



# Symposium Report

## Preparing for the Citizens Assembly on the Future of Education

11-13<sup>th</sup> May 2022

*‘Creating an Unstoppable Momentum for Change’*



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## Preparing for the Citizens Assembly on the Future of Education

### FOREWORD

#### **Purpose – supporting CAFE**

Upwards of sixty participants including students, parents, teachers, academics, policy makers and many others from the field of education assembled at the Burren College of Art over three days of creative exploration of how to make the Citizens Assembly for the Future of Education (CAFÉ) as effective as it could be. The central focus was on how to be as helpful as possible to those charged with organising the assembly.

This report is a reflection of the ferment of creativity that animated the process from Wednesday evening the 11<sup>th</sup> to midday on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2022. The hope is that this provides some useful guide-posts to the important work that lies ahead.

#### **Context – ‘the Centre Cannot Hold’**

The symposium built on the 2018 symposium [Towards a More Creative Education System](#) at which the idea of a citizens assembly was born and which also gave rise to the [BEACONS](#) process under the aegis of the Teaching Council enabling local conversations about education between students, teachers and parents. These initiatives were responding creatively to the nature of the times we are in - an era characterised by increasing Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity ([VUCA](#)) - when the traditional ways of negotiating change no longer suffice.

The short interval since the 2018 symposium has witnessed the Covid pandemic, the arrival of the monkeypox virus and migration occasioned by war in Ukraine – a number of Ukrainian students were among the symposium attendees. Each successive crisis has called for in-the-moment improvised creative responses.

Meanwhile climate change is progressing unabated as captured in a painting of the ‘world on fire’ by a student at the symposium. Combined with biodiversity loss, technology change and the shattering of agreed/objective truth thanks to social media, these circumstances have contributed to an extraordinary degree of stress and anxiety in young people.

Of course, change is not without its upsides. Advances in information technology have huge potential in assisting teaching and learning. For better or worse, big tech companies are becoming key players in education through the provision of digital education platforms. These developments can free up class-room attention to focus on those endeavours where being human is most important – *education for being 'first-class humans not second-class robots'* as the OECD's head of education, Andreas Schleicher, frequently reminds us.

## The Reform Agenda - a Paradigm Shift

Recognizing that education has to adapt to these changing circumstances, the OECD has been leading out with its [Education 2030](#) agenda with its focus on student agency. Its more recent work has focused particularly on the whole area of Social and Emotional Learning ([SEL](#)) recognizing that the traditional model of education with its emphasis on knowledge transfer, needs to be complemented by the development of the inner skills of learners.

UNESCO, the UN agency tasked with forging cooperation on education, arts and sciences has launched a [Futures of Education](#) initiative with an ambition to “*rethink education and shape the future*” by “*catalysing a global debate on how knowledge, education and learning need to be reimaged in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty and precarity.*”

Meanwhile, at home, the new Junior Cycle is being embedded, proposals for the reform of the Senior Cycle have just been launched, a new Primary curriculum is in preparation and a new Department of Further and Higher Education Research Innovation and Science has been established. There is an ambition to make Ireland a leader in STEM education in Europe by 2026.

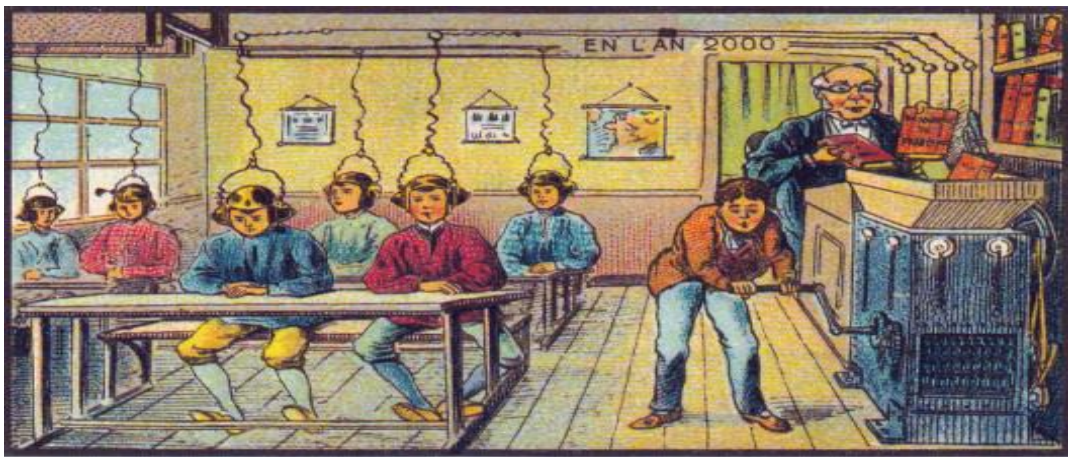
However, reaching such goals will be challenging if the assessment of the OECD's Andreas Schleicher, (Irish Times, March 2021), is accurate. While acknowledging as strengths the value placed on education by Irish society, together with a 'reasonably' good track record in providing educational opportunities to less well-off students, he had the following critique to offer (which could, no doubt, apply to many other education systems as well):

- **Industrial Age Design:** Ireland's education system is still “very much a 20th century kind of education, infrastructure and architecture, quite industrial in its outlook and its design.” There is still too much focus in Irish classrooms on transmitting knowledge and not enough on equipping students to “think outside the box”. The rapid change such as automation and artificial intelligence means education systems need to do much more to equip students to flourish in the modern world;
- **Ethics:** A key challenge for Irish schools will be getting students to think for themselves, and develop a strong sense of right and wrong;
- **Critical Thinking:** In a modern world where Google knows ‘everything’, the world will reward people for what they can do with what they know. For example, while Ireland has a good track record on literacy in global studies such as the Pisa league tables of international educational achievement, this is only part of the picture. “Just 15 per cent of Irish 15-year-olds can distinguish fact from opinion in a reliable

way. So, you know, what value is literacy, if you can't navigate ambiguity? If we can't manage complexity?"

- **Multiple Pathways:** The heavy focus on higher education after school is "pushing everyone through the same pipeline" at a time when there should be multiple pathways available.
- **Individual Needs + Teacher Collaboration:** High-performing countries focus on utilising their resources in such a way as to meet the needs of students on an individual basis and promote more collaboration among teachers.

