

# Response to Draft Programme for Government 2024

## Contemporary Peacebuilding Issues for Young People in Northern Ireland

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### Introduction

*“Interconnected Problems: In too many places and too many lives, people are dealing with a complex mix of health, justice, education, and employability issues. Our Community and Voluntary Sector is a key partner, but we recognise they have been significantly impacted by unpredictable funding arrangements along with increased demand. The problems are interconnected, so we will prioritise interconnected solutions and sustainable funding models” (DPfG, 2024: 51).*

The Draft Programme for Government (PfG) recognises that public services and government that operate in silos will not address the complex interconnected issues facing the population of Northern Ireland. The solutions lie in a deep understanding of the intersectionality of the systems and a collaborative approach across statutory and voluntary partnerships. The Peace Summit Partnership is such a collaboration with partners working together to approach peacebuilding actions in a myriad of different ways. This partnership is both a resource for government to access and a model for sharing and broadening expertise on community and societal issues.

Young people have been a core priority of the Peace Summit Partnership. As we will outline in this document, young people face a number of key interrelated issues. More needs to be done to place their needs and aspirations for the future at the heart of the Programme for Government in Northern Ireland.

### The Peace Summit Partnership

The Peace Summit Partnership is a collaboration of the John and Pat Hume Foundation, Ulster University, Community Dialogue, the Glenree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation, YouthAction NI, Holywell Trust, Northern Ireland Youth Forum and the Integrated Education Fund. It is supported by the International Fund for Ireland. This collaboration has emerged from reflecting on the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement after 25 years.

The Peace Summit consultation revealed that although there is a sense of gratitude for what has been achieved since 1998, there is also some disappointment and frustration at the work still to be done. This partnership gathered voices around the ‘unfinished business of peace’ and has gained momentum in promoting peacebuilding actions within civic society and influencing political actors.

Since the Peace Summit Partnership began its work in 2022, peacebuilding work with and by young people has emerged as a core priority. To this end, the Youth Network for Peace has evolved out of existing and new partnerships which implement youth sector peacebuilding. This strand of the Peace Summit Partnership aims to build greater coherence and voice for those who represent and work with young people on peacebuilding locally and regionally.

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The Youth Network for Peace consists of Ulster University, YouthAction Northern Ireland, the John and Pat Hume Foundation, Springboard-Opps, YMCA Ireland, Londonderry YMCA, the North-South Youth Work Practice Hub, Integrated Education Fund, the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, Diverse Youth NI, Cooperation Ireland and the Belfast City of Sanctuary.

This document includes a summary of the main issues for young people coming out of the Peace Summit Consultation Process, Peace Summit events and the Youth Peace Summit. The Peace Summit Report (2022)<sup>2</sup> was built on the consultation that took some 8 months and engaged at least 700 individuals in 30 events, many directly with young people. The recent Youth Peace Summit was held on 25 April 2024 with 100 young people from different backgrounds.

This document summarises some key views expressed across these processes and how these relate directly to the Draft Programme for Government (PfG). Twelve recommendations for action are proposed below to strengthen the priorities for young people in the Draft Programme for Government.

## Key Issues Facing Young People

### 1. Young people have a strong sense of the importance of relationships and tolerance in working with others from all backgrounds, and want to make a positive societal contribution.

Young participants in the youth peace summit expressed optimism, hope and compassion towards others from different communities who lived locally and globally. There was a restorative and accepting tone in how young people spoke about people from various backgrounds. Young people want to contribute positively to building a forward and outward-looking region and a place where identities are celebrated rather than diminished.

*“You should be respectful to everyone. You have to treat others the way you want to be treated. While everyone has different identities, we’re all human; just treat each other the way you want to be treated” (Youth Engagement workshop).*

*“We want to see the sharing of traditions and people welcomed to everywhere so you can celebrate your own culture and background from wherever you’re from. We also agree that we want to see more integrated and mixed schools and mixed housing” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“It is about healing attitudes towards any ‘other’” (YPS, 2024).*

*“I think everyone is allowed to have their own identity, but they each have to understand each other’s identity” (YPS, 2024).*

Young people are willing contributors to peace, and their positive contribution to society, respect and tolerance should be harnessed for good. The PfG should build on UN Security Council Resolution 2250, as well as resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on Youth Peace and Security,<sup>3</sup> that recognise young people’s positive role in negotiating and implementing peace agreements and their positive impact on society as a whole. Currently, these positive aspirations and inclusion are not reflected in the draft PfG, and young people are barely mentioned as willing and capable allies to achieve the aims set out in the PfG. The potential positive contribution of young people to the three strategic pillars of the draft PfG—People, Planet and Prosperity—needs to be written into the heart of the strategy. By way of example, considering a new environment strategy without explicitly mentioning how young people should and want to be mobilised to engage with such issues limits what is possible now and into the future.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://humefoundation.org/peace-summit-2023-report>

<sup>3</sup> Also see Simpson, G. (2015). *The Missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*. New York: UN.

