



# REPORT: WATER FORUM YOUTH WORKSHOP – Conversations About Water

26<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2025 Gibson Hotel Dublin



# Introduction

On 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025 the Water Forum held its first Youth Workshop. The objective of the Water Forum’s inaugural youth workshop was to engage with young people, explore their awareness and knowledge of water management and water policy in Ireland. We also wanted to know how best to communicate with young people, along with opportunities and barriers for getting involved. It is expected that learnings from the workshop will inform future policy advice of the Forum in relation to public participation in water management. The learnings and findings from the event will also be important in shaping future communications and messages of the Forum. The event provides us with an opportunity to engage in a targeted way with young people and develop relationships and networks for future communications and policy development.

The workshop was supported by some of the Forum’s member organisations: the National Youth Council of Ireland, Macra na Feirme and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

## Workshop Agenda

Session 1 provided a background on water management in Ireland, along with future challenges to our water resources. This was followed by a workshop to explore learnings and key messages.

Session 2 involved an interview with Stephen Reid, a YouTube influencer, on his video ‘the 50 year cover up that poisoned the largest lake in Ireland’. This was followed by a workshop to explore communication platforms and key messages for young people.

Session 3 began with a video showcasing community engagement along the Moy River Catchment, followed by a workshop exploring ways to increase youth participation in local efforts to protect water.

Throughout the day the learnings and key messages were being captured by a graphic harvester, Hazel Hurley.

See full Agenda in the Appendix.



## Workshop Attendees

19 young people (age 18 to 25) attended the workshop. Attendees were invited through the National Youth Council of Ireland, Macra na Feirme and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

The workshop was supported by the Forum's secretariat and several members of the Water Forum.

## Workshop Outputs

### Workshop 1: Knowledge And Information

Presentations in this session included the key policies and plans responsible for managing water in Ireland. They also highlighted the existing challenges we have in relation to the current health of our natural water bodies (rivers, lakes, groundwater, estuaries and coastal waters), along with the pressures in our water supply infrastructure. The final presentation highlighted that population growth, economic development and climate change will add further challenges to managing our water resources.

Workshop 1 focused on identifying the water quality issues most important to communicate to young adults, as well as the key messages that could effectively engage this audience.

#### Key points made in the discussion in Workshop 1:

- Water is not always where it needs to be
- People need to know how to identify and report leaks
- People need to know how climate change will impact water quality
- We need improved infrastructure
- We need better communications about water
- Success stories of water quality improvements should be shared widely
- The communications from Uisce Éireann should be improved
- Comparisons with Europe might be useful to improve knowledge on how we are doing
- Messages should be proactive not reactive during times of water stress
- Individuals need to be better informed about water
- Messages about action for water should be kept simple
- We need a Department of Environment for more aligned national policies

#### Key Messages highlighted in Workshop 1:

**Water is life:** Damaging water harms life.

**Check for leaks:** High leakage wastes valuable water.

**Climate change matters:** It will affect water availability and water quality in Ireland.

**Water supply is vulnerable:** Our water security is not guaranteed.

**Conserve water:** We all need to use water more sustainably.





## Key points made in the discussion in Workshop 2:

### Platforms being used by youth:

You Tube, Instagram, Tik Tok, local groups, Foroige, (2<sup>nd</sup> level), Online Newspapers, LinkedIn (3<sup>rd</sup> level).

### Information sources typically used by young people:

Online, Instagram, You Tube, podcasts, local co-ops and workshops, Google & Google Scholar, peer-reviewed journals, Nation Youth Council of Ireland, fieldtrips and local activities (beach cleans etc), Spotify, local communities, local papers, local radio, government websites.

### Barriers to communicating with young people:

Death by PowerPoint or too much text, lack of meaningful interactions, connections with presenters (eye contact, emotional engagement), lecturing young people, generational alienation.

### Suggestions made for innovative ways to communicate with young people:

- Formal education in Schools
- Cross curricular approaches
- Fieldtrips particularly at local level
- Infographics
- Targeted advertising campaigns – by demographics, local groups, regular Instagram posts, news updates via social media (*concise, clear messaging with messages repeated*)
- Targeted campaigns on local issues, including health impacts and personal responsibility
- Information sharing through established networks–
  - via teachers, schools, emails, school social media
  - Students unions, theme days at second and third level institutes
  - Public platforms – town halls and community forums (with multi sectoral representation)

### Recommendations on platforms to best communicate with young people:

You Tube, Instagram, Tik Tok, Local groups, Foroige, (2<sup>nd</sup> level), online Newspapers, LinkedIn (3<sup>rd</sup> level).