If this critique is accurate, it suggests that nothing less than a paradigm shift is required to repurpose the education system, designed for an industrial age context, to the very different circumstances of the digital age with which we are now confronted.



Postcard from the World's Fair in Paris -- Circa 1899 A Futuristic Image of Learning  
"At School in the Year 2000" (Image Source via Wikimedia Commons)

## The Mandate – a once-in-a-lifetime Opportunity

The Programme for Government states:

*'We will establish a Citizens Assembly on the Future of Education ensuring that the voices of young people and those being educated are central.'*

A notable innovation in the citizens' assembly process is the provision that the voices of young people and those being educated will have a central role. Experience of the 2018 symposium and the BEACONS processes all point to the power of the voice of young people to transform the conversation. This echoes the sentiments of MIT's [Otto Scharmer](#) in his video address to the 2018 symposium: *'We need to put the learner in the driving seat of profound societal change'*.



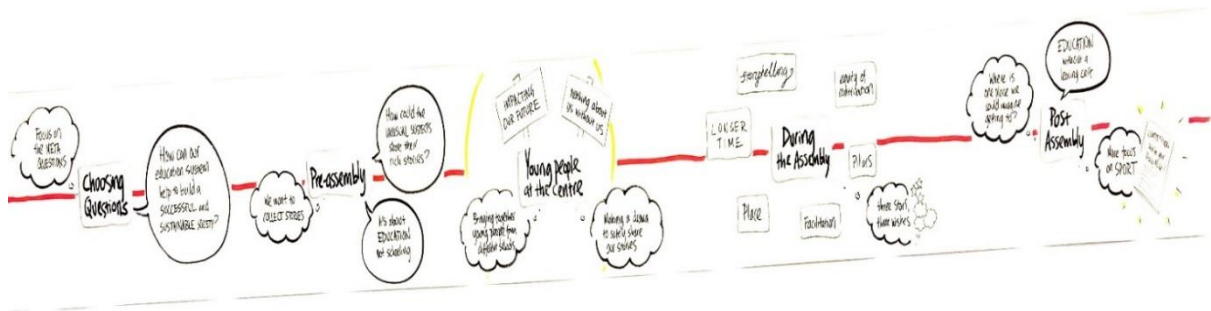
The magnitude of the opportunity afforded by a citizens' assembly with students at its heart was nicely captured by the Minister for Education in her video remarks to the symposium, when she observed that the assembly represents a:

*“Once -in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine education and to consider Ireland’s education needs.”*

## The Journey of Change – Culture & Process matter

Making the most of the Minister’s exciting ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ invitation requires not just an act of reimagining what change in education might look like, it also requires close attention to the journey of change starting before and continuing after the citizens assembly proper. A recurring theme in the symposium was that in a social system as complex as education, reimagining the ‘means’ of change is as important as reimagining the ‘ends’, if vision is to make the difficult transition to lived experience.

Peter Drucker’s aphorism that *‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’* was evoked pointing to culture as an underlying problem in the policy/implementation disconnect. If true, it suggests that capitalising on favourable conditions for a systemic reset in education requires us to pay particular attention to the cultural dimension of change.



### *The Thread of the Journey – young people at the centre*

The journey metaphor is helpful in positioning CAFÉ, not as an end in itself but, as a staging post on a journey of change that can catalyse and impart momentum to that process. The idea of a journey also serves as a reminder that education is about life-long learning and that much learning takes place outside the formal education settings of industrial-age conception. This reality becomes even more compelling given the opportunities afforded by the rate of progress in applying information technology to education.

The challenge for now is to clarify the desired direction of travel in education and create an unstoppable momentum to sustain the journey to the next horizon. Meanwhile we must keep the lights on in the current system, while remembering that this is a whole of society endeavour - ‘we’re all in this together’.

## Acknowledgements

The symposium would not have been possible without the engaged participation of many people from departmental officials, institutional actors, academics, teachers, managers, pioneers of alternative education, parents and, most particularly, students. It's not often that such a diverse group is assembled over three days without input from outside 'experts' and where, instead, they are invited to become the experts. As one student remarked, we are the experts on what it is to be a student in the education system of today.

The organisers are deeply grateful to all who participated for their generosity in making the time and taking the risk to be part of this creative conversation about the future of education in Ireland. This conversation speaks not just to the future of education but to the future and wellbeing of our young people and society more generally. There can be few endeavours more worthy of our collective attention.

Lastly, the power of the symposia series depends on the goodwill of all to respect [Chatham House Rules](#) that allow for open honest conversation to be hosted safely. We thank you for your humble respect of these precious ground rules.

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## Preparing for the Citizens Assembly for the Future of Education

### Executive Summary

Given the intention of the symposium to be as helpful as possible to those charged with taking forward the important work of CAFÉ, the diverse range of views and feelings expressed have been distilled into the ‘take-aways’ set out below. These address the core issues considered by the symposium:

- What are the most important Questions for CAFÉ to address;
- How should CAFÉ be designed and hosted so as to be most effective?
- How might the role of young people best be accommodated?
- What should happen before and after the assembly to facilitate its potential to effect necessary change?

Needless to say much important detail is lost in the distillation process. Accordingly, an attempt is also made in the ‘latent messages’ section that follows on, to capture other less explicit messages to be read between the lines of the main ‘take-aways’.

### Take-aways

As the dust settled after three days of creative engaged ferment, the outline of clear messages to the wider system crystallised in a number of propositions about CAFÉ:

#### The Core Question of Purpose

- **What does society want:** How can our education system contribute to the building of a successful and sustainable society – what do we as a society want from our education system?
- **Other Questions are subsidiary:** Based on the answer to these core ‘meta’ questions about the purpose and meaning of education and the shared values that should inform it, other issues such as provision/patronage can be addressed;
- It is also necessary to identify what is good in the present system and what can be shed;
- **Latitude in Terms of Reference:** Be careful not to make the terms of reference so prescriptive that they narrow necessary debate – perhaps give the citizens some



agency. On the other hand, there is a tension with the opposite view-point that sees the danger of going too broad with the concept of education instead of focusing on the more concrete realities of schooling.