## 2. Young people feel held back by divided politics and distrust the political system in meeting their needs.

Young people expressed a strong desire to make positive change but often felt constrained by the past, a lack of voice and older people deciding the parameters of what was important or how issues should be addressed (much of this involved the conflicted past). Young people have negative views of the political system. They see it as a dysfunctional system scarred by past divisions and aggressive political debate that is stuck in the past. They have inherited a burden. They are held back to address issues that are important for them, such as climate change, LGBTQI issues, and the economy.

*“Young people are saying ‘We don’t give two fucks about... we’re totally turned off by traditional politics’ and what they see is they shout down and the shutdown of our traditional political representatives and that doesn’t feel good. And then you have the ‘Top Table’ by Stephen Nolan and it’s replicating exactly the same thing” (Youth Peace Summit participant hereafter YPS, 2024).*

*“I would never, ever, ever go into politics like, you know, because we...we did. We did get like a lot of brunt from XXXXX too” (YPS, 2024).*

*“[Political] parties are still focused on religion rather than actual policies and a lot of communities have suffered because of this” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“In 25 years, we want to see a functioning government for all, parties are still focused on religion rather than actual policies and a lot of communities have suffered because of this. As part of this we want to see unsegregated parts of towns and communities as there is a lot of socio-economic divide between them” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“It’s the older generation pushing it down on us, with our generation coming up no one really cares about it anymore” (Youth Engagement participant).*

A Programme for Government, and the existence of a functioning Executive, is long overdue. Young people have understandably low levels of trust in the formal political system to meet their needs. Some of this mistrust relates to a precarious system in which political parties can easily topple the government. Mistrust also relates to long-standing divisions where communities align themselves with one of the major political parties even on everyday issues impacting young people’s lives. The task of developing a coherent PfG is appreciated and will address some of these concerns. But the vehicle to allay suspicions and fears over divisive politics is implementing and delivering the actions in the PfG. The political parties must also work together to build trust and address the legacy of partisan politics. A sustainable and functional peace, and working towards this as a priority, should be acknowledged in the PfG. Stabilising the institutions will not only rebuild the infrastructure but assist young people to relate to and participate in the social, economic and political life of the society.

## 3. Young people want to contribute to politics but lack a voice.

Young people are interested in politics, especially issues that impact them. Young people are particularly keen to be involved in political and social processes but feel their voice is not listened to, creating a sense of frustration. To this end, young people want to push society forward and contribute constructively and creatively but feel powerless. To facilitate this, official processes must include young people.

The Agreement means little without the participation of young people in civic spaces now and into the future. Young people value politicians speaking and listening to them but worry that this may be tokenistic or only about seeking their vote:

*“They like to listen, acknowledge but don't do anything; politicians do speak to young people, then there are recommendations, and asks, then there is a pause...a gap in recommendations to policy making; Young people are consulted on policy, but how much are they listened to?” (YPS, 2024).*

*“I get that young people don't have a lot of power and they can't actually be part of a government and stuff like that but I think that politicians are now realising the importance of young people and are listening to them more or seeing that young people are actually the future...opinions should be listened to and are actually valid, they're not just saying stuff to be difficult and to disagree with people but are actually saying stuff because they care about their future and they want a good future...they are genuinely worried that these older politicians who are in government are thinking about themselves and their own generation and not really, as well as the future” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“Young people are actively involved in creating a better world because it's our world and we're responsible for what happens to it and us. Children are the world's future and should have a part in deciding what will happen. People are involved like Greta Thunberg who is an inspiration to those who don't have as big a voice as her. Young people are actively involved in creating a better world because they will be the ones who are most affected, and older people can't get over the fact that their way is not always the right way” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“The young people speak up about different issues like climate change, older people stick to what they know, they're not willing to look at things and understand the different aspects that the youth can look into. So, young people are the future and young people should have their say” (Youth Engagement participant).*

