles
- LGBTQ and acceptance
- Digital and safeguarding
- Expression through art and music
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Young people positive influence in their communities
- Resilience and coping strategies
- Relationships and sexual health education



- Importance of youth work
- Less emphasis on exams
- Development of the curriculum
- More access to outdoor learning

One word or phrase to summarise your experience of today:

- Inspirational
- Controversial
- Positive
- Informative
- Hopeful
- Motivational
- Empowered
- Optimistic
- Encouraging
- Fun
- Visionary
- Stimulating
- Powerful
- Equity
- Diversity
- Inclusive

What key themes would you like

- Money management
- Mental health
- Environmental education
- Skill development
- LGBTQ issues
- Relationships and sexual health education
- Diversity and inclusion
- Curriculum change
- Health and wellbeing
- Music and art therapy
- Therapeutic interventions
- Counselling
- Recycling
- Social media
- Emotional/resilience/coping strategies
- Gateways to appropriate services
- Early interventions
- Digital resilience
- Youth Voice and young people's rights



- Social Action projects
- Period poverty
- Opportunities for youth leadership and volunteering roles
- More Youth Work in a school setting



A man with grey hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a light-colored button-down shirt and light-colored trousers, stands at a silver podium. He is gesturing with his right arm towards the right side of the frame. The scene is set in a room with a chandelier visible on the left and a white door in the background. The entire image has a blue color overlay. The text 'Summary of Findings' is centered over the man's torso.

# Summary of Findings



## Summary of Findings

- Young people want access to more life and career skill development opportunities.
- Curriculum reform should include relationship and sexual education, environment and climate education, health and safety education, mental health programmes, skill development and outdoor learning opportunities.
- Young people should have access to more informal learning opportunities, and these should be available in schools as well as traditional youth work settings.
- Young people's voices should be heard and influence any future educational reform.
- Teachers, youth workers and other educational professionals urgently require training in dealing with the multi-faceted mental health concerns facing children and young people.
- Young people want greater access to mental health wellbeing and awareness programmes to support their coping skills and resilience.
- Any reform of the education system should be inclusive and value everyone, regardless of their learning style, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality, or additional needs.
- Schools should be more accepting of LGBTQ young people and provide support and guidance when it is required.
- Youth work can support young people and provide positive pathways beyond the option of University.
- Future curriculum offers must meet the needs and lived experiences of children and young people.
- Curriculum reform should also address the societal and environmental concerns of children and young people.
- Appropriate educational services, including Youth Services, are required to meet the needs of rural children and young people.
- Innovative ways should be sought to address the digital divide faced by young people growing up in poverty or those in rural communities.

The Independent Review Panel

Recommendations for the Education of children and  
Ireland are...

dream of and not letting anything that  
hold them back.



Education  
Authority

YOUTH SERVICE