### **Creative Assembly Process**

- **Creative process:** Process is key to the success of CAFE. Could it mirror the creative Burren process in how it was facilitated – with trust and listening as key components? How to put language on this form of facilitation?
- **UDL:** The CAFÉ process should be informed by the principles of ‘Universal Design for Learning’. It needs to engage more than the ‘head’. It needed to hear lots of stories.
- **Location(s):** Could it be multi-local – or at least have preparatory sessions in more creative, fun places/spaces than is the norm?
- **Time and Space:** There needed to be sufficient time and space to excavate the issues appropriately.
- **Chair/Facilitator:** The choice of a good chair – should this be a facilitator - was critical.

### **The Young must be Centre stage**

- **Lundy Model:** Anchoring the entire process, young people and those being educated must be central as promised in the programme for government - ‘nothing about us without us’. Follow the Lundy model.
- **Expertise of the young:** Our expertise (the young) resides in our experience of compulsory education up to the age of 18 which determines whether we get the opportunity to grow into our potential.
- **Lower age limit:** The lower-age limited for participation needed to be reduced from the customary 18 to 16 years or below. The young should be over-represented to allow them speak for those younger not present and the unborn generations.
- **Good communication:** Information could be shared in drama form and using media such as ‘tik-tok’. The crucial question is how to communicate messages well.

### **Pre-assembly Process:**

- **Early preparation:** Preparation for the assembly needs to start immediately using multiple methodologies.
- **Media strategy:** There should be a media alliance and a media blitz setting the country talking.
- **Engagement:** The system must ‘listen louder’, prompt as many people as possible to reflect and open their eyes. Build empathy through gathering stories – surveys don’t capture the tone and the colour.
- **BEACONS as a model:** The [BEACONS](#) process could be deployed in the run-up to CAFÉ to shed a bright light on what the people of Ireland think about education. BEACONS might model what CAFÉ needs to be.
- **The ‘Unusual Suspects’:** CAFÉ should hear from the ‘unusual suspects’ and the output should broaden the list of ‘usual suspects’.

## Post-assembly Process

- **Living aspired values:** How will we know CAFÉ has been worthwhile – how do we live the aspired values? We need to care for everyone in the class. Everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner and leader.
- **Alternatives to Leaving Cert:** Could we imagine life without the Leaving Certificate? What are the alternatives? Teachers as well as students need relief from the 'exam thing'. Continuous assessment could help.
- **What skills are relevant:** We need to enquire what we are preparing students for – compassion seems relevant to being a doctor, not just points.
- **Models of Good Practice:** Student participation can be gauged through the [Our Voices Our Schools](#) web-site. [Restorative Practice](#), the [Lundy Model](#) and other approaches can be part of the school tool-kit. There needs to be parity of esteem for all forms of learning.
- **Spread good Practice:** Good prototypes should be packaged for propagation more widely such as done by [Change X](#) for spreading innovative community models. Imagine sport as a metaphor for how learning skills are acquired. Imagine spending much more time outside the classroom and teachers being trained to nurture happiness.
- **Wider Implications:** This will need a whole-of-government approach to get done. The wider system has an interest in this work.



## Latent Messages/Questions

**Surfacing the latent consensus:** In reflecting on what could be learned from other assemblies it was noted that CAFÉ had the capacity not just to help generate consensus on the way forward but to make explicit and give oxygen to the latent consensus that already exists in support of a systemic reset in education. While the symposium focused attention on the key theme for CAFÉ to consider there were other themes that were strongly present and recurrent in the conversation which could provide the agenda for the subsidiary questions to be addressed.

**The ‘How’ Question:** In addition to giving strong endorsement to the overarching ‘why’ question in relation to education – the purpose and values that should inform the system – the symposium returned again and again to the ‘how’ question, acknowledging that securing change was extraordinarily difficult and that there was an implementation deficit. We needed to create time and space for the conversations that really matter.

This suggests that the question of how to bring about change in education, in particular how to bring about culture change, could form an important area for consideration by the citizens’ assembly. (Questions posed in the symposium about the process of change and the disconnect between policy and practice are set out in Annex II at page 47.)

**Other Questions:** Other questions – what might be termed the ‘what’ of change - that commanded greater or lesser attention in the symposium included:

- **SEL:** How might Social and Emotional Learning ([SEL](#)) become integral to the culture and practice of education? While SEL as a term did not feature in discussion, the importance to participants of this agenda was clear from: (i) the characteristics of the ‘desired future’ elaborated in this report; (ii) the concern with mental health and wellbeing to which SEL is core and (iii) the use of creativity (another dimension of SEL) to powerful effect in surfacing ideas and feelings at the symposium;
- **Leaving Certificate/Assessment:** How to reform the Leaving Certificate, CAO and assessment system? This is a critical and very concrete area for consideration and might be termed, in system’s terms, an ‘acupuncture point’ of change. The recent Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education’s [Report](#) on Leaving Certificate Reform recommended that a citizens’ assembly should be devoted to this subject. Whether explicitly included in the terms of reference or not – and it may be argued that the area is already under active consideration in the aftermath of reports from the NCCA and the DES - this seems likely to feature in the considerations of any citizens assembly on the future of education in Ireland;
- **Patronage/Provision:** Should the constitution be amended to make the State directly responsible for education provision rather than providing ‘for’ education (Article 42.4)? This was one aspect of the patronage issue which some regarded as an important subject for consideration by the assembly. Others felt it was better to reframe it under the broader theme of education provision. Still others acknowledged the importance of the subject but felt that CAFÉ wasn’t the best

forum to address it and that it wasn't the best use of the citizens' assembly's time. However, addressing the over-arching question of purpose and values first should facilitate progress towards a resolution;