The Draft Programme for Government does not fully address young people's ambitions to lead political and social change now and in the future. There is a great need for investment in young leaders interested in taking on these roles but have limited or no voice. Youth assemblies and parliaments are often proposed to gain youth voice but are limited in attracting the most articulate or outspoken young people rather than marginalised voices. A youth participation strategy and leadership strategy is an essential addition to the PfG. Including such issues in the PfG will enhance its ambitions towards a more sustainable future, as well as align it with the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 and subsequent resolutions 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020) on Youth Peace and Security that recognises the positive role young people can play in society. Youth-led initiatives and organisations are critical to promoting participation and voice, and these need to be supported, a point the Draft PfG does not address.

#### **4. Young people feel the Agreement must reflect their needs in a changed and changing society.**

Young people respect peace and how hard it was to achieve it and feel grateful for less societal violence. However, there is a sense that they still live in its shadow.

Peacebuilding needs to move into a new phase. The Agreement and the peace process did not address the issues young people live with and don't reflect our changing local and global world.

*“Back in the Troubles days you would go, you would join the UVF, you wouldn't trust the police. But now, if you see some random act of violence, you would go tell the police, the police are trusted now in the community. I think that's about it, the conflict, it hasn't stopped but it's definitely went down, and you feel safer, you can feel safe – anyone can go into Portadown... there's more of a community now” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“I think peacebuilding in Northern Ireland has focused too much on the whole sectarian divide” (YPS, 2024).*

*“Peacebuilding is not just a Northern Ireland network, it is finding a space in the world that works, creating a society that works, with people coming in and people leaving, with...especially with everything that has happened because of Brexit, now that we are part of multiple different countries and societies at the same time – there is just a lot more to participate in...” (YPS, 2024).*

*“People in power today are too old and don’t understand the youth. They don’t understand that it’s our future and we should be able to decide how to shape it. They’re not changing their own future, they’re changing ours and they don’t have the experiences that the youth have today so youths should have their say in what should be done about it” (Youth Engagement participant).*

The Peace Summit Partnership proposes that a new inclusive peace plan be developed to take into consideration the changing face of Northern Ireland. While the Draft Programme for Government proposes a ‘cross-cutting commitment to peace’, which is to be welcomed, this is short on substance. Outlining steps to deliver a peace plan in the PfG will ensure that peacebuilding is seen as a priority action area that must be nurtured and developed. The ambition for peace and economic growth without careful investment and a proactive stance that includes young people is hollow. Likewise, the idea that economic prosperity can be fully achieved in the PfG without recognising that the society remains divided politically, which impacts all aspects of life, including service delivery and economic development, is short-sighted.

## **5. The trauma of the past leads to everyday fear and anxiety for young people.**

Young people still experience physical and psychological threats from the conflict. These anxieties were routine, and young people made ‘adjustments’ to their social and personal lives to work around the dangers and fears they faced. This alone has an invisible impact on the psychological health and well-being of young people.

Young people are forced develop habits, patterns and routines to avoid and minimise anxieties, but this can profoundly impact individuals.

*Advice from parents encouraged avoidance: “Don’t be having nights out in that town ‘cause you could end up you know getting attacked” (YPS, 2024).*

*“We were talking about people not feeling safe going places because of their backgrounds, but people should not be scared. They should be able to go anywhere without thinking something bad will happen because of their background” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“...because you also don’t know the area, or you wouldn’t know your way around it. So, you would be a bit on edge from the start” (YPS, 2024).*

*“We were talking about people not feeling safe going places because of their backgrounds, but people should not be scared. They should be able to go anywhere without thinking something bad will happen because of their background” (Youth Engagement participant).*

The Draft Programme for Government considers the need to build safer communities (p.42), where the emphasis is primarily on tackling crime and strengthening justice measures. But these do not reflect young people’s views. The focus on crime and strengthening justice, perhaps inadvertently, paints young people as a ‘problem’ rather than as positive contributors to society. Community safety and community development measures are essential, but they should not be tied to institutional justice powers, as the PfG suggests. Instead, we need to recognise the lived realities of many young people, where fear and anxiety caused by past and present divisions are everyday realities. Addressing this is not a “justice” or “policing” concern, but one of engagement, inclusion, safety and understanding of the needs of young people at the local level.