## Key Learnings from Workshop 2:

1. Messages need to be short and to the point and repeated on multiple platforms/channels
2. Include Visuals, animation, gamification, QR codes, quick access, infographics
3. Fieldtrips and local events to address local issues
4. Theme days at schools and colleges
5. Develop education on personal responsibility
6. Establish networks for information sharing through students unions, teachers, social media
7. Develop targeted advertising campaigns
8. Organise town hall events – community and agency fora
9. Provide short form hooks followed by longer term deeper learning



Figure 2. Key learnings from Workshop 2 on how to improve communications with young people, captured by graphic harvester, Hazel Hurley

## Workshop 3: Youth Engagement and Innovation for Action and Outcomes

This session discussed plans to establish community catchments across the country over the coming years, with the aim of increasing community engagement in the management of local waterbodies. The session began with a video from the Moy Rivers Trust, showcasing how the group was formed to enhance biodiversity within the catchment and to promote, protect, and conserve local water resources.

Following the video, the workshop explored whether young people are interested in getting involved and how opportunities can be improved to encourage youth participation in local water-related action.



### Key points made in the discussion in Workshop 3:

#### **Interest in engagement**

Overall, there was significant interest among young people in getting involved; however, improved access to information and education about the catchment is needed to give background knowledge on local issues.

#### **Barriers to youth engagement**

##### **Knowledge Gaps:**

- There is a generally a lack of knowledge of national or local issues
- Requires improved awareness and access to relevant education
- There is currently a poor connection between youth and local government, where local authorities lack interest in facilitating young people
- Within communities, young people are not seen as priorities to engage with

##### **Access:**

- There are often financial barriers (e.g. travel costs) that inhibit young people attending events
- Need funding for youth engagement =
- Requires accessibility for disabilities, sometimes community centres are not accessible
- Lack of information on activity happening locally
- Barriers around garda vetting by volunteers required to work with young people

##### **Other barriers:**

- Lack of interest – highlighting education piece on the risk to water resources
- The challenge can be perceived as overwhelming
- Lack of time – commitment to education sport and other activities
- Other 'social' pressures

## Recommendations for Innovative supports to encourage youth engagement – key points from Workshop 3

### Knowledge:

- Facilitate and run local events
- Positive communications, clear language, success stories
- Better education on what the government and other agencies are doing
- QR Codes for local water information to improve access and understanding
- Taster sessions/Trial nights/ local river walks with experts
- Summer camps and Summer Schools - Student societies, green campuses, green schools
- Family engagement, citizen science and local project promotions

### Access:

- Proactive engagement between local groups (Rivers Trusts), Tidy Towns with young people
- Improved Youth Agenda in local project, e.g. local youth advisory councils, ensure youth input is valued
- Promote urban green spaces, highlight social benefits of engagement
- Requires staff at Local Authorities to engage young people.
- Consideration of a National Youth Water Forum
- Incentivise youth engagement (food and travel costs)
- Leadership and training, develop links between councils and environmental groups

### Interest

- Build a connection between sports clubs and water communities with water quality initiatives and projects
- Grants/awards for sports clubs for water conservation or water protection initiatives
- Develop incentives to water quality
- Develop Water ambassadors, catchment champions programmes and environmental awards
- Gamify the outdoors
- Develop societal norms and share success stories

## Key Learnings from Workshop 3:

- 1. Improved engagement first requires improved knowledge of environmental issues within the catchment.**
- 2. The main barriers to youth engagement are lack of knowledge and access to and accessibility of events.**
- 3. A lack of interest in water and water management issues was also highlighted as a challenge to overcome.**

### Suggested actions to address the barriers and support youth engagement:

- Develop Summer camps and Summer Schools
- Student societies, green campuses, green schools
- Provide family engagement activities, citizen science and local project promotions
- Encourage and support local groups (tidy towns, rivers trusts) to have youth programmes

- Dedicated staff at Local Authorities to engage with young people to make sure their voice is heard and valued
- Ensure events and meetings are accessible to young people, e.g. transport
- Incentivise young people to attend local groups, for example food at events
- Provide training and highlight the benefits of involvement for learning, etc
- Build connections with sports clubs and other groups to encourage interest in water
- Provide grants and awards to develop interest in water management
- Link incentives to water quality (greater incentives to address bigger challenges)
- Water Ambassador or Champion programmes
- Aim to develop social norms for valuing water