- **Policy/Implementation Disconnect:** How to narrow the policy/implementation disconnect? This is a fundamental challenge and relates, ultimately, to the 'how'/process question suggested previously – how to make change an ongoing iterative, co-creative process;
  - **Reconnecting to Nature:** How to make time and space for education outside the classroom and for place-based learning? This feels like a question whose time has come and which has much to contribute to the SEL and wellbeing debate at a time of climate change and biodiversity loss. It also echoes the recurring call in the symposium for greater 'sustainability' in the system;
  - **Gaeilge:** How to address problems with the teaching (and learning) of Irish? The native language, a unique feature of the national education landscape, was referenced in a few comments and featured prominently in earlier consultations with initial teacher educators. In the centenary of the foundation of the state it can be argued that problems with the teaching of Irish merit the consideration of 'we the citizens';
  - **Other Issues:** How to make the system more equitable and inclusive? How to inculcate ethics and global citizenship? How to widen the terms of the education debate to give early years education and life-long learning the attention they deserve? All of these are questions of fundamental importance and merit due consideration. However, it seems likely that reflection on them will flow directly from the main question;
  - **Digital Education:** How best can IT and AI support the aims of education? Surprisingly, given the degree of dependence on digital platforms during Covid, the potential role of technology in education featured less in the symposium than might be expected.
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## Preparing for the Citizens Assembly for the Future of Education

### The Symposium Journey

This report faithfully follows the contours of the symposium journey from Wednesday evening to Friday midday, a roller-coaster ride that entailed multiple modalities from conversation, poetry and prose to drama, walking, painting, singing and toasting – much of which was improvised and spontaneous. As such it mirrors the creative process which was central to this and other symposia in this education series.

To help draw coherence from the disparate elements which were woven artfully by the facilitation team the following provides a guide to the shape of the symposium:

**Wednesday Evening:** Reconnecting with the energy of previous symposia and sensing what is good and what needs changing in the current system?

**Thursday am:** What's going on in Irish education and what do we need to learn from other citizens assemblies? How can CAFÉ help?

**pm:** Co-creating the future of Irish education – Questions for the assembly, Three-horizons Model & Arts practice.

**evening:** The Toasting Feast

**Friday am:** Harvesting the Insights





## Wednesday Evening: Welcome & Reconnecting



### *Chris' Call to order - attentive Listening*

The opening session was devoted to reconnecting with the energy of the 2018 symposium [Towards a More Creative Education System](#) at which the ideas of CAFÉ and [BEACONS](#) were born.

Firstly, though, there was an opportunity for all present to introduce themselves while recording on cards what was valuable in the current system and something that needed changing.



## What's Valuable in the Current System?



*It isn't all bad, you know!*

While some claimed to have difficulty finding something good to say about the system, there was recurring recognition for the value, high standards, dedication and compassion of **teachers**. Among the other positive themes were high **completion rates**, the **quality of relationships** and the system at its best was seen to demonstrate **integrity**, potential for growth and space for teachers to transmit their **passion**.

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**Teachers are rated highly:** High standards of teachers; teachers; teacher dedication; teacher professionalism; dedication of teachers; 'múinteoirí'; passion of most teachers/educators; sense of ambition for our young; the compassion and passion of many; generally, our teachers care deeply;

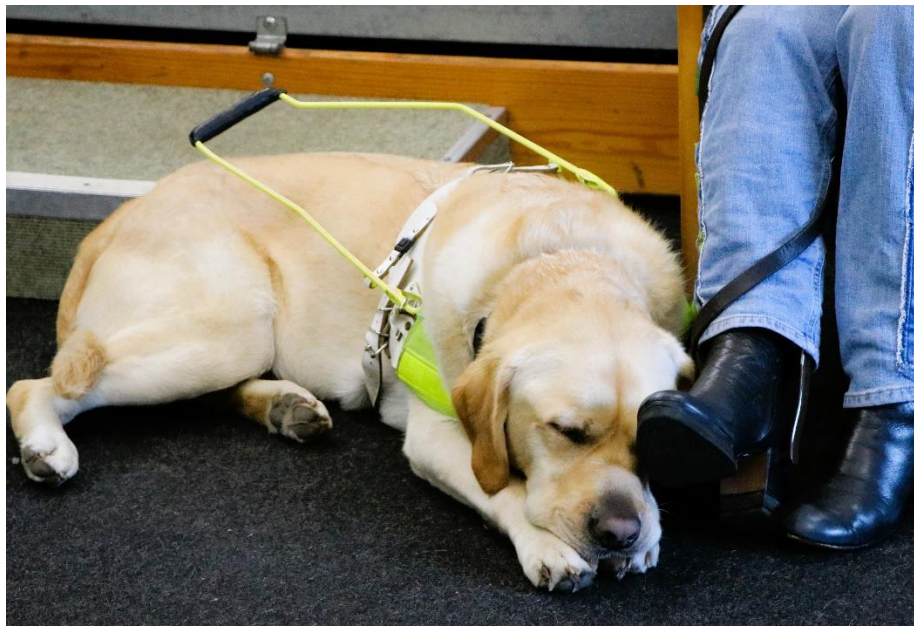
**Relationships:** adult-child relationships; people – students; relationships; relationships – people – teachers/SNA's/Leaders/Students;

**Completion:** High participation; it seems to be good at getting completions; school completion programme and DEIS as key supports for marginalized;

**At its best:** its soul; integrity; potential for learning and growth when it works well; autonomy within classroom for teachers to be creative and pass on passions;

**Other:** High level of accessibility; flexibility; fairness (not without inequality though); reasonably fair; young peoples' resilience; opportunity for socialisation; Innovative alternatives on the margins; potential for outdoor nature learning; it exists.

## What you would like to change?



*Gaston seems happy with things just as they are!*

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a strong desire to reduce an excessive emphasis on the **stress-inducing exam system**, particularly the leaving certificate. Secondly there was a call for **greater appreciation of diversity** and a more diverse teaching staff. Related to this was a perception of an **overly-rigid system**, resistance to change and the need for **greater creativity, relevance, and student agency**. Despite appearances to the contrary there was a fundamental challenge in terms of the **equity of the system** and the need to make it cater for all young people.