## 6. Paramilitaries are still a problem for young people.

The persistence of violence and paramilitary activity was seen as a massive impediment to socio-economic development across Northern Ireland. For some young people, paramilitaries still control their lives and are a threat to violence, particularly against young people. We know more about this impact on boys and young men than how paramilitaries impact the lives of young women and girls.

*“We want to see the end of paramilitary violence as this is a big issue in today’s society” (Group feedback on flipchart, Youth Engagement workshop).*

*“The shooting of the journalist, the young female journalist. So it's still there, it's still underground” (YPS, 2024).*

The Draft Programme for Government notes that the Executive is “committed to tackling paramilitarism and organised crime” and will “continue to support the cross-Executive efforts aimed at addressing them”. This is welcomed as paramilitarism directly impacts many young people’s lives. Likewise, the statement that “Paramilitary harm continues to affect too many adults and young people; this rises significantly in communities where paramilitary gangs continue to exert coercive control. The estimated cost to our economy is a minimum of £750 million per year” is positive. However, it is also important to acknowledge that such harm impacts well-being, life chances, self-esteem and opportunity—the cumulative impact over the last 25 years is enormous socially and economically. Addressing paramilitarism is an urgent priority for the well-being and future of young people and requires more than a policing response addressing issues such as increasing life chances, enhancing community cohesion and empowering communities. It is essential that the gendered aspects of paramilitarism are acknowledged and addressed, including the pervasive nature of violent masculinities in the society, and that the impact on young women and girls is under-researched and recognised.

## 7. Young people want education to be integrated and to remove the segregation of the current education system.

Young people are critical of the education system. Structurally, the education system follows similar segregation patterns, which adds to a separatist perspective and way of life, along with divided housing:

*“Because there are not that many integrated schools about, people don’t really have them opportunities .....but that’s where opportunity lies that some people don’t get that” (YPS, 2024).*

*“Integrated schools, promote inclusivity in multiple areas such as the workplace or friendships or even wider in places like housing...in Northern Ireland we have a very tribal view on life, where you’re from one side or you’re from the other side but with inclusivity, it means there’s no more of that and we can live together in harmony and promote peace” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“Integrated education will eventually lead to the removal of peace walls which plague our communities in Northern Ireland. Whenever the peace walls fall it will signify that Northern Ireland’s finally moved on and we can achieve this through integrated education” (Youth Engagement participant).*

It is positive to see the Draft PfG refer to the importance of addressing barriers to education and the need for high-quality education, especially for those with special needs. The outlining of pathways of opportunity for further training, education or employment for young people is also positive. However, it is troubling that the divided education system, which the young people in our consultations saw as problematic in limiting horizons, friendships, community cohesion and opportunities, and as instrumental in exacerbating conflict, is not tackled in the Draft PfG. Young people recognise integrated education as promoting peace, and we should listen to this perspective in any PfG and outline steps to further integrate education as part of the delivery of a better future for all.

## **8. Mental health for young people needs to be prioritised. Mental health is not just about services but also about young people's social and political environment.**

Mental health is an issue. Mental health is featured in young people's visions for the future. They believed that "mental health matters", and young people want it to be taken seriously, better understood and included in the education curriculum with issues such as suicide discussed more openly. They feel there is a positive change as people now talk about it more, and openness and talking replace the previous silence that characterises their parents' generation. The generational disparity in these two narratives cannot be underestimated.

Furthermore, young people still have mental health needs linked to their communities, socio-economic prospects and the pressures associated with social media, and living in a deeply divided society.

*"Society does not talk about it, known for drinking, and especially men and older men who lived through the Troubles cover it up" (YPS, 2024).*

*"We want to see an improvement in mental health for young people in Northern Ireland because we think this isn't as important as it should be" (Group feedback on flipchart, Youth Peace Summit).*

The Draft PfG makes links between deprivation and other experiences, such as violence, crime, racism and exploitation, and the subsequent impact on physical and mental well-being. This chimes with the experience of many young people. Links to the Executive's strategic framework for public health, Making Life Better, to tackle the wider determinants of health and the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 are also mentioned in the draft PfG. However, given the seriousness with which young people raised mental health concerns in our consultations, it feels such issues are not adequately addressed in realisable terms in the draft PfG by alluding to other strategies. It is acknowledged that "the levels of trauma in our post-conflict society" are highlighted in the Draft PfG, and the need to embed a trauma-informed approach across government is stressed. But such high-level approaches, although useful, do little to deal with living with everyday mental health concerns and how the environment and deprivation impact mental health in real terms. Such approaches also make no inroads into eradicating the stressors that cause mental health problems. A more nuanced understanding and systematic approach to mental health is needed in the PfG. Such an approach would move beyond service delivery (as crucial as that is) to recognising that the conflict, hostile and antagonistic political systems, environmental destruction, limited space for young people to express diverse sexual and gender identities, paramilitarism, political and other violence, gender inequalities and poor economic prospects all undermine mental health. Addressing and acknowledging these issues at the highest policy level arguably promotes positive mental health in itself. The PfG needs to charge politicians, civic leaders and policymakers with a more ambitious and wide-ranging agenda to promote well-being through service delivery and structural societal changes at all levels.