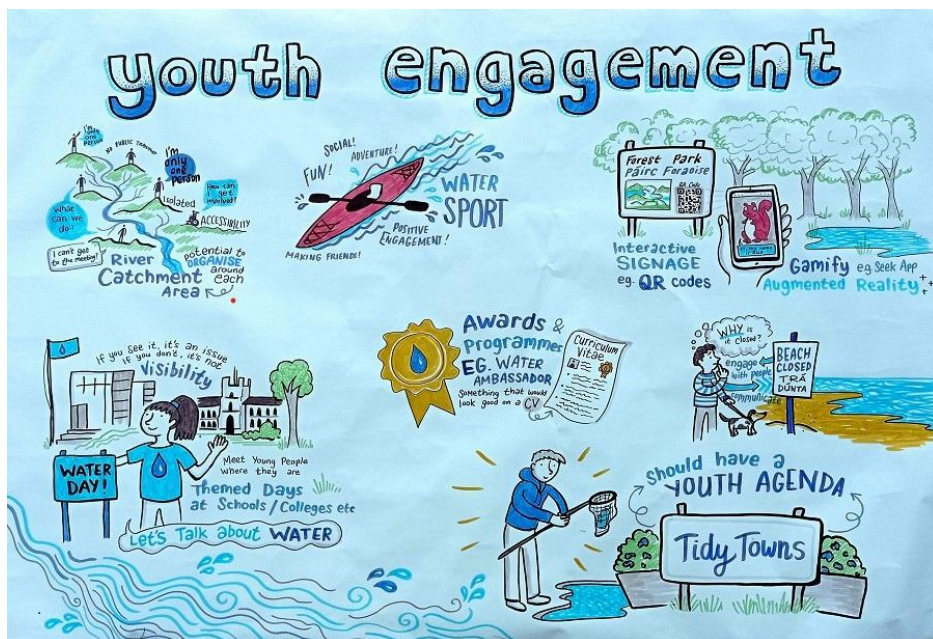


Figure 2: Key learnings from Workshop 3 on how to better involve young people in local action for water, captured by graphic harvester, Hazel Hurley

## Next Steps

The Forum will incorporate the learnings from this workshop into its engagement with the Local Authority Waters Programme and other stakeholders in our network, to shape future policy advice on public participation in water management. These insights will also guide how the Forum will communicate with young people and support their involvement in future community initiatives.

## Appendix

### Water Forum & NYCI Youth Workshop – *Conversations about water* 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025 Gibson Hotel, Dublin

<b>Time</b>	<b>Session</b>	<b>Overview</b>
<b>10:00</b>	<b>Registration</b>	<b>Refreshments</b>
10:30	Welcome	Welcome from Matt Crowe Water Forum Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NYCI Introduction to programme</li> </ul>
10:40-11:00	<b>At table</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions &amp; Mentimeter survey</li> </ul>
11:00- 11:30	<b>Session 1 Presenting the Science 30 minutes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Management in Ireland (10 mins)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Water Services &amp; WAP</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Ecological status video</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Future challenges to water (10 mins)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Water quality &amp; availability</li> <li>○ Public Health</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>Q&amp;A (10 minutes)</i></p>
11:30-11:50	<b>Knowledge Workshop</b>	<b>Discussion</b> – What information surprised you? What are the key messages? Create a list of key messages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>15-minute discussion</i></li> <li>• <i>5-minute report</i></li> </ul>
<b>11:50-12:05</b>	<b>Short Break</b>	<b>Refreshments</b>
12:05- 12:30	<b>Session 2 Communications Interview</b>	<b>Eimear Manning Interview with – Stephen J Reid, You Tube <a href="#">The 50 year cover up that POISONED the largest lake in Ireland</a></b> <i>Q&amp;A (10 mins)</i>
12:30 – 13:00	<b>Comms Workshop</b>	<b>Discussion</b> - How do you communicate key messages to young people? What are the important communication platforms and methods to reach young people? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>20-minute discussion</i></li> <li>• <i>10-minute report</i></li> </ul>
<b>1:00 – 2:00</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
2:00-2:40pm	<b>Session 3 Youth Engagement Workshop</b>	Moy River Catchment Video (5 minutes) <a href="#">River Moy Trust, Foxford connecting groups along this wonderful river.</a> <b>Discussion</b> - How can young people get more involved in local catchment management? What are the barriers? What might facilitate involved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>20-minute discussion</i></li> <li>• <i>10-minute report</i></li> </ul>
2:40- 2:55	Feedback	Mentimeter survey response
2:55- 3:15pm	Close	Next steps

Notes: Graphic Harvester – Hazel Hurley will gather the key findings of the discussions.