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**Change the Exam Focus:** Hate exam focus on points for the Leaving Cert; obsession with exams and credentials; student and teacher experience of senior cycle – decouple from 3<sup>rd</sup> level entry; the obsession with grades and state exams; leaving Cert – fear and stress; Leaving Cert as exam system and path to further education; decouple leaving cert from college entry;

**Inequality:** Underpinning by social class factors; inequalities in outcomes - empowerment, class, money; it's not fair; make it a system that caters for all children; lack of equality; perception that the system is fair;

**Diversity & Inclusion:** Diversity needs to be appreciated; need for more diversity – more well-rounded scholars; inclusion – children with special needs and from areas of disadvantage; more diversity in teaching profession; monoculture in curricula and staff;

**Rigidity & Relevance:** Rigidity of systems – lack of ambition for marginalised; too rigid + standardised (+ inhumane); greater adaptability; rigidity – solely academic focus – snobbery; it's so terrified of change; top-down dynamic; curriculum more suited to today's society; relevance of subjects taught;

**Creativity & Agency:** Further space for creativity; more creativity; it should allow all forms of expression; it's hard to talk; more child agency; enhancing opportunities for student voice.

**Critical thinking:** Under-development of critical thinking; more critical thinking and smaller class sizes;

**Other:** Value early years – child rights; How we educate to nurture happiness; lack of kindness in the system; busy.

## **Reconnecting with 2018 Insights & Energy – Process is Key**

Reprising what was live from 2018 the following themes were surfaced which related primarily to the importance of process:

- **'Everybody is an Artist':** It started with a belief that creativity was not just for artists. It was the birth-right of all and should be enabled by a creative education system;
- **Time for Systemic Reset:** The scoping exercise that preceded the 2018 symposium surfaced a widespread consensus on the need for systemic change in education, a consensus that wasn't evident on the surface of discourse about education. CAFÉ could help to give oxygen to this latent desire for a systemic reset;
- **Student voice:** 'I felt honoured as a student among professionals'. Indeed, the facilitation of one group was handed over to students;
- **Real Conversation:** The process created a safe space in which representational hats were shed and people moved into real dialogue which was heart-felt;
- **CAFÉ incubation:** Meetings were hosted in Larkin College to plan for CAFÉ – students were involved in a deep listening process and felt heard. When CAFÉ appeared in the programme for government there was a commitment to ensuring the voice of young people and those being education would be central;
- **BEACONS:** The BEACONS innovation that also arose from the 2018 symposium provided a safe space for conversations in local school system between parents, students and teachers. Starting in Ennistymon, it allowed local issues to be addressed and messages to be shared with the policy centre. Specific BEACONS were devoted to inter-cultural inclusion, disability/special education, challenges in DEIS schools and the primary curriculum. An OECD pilot was in prospect to assess

the ability of the process to help bridge the gap between policy formation and implementation;

- **Key Messages:** Those who weren't present in 2018 couldn't help but be impressed by the passion and **focus on listening** that was evident from those who experienced the event, the importance of creating **safe space** and the desire for what's best for the whole education system and those it serves. How could we resolve issues through recognition that **we're all in this together**?
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## Preparing for the Citizens Assembly for the Future of Education

Thursday

### Glimpses of the Future

As others joined the symposium on Thursday morning introductions were made and we were reminded that CAFÉ was an opportunity for us to stand back as citizens and imagine an education system fit for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Might it be possible to create space for the new to emerge in place of pressure and stress - the symposium could model deep listening and honest conversation. A student stated that she had never before experienced anything like the Burren process where young people were at the centre. The power of human vulnerable conversation was recalled.



*Students central to the Conversation*

Newcomers were invited to share glimpses of the future, twenty years hence, when the system had evolved. These glimpses included:

- ❖ **Values:** Equity, inclusion and enjoyment; equality; understanding; no such thing as educational disadvantage; well-funded – everyone has what they need;
- ❖ **Student-centred:** meaningful participation; student at the centre as a given; immersed daily in creativity of youth; student as part of co-creative eco-system with parents and teachers; young people involved;



- ❖ **Self-intelligence:** Learning for yourself, not because it's required; confidence in one's own intelligence ('self-intelligence') vs the system's understanding of intelligence;
- ❖ **Human:** Less stress being put on students; comfortable, safe; teachers and students relate as human; more freedom to be expressive; empathy and support; easy;
- ❖ **Joy of Teaching & Learning:** School an easy place to work – kindness; school is a place to learn for the joy of learning;
- ❖ **Flexible:** education accommodates different learning styles; adaptive, responsive curriculum – skills and competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; more extra-curricular options to help develop a sense of self; technology;
- ❖ **Holistic System:** More connection between subjects; cooperation; more student/teacher interaction; easier integration from primary; synergies between early years, primary and post-primary systems; effective transitions;

**Message from the Minister:** In a video message, the Minister, Norma Foley, TD, reminded us that CAFÉ was a:

*'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine education and to consider Ireland's education needs'.*

The Department had already commenced work on what the citizens assembly would look like ensuring that the voice of the young would be heard in the process. There was great wisdom and power in collectively giving time and attention to reflect on issues and she looked forward to the outcome of our deliberations.