## **9. The legacy of the past for young people is more about the impact of sectarianism than addressing larger questions of truth and justice.**

Legacy of the past is important to young people but in a different way. Young people (in the PS report) did not focus on the specifics of the legacy debates (e.g. legislation, truth or justice questions), but their view of the past related to the shadow it casts on today's society (e.g. community separation, different versions of history). This reflected their realities of life scarred by sectarianism. Day-to-day segregation and safety concerns about going into the "wrong" area seem to impact them more directly than larger political debates, such as who was responsible for past violence or what mechanisms need to be implemented to deal with the past. As such, there were concerns about flags, emblems, territory marking and the impact of sectarianism in large and small ways. Some of these influences are reinforced within families and communities and have a detrimental effect on young people.

*“Ignorance from parents can lead to an increase in sectarianism as they don’t understand how bad the troubles was” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“We are encouraged to be sectarian through ignorance from our parents. Young people are influenced by others to be sectarian because of the community they were brought up in and think it is right to treat people different because of their religion/identity. Everyone is equal and should be allowed to join and be together no matter their religion” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“Even though you might not have had those experiences, people relating this to you over and over and over again – it kind of sticks with you” (YPS, 2024).*

The Draft PfG does not fully capture or address the everyday lived realities of young people in terms of division, lack of freedom of movement for fear of going into the “wrong” area, violent imagery in their communities (such as murals), living with paramilitaries, dealing with parents impacted by the conflict, while dealing with social and economic deprivation. Although these issues feature at points in the Draft PfG, and at times, the linkages made in the document itself are not fully reflected in its policy recommendations and approach to the type of integrated life challenges many young people face. There is an urgent need to improve the regional and local infrastructure which reproduces and exacerbates division and segregation. Specific actions to promote and enhance integrative healthy cultural activities should be promoted. Equality impact assessment measures should take cognisance of the subliminal impacts of sectarian emblems and infrastructure and work to first reduce and ultimately eliminate these from communities.

## **10. Young people value new communities and diversity but worry about racism and the marginalisation of these communities.**

Young people saw the growing diversity and multiculturalism as a positive sign and an opportunity to encourage greater openness. It was noted that although those new to our society were generally welcomed, racism and concern for people moving to communities controlled by paramilitaries were highlighted. Young people also mentioned racism but tended to be more concerned with local political divisions. They tended to link questions of race with more global phenomena such as Black Lives Matter and felt young people were generally open to diversity and inclusion.

To reflect these changes in our society, peacebuilding needs to be re-imagined for a multicultural society, and greater consideration needs to be given to how to build inclusive peace processes that can draw out minority voices.

*“We would like to see everyone in unity, the government working together. Nobody disrespecting or discriminating each other about their identities. Looking past people’s race and culture and focusing on their personality. Letting people celebrate their cultures with respect from everyone in the community” (Group feedback on flipchart, Youth Engagement workshop).*

*“We have more newcomers coming into NI and how are we working together to build a multicultural society?” (YPS, 2024).*

*“Speaking to each other and not judging someone for the way they speak, finding they come from another country, not judging them straight away, you get to speak to them and see where they’re from and what their experience is in life, they might have some of the same experiences to you. You never know, you might make a new friend or a best friend” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“I feel that often their [marginalised communities] voices go unheard or lost in the wider scope of peacebuilding” (YPS, 2024).*



The development and implementation of social inclusion strategies in the Draft PfG is welcomed as they can integrate many different communities into the fabric of society. But these social inclusion strategies require proactive affirmative measures to increase representation across public life and appointments from a variety of different race and ethnic backgrounds. This process can help include the voice of those most marginalised from services and communities. This process also needs to include young people actively and be supported by more policy research and action focused on the direct needs of young people migrating to Northern Ireland or living here as refugees. Youth-led initiatives and organisations are critical to promoting inclusion and developing leaders, and these need to be supported to do this important work, a point the Draft PfG does not address.