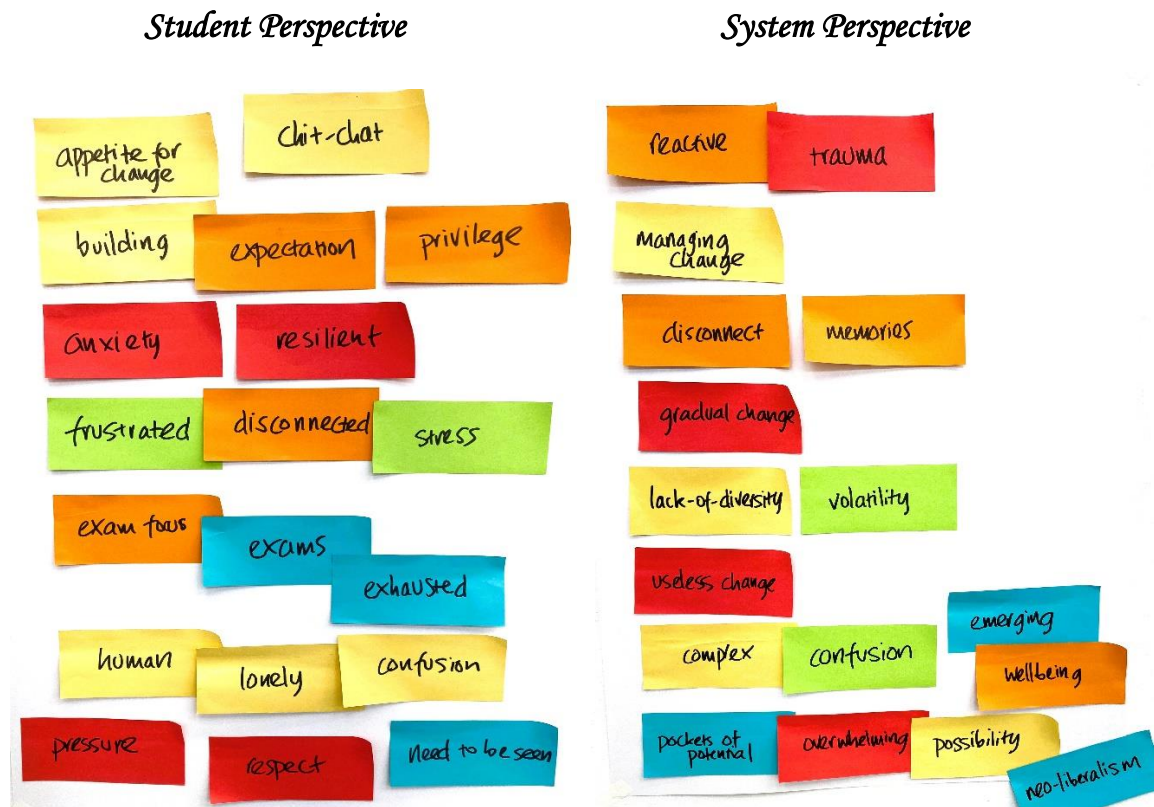
## Snapshot of What's Going on in the Irish Education System?



*Preparing for an un-imaginable Future*



Before considering the future of Irish education it seemed wise to reflect on what was going on at present – from a student and a system perspective. The overwhelming sense was of pressure and stress in the system, disconnection, reactivity and a failure to realize inclusion and diversity. At the same time there was an appetite for change and pockets of potential.



**What's going on from a Student Perspective:** Snippets from a table-conversation spoke of student demotivation and disconnection from a system that was too content and knowledge focused:

- **Demotivated:** Not motivated by subjects – will they be relevant; subject choice is dictated by entry to 3<sup>rd</sup> level; post-covid there's less connection to education – connection has moved online;
- **Content-driven:** too content-driven and knowledge-focused; learning-off – missing out if absent; language is not for using with inadequate oral emphasis;

**In plenary** the comments captured in the above graphic – rendered by Ali as poetry - spoke to the stress experienced by the young - frustration; exam-exhaustion; loneliness; confusion; pressure; disconnection; expectations; the need to be seen and privilege. However, there was also an appetite for change, respect and resilience.

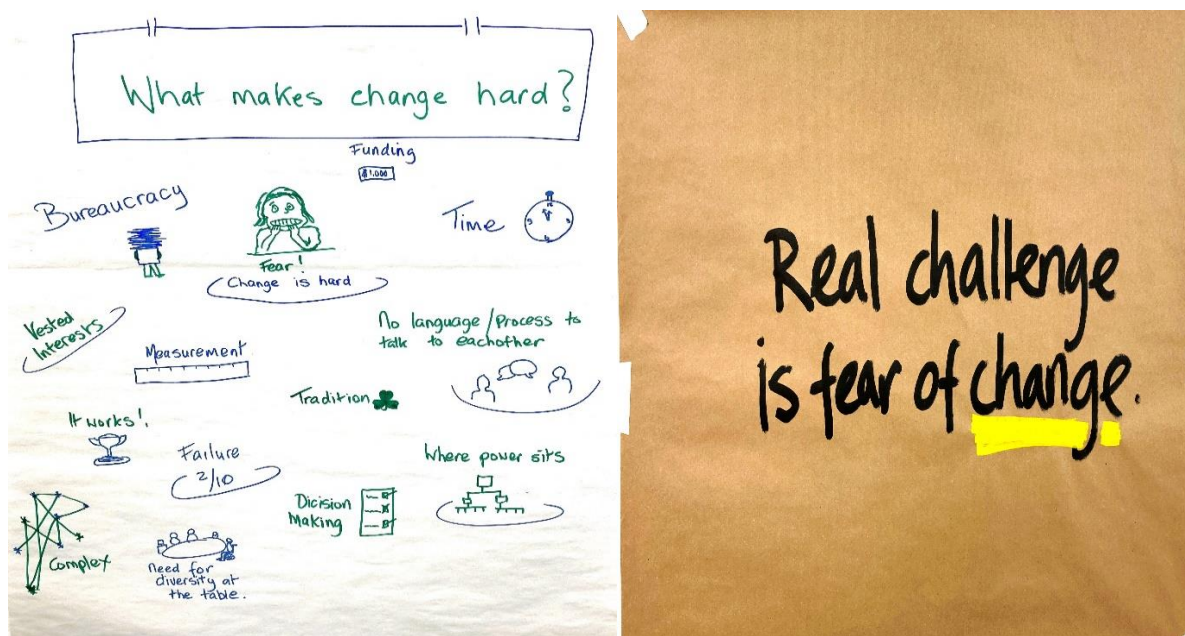
**What's going on from a System Perspective:** Reprising the question of what was going on in education from a system perspective one table conversation homed in on the challenge of the system to effect change:

- **Maintaining the Status Quo:** The system attempts to hold on to the status quo; there is disconnection of the early-years sector;
- **Inclusion as aspiration:** There was false narrative around inclusion. How could inclusion exist with special schools? Good people with good intentions were relying on official guidelines to transform intent into action. Meanwhile the pressure was on to maintain a positive narrative and keeping the terms of debate and research within narrow parameters.

**In plenary** the talk was of neoliberalism, complexity and confusion; lack of diversity; volatility and overwhelm; reactivity and trauma; conflict and disconnection; managing change - gradual change and useless change. There was also possibility and pockets of potential.

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## Why is change so Hard?



Exploring the question of why change was so hard revealed a rich range of perspectives (see Annex I) from the need to firstly recognize something is wrong to acknowledging the

complexity and inertia of a system that suits many and has inadequate mechanisms for creating time and space for reconciling conflicting perspectives:

- **Priorities:** given the complexity of the social system that is education, it is difficult to establish priorities;
- **Fear of Change:** there is a natural fear of change so why go there when we appear to be doing well by international standards?
- **Inertia:** There is a lot of inertia in the system – the way it always was; it's difficult to seek to change the system of which you are part and no one wants to be the test case;
- **Vested Interests:** the hidden curriculum is at work – the system suits many well, particularly those who are in positions of power; stakeholders look to their own interests;
- **Decision-makers:** key decision-makers are products of the existing system which has worked well for them; trades-unions need to be on board as key stakeholders;
- **Time and Space:** we don't have the language/process to talk to one another; the system creates little time and space for necessary ongoing reflection – existing structures could be better used;
- **Other:** change requires acknowledging something is wrong; the system finds it hard to reconcile conflicting perspectives.

**Plenary:** Bureaucracy; memory test reflects what's important in exams; change benefits some more than others; it suits a lot of people; many think the system is fine; it's hard for system to reconcile different perspectives; change would require acknowledging something is wrong; teachers are compliant; there's not enough focus on multiple intelligences.

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**Context is Important:** Before moving on we were reminded of the importance of keeping the current context in mind: We are faced with climate change, the aftermath of a pandemic, war in Europe and many other existential challenges. This may be a foretaste of the 'new normal' for which we need to prepare our students.

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## What do we need to Learn from other Citizens Assemblies?



Tapping into the intelligence in the room the question was posed as to what have other citizens' assemblies done well, leading to the sharing of the following insights;

- **Developing a consensus** and recommendations for change;
- Garnering the views of the public – past referenda mirrored the related assemblies thought not all assemblies were followed by referenda; some, such as climate change, led to an action plan;
- Importance of **making consensus visible** – maybe we the citizens are ready for change and making this visible in an assembly can provide cover for politicians;
- Talking without governing: assemblies are a form of deliberative democracy with multiple perspectives but do not constitute democracy as participants are not elected;
- It is important that the deliberations of the assembly are **fed into a Joint Oireachtas Committee**;
- A citizens' assembly is **not a stakeholder forum** – many in education would have no direct involvement in CAFÉ;
- The Scottish Assembly on Climate Change engaged the young through a separate 'youth parliament';
- Many around the world are looking to the Irish experience of deliberative democracy – giving time and space for citizen engagement and **bringing citizens' values to the table**;
- The most recent assemblies have expanded **eligible participants** to include not just citizens but those born in Ireland;
- With CAFÉ giving a central place to the young there is an **opportunity to reduce the lower age limit of participants to 16 or below**.

## Conclusions from other Assemblies for CAFE

Following short discussion in groups the following views were surfaced in plenary:

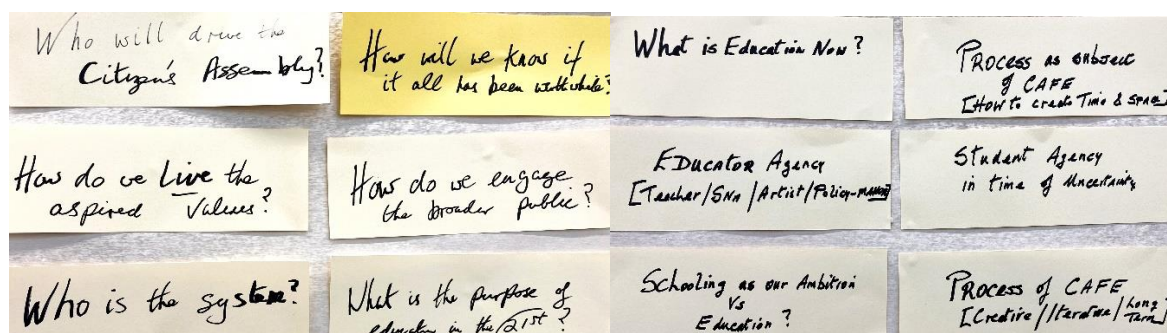
- A **pre-assembly** might be useful to inform CAFÉ;
  - Its deliberations should allow for **blue-skies thinking** but should not be disconnected from real-world concerns;
  - It's an opportunity to **widen the circle** of those engaged with education;
  - We should think of education not as a linear progression from primary to 3<sup>rd</sup> level but as **multiple pathways** and choices to engage young people;
  - CAFÉ could interrogate education from cradle to the grave or it could be more specific and there could be more than one question; how might we need to **rethink education** to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
  - Should the state's role under the Constitution in 'providing for' education be changed by dropping 'for' with **the church** ceasing to be involved?
  - If we focus on a narrow question such as the role of the church or the CAO we may find the problem shifts elsewhere. We need to address the **purpose** of education and we need to be able to express this in terms that make sense to others. **Process** is also key. The process needs to be embodied and creative;
  - We need to **be strategic** – what ideas can the system work with? The system has the ability to take ideas and water them down;
  - The view that assemblies should address a **binary question** has given way to the recognition that they can also deal with broad questions of purpose and values. There have also been innovations and suggestions for giving assemblies a role in setting the terms of reference, interacting with Oireachtas Committees and being **facilitated** rather than chaired;
  - The **framing of the question** as in 'How the State can make Ireland a Leader in Climate Change' is important. So is the **time** given to the assembly to complete its work. And the **terms of reference** are crucial;
  - What does education look like for **children** – might a separate children's assembly feed into CAFÉ by sending delegates?
- 

### What Questions might CAFÉ Address?

In this first round addressing what the central focus of the Citizens Assembly for the Future of Education (CAFÉ) might be there was a rich diversity of views. While many favoured addressing the big question of purpose and values in education, some argued for a more practical focus on schooling rather than education. Culture, it was suggested, was the



invisible force that resulted in a disconnect between vision and lived reality in education.  
What might a socially healthy system look like?