## **11. To fully address poor community relations, we need to tackle socio-economic issues and community segregation.**

The root of many community relations issues lies in community segregation and socio-economic problems associated with poverty. This socio-economic analysis identified that many of these issues of work, economic inactivity, and housing have emerged from sectarian fault lines that have long been established in the structures of this society. Community relations programmes with young people are often limited because relations built within and between communities are constantly undermined by continued living within a so-called single identity. The education system follows similar segregation patterns, which adds to a separatist perspective and way of life.

Economic regeneration and work with families and communities is required in the areas with the least economic investment. More holistic programmes are needed that recognise issues like poverty, peacebuilding, community development and addressing the specific needs of young people (say around drugs or addiction) are related and not treated in silos.

*“There is still clearly so much work to do to build up the society, to make it more equal, to things like the housing crisis that is slowly building up across our cities – if those things aren’t tackled we could easily fall back into violence” (YPS 2024).*

*“It is also really important to have a thriving society where young people have access to more working opportunities, more educational opportunities” (YPS 2024).*

*“A lot of politicians now, those in power, they’re only concerned with the old tribal politics of green and orange, but now there’s so much more going on, especially the cost of living, more people are worried about that there than a border in the Irish Sea. People are worried about putting food on the table, they don’t really care about stupid stuff like that” (Youth Engagement participant).*

*“We want to see more investment in young people because right now it’s mostly just about the adults and what they think, but we think we could add some things to the community” (Youth Engagement participant).*

The Draft Programme for Government recognises the connections between poverty, discrimination and social inclusion strategies. We welcome regeneration activities but also recognise the limited appeal for inward investment when the threat of violence persists. Regeneration activities focusing specifically on innovation and technology can sideline working-class young people most impacted by the conflict. Innovation in apprenticeships is appreciated as a vehicle to build capacity for young people with negative experiences in formal education. Extending the range of apprenticeships will address a skills shortage locally and when coupled with sustainable living wages is vital for viable livelihoods. But where the Draft PfG falls short is in connecting our housing issues directly to sectarianism and our long history of community segregation. Improving access to housing options must take a strategic approach in assessing whether new housing projects are safe and accessible for specific communities. These actions will mitigate societal violence connected with the past and use regeneration to address poverty.

## 12. Young people want political education with a dual focus on the past and for youth activism to address contemporary social issues (even those they inherited).

Young people want to learn about the past. Through transgenerational sharing and learning, engage in an accessible civic education process about the Agreement, the past and the conflict. They wish to break the silence about the past – not to come to terms with the past individually or psychologically as such – but to help create a new future free from the past. It is important to link understanding the past with a constant process of future visioning.

Young people also want the political skills to engage with formal political systems and to finetune their activism on relevant societal issues. The expectations of the young participants were that schools should have educated young people to engage with the formal political systems. They also hoped that political education would emphasise the need for young people to act on their behalf and pursue relevant issues. Learning about action and activism is a core part of political education:

*“How to lobby your campaign and give good examples of maybe different campaigns that have been successful versus ones that haven't been, maybe looking at the hows and whys ..... how policy has passed is also probably huge too, so that people understand that they want a change. What do they need to go through in order to make that happen? From campaign to actual delivery?” (YPS, 2024).*

*“My thing back in school was we were never brought to Stormont” (YPS, 2024).*

*“Invest in radical peace education that's workshop and dialogue based, in power with relationships, part of a culture of justice and human rights. Then those engaged get a sense of the difference a peace-based education can imbibe and are opened to possibility of being that change, power-with: others, other species, and earth, in a power-over system that is ravaging community spirit and our earth” (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).*

Political education in the Draft Programme for Government focuses on global politics and wider issues rather than looking at local political and civic engagement skills and young people's understanding of the conflict and its legacy. Understanding local and global issues are important for young people to comprehend their past and its impact without being bound by this, as well as to equip them with the skills to connect and address their local context and global concerns. Young people in our consultations wanted political education to build their skills and knowledge, as well as a solid foundation, to engage positively in the world. Furthering such political education and ultimately ensuring a civically engaged youth population requires deliberative actions, including supporting youth organisations, the participation of young people in politics directly, and school programmes that encourage and develop political education and critical engagement with social issues to build a better future.