### *Diversity of Perspectives*

At one round-table discussion the following ideas were surfaced:

- Student voices spoke of **relationships**; ethnicity; the need for religion class or multiple religions;
- The need for education adapted to **different styles of learning** – e.g. audio-visual vs written culture;
- Others spoke of a basis for **ethics** enabling questions of values, meaning and purpose – might global citizenship address these areas?
- **Wellbeing** and mental health of both teachers and students post-covid;
- The assembly process needed to ensure **parity of esteem** for all voices;
- Education needed a **gestational process** – more assemblies and regional assemblies.

The abundant harvest of views from all tables presented in Annex II resolved into a number of themes:

- **The Why question:** the purpose of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – answer this question first and the answers to other questions will follow;
- **Values:** The related question of values interrogated what's valued in the current system, what's important to retain and what values do we want to promote and to inform the education system?
- **Change Agenda:** In terms of the specifics of change there was a desire for fairness and inclusion; reform of the leaving certificate and CAO system; assessment; mental health and 'Gaeilge';
- **Young People:** Is the current system serving young people and how might it be changed to make it an empowering, enjoyable and transformative experience?
- **Policy/Implementation Disconnect:** There is a disconnect between vision and policy on the one hand and what's experienced in practice on the other – how might this disconnect be resolved?

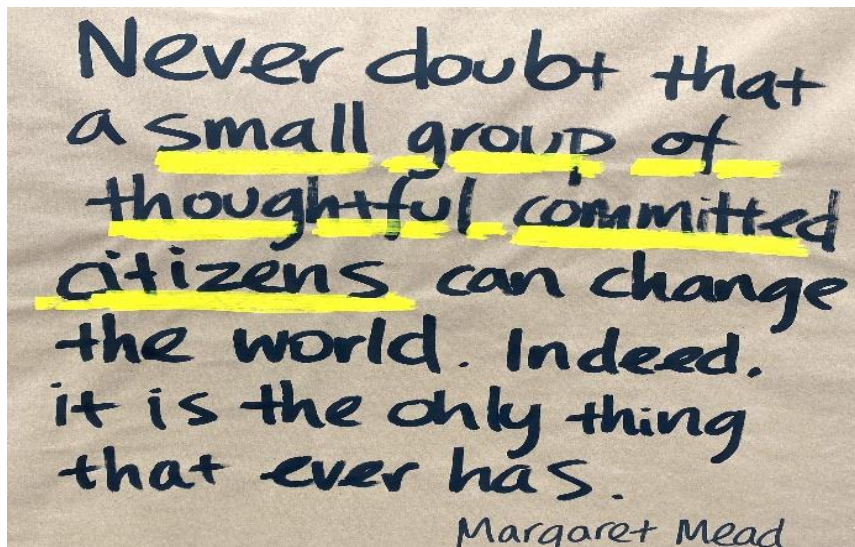


- **Process of change:** For others the question was the process for bringing about change, conversation process, making the system better understood by the public, how to make the system more adaptable and suited to individual needs;
- **Patronage:** How to support religious diversity and parental choice?

In plenary discussion there was reference to:

- **The Why Question:** Purpose, values and passion – the need for change should be assessed against these criteria; answering the purpose/value question would facilitate the answer to all other questions; without the ‘why’ question everything else is different; twenty years ago who would have imagined a world of social media – we can’t predict the future;
- **Specific Questions:** Identify problems and if we can fix them, get on with it; seeing what works and what needs to change that might make life easier; we should focus on schooling rather than education;
- **Vision vs Reality:** Why is there a massive disconnect between the vision for education and the experience of those in the system? How can we narrow the disconnect?
- **It’s a culture Issue:** ‘Culture eats strategy for breakfast’ – we have a culture problem; that’s why we don’t get on with it; it’s the invisible part of the ice-berg below the water-line; culture reflects beliefs and values held in common – but defining culture assumes we can name these; is CAFÉ the only way to identify this?
- **Danger of dumbing down:** We need to strive for excellence and should not make it easy to ‘get the parchment’. However, a distinction needs to be made between ‘dumbing down’ and not making things harder than they need to be; how can we reduce the stress in school without dumbing down; and how can CAFÉ help the disease in the system for teachers and students?
- **Healthy system:** The system’s impact on mental health is huge; it’s not about my results but about competition to get more points than others or last year; we need take the focus off points and motivate those who drop out because of stress; what might a mentally, socially-healthy system look like?
- **Framing the Question:** The last big stakeholder engagement was in 1993. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, both exciting and terrifying. Given this ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ opportunity, how do we frame the question for the Department of the Taoiseach in light of the great diversity of views in the room?

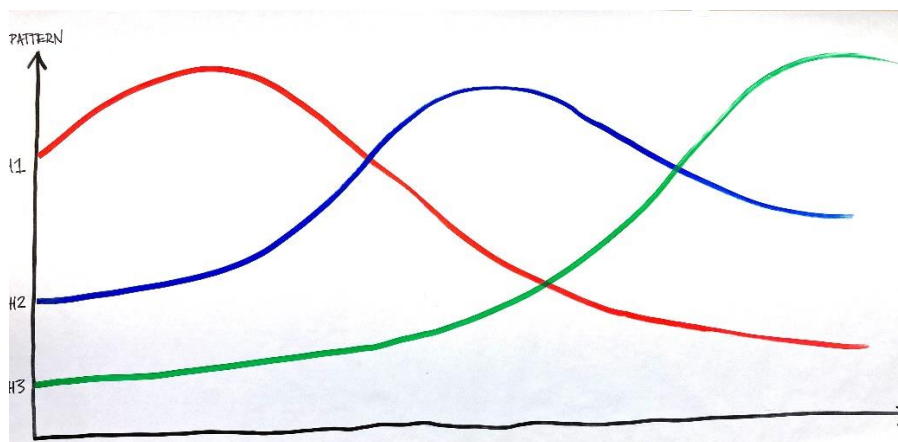
## Co-Creating the Future of Irish Education: How can CAFÉ Help?



In the afternoon participants were invited to explore the future of education through three modalities:

- A journey of change using a 'Three Horizons Model' – the majority choice;
- An 'Artist Studio Collective' working with ideas and art (as befits an art-college setting) and
- A structured 'pair-walk' to tease out ideas that were bubbling.

### Three Horizons Model



The [Three Horizons Model](#) was introduced by Valerie as a simple way of viewing the journey of change over time (the horizontal axis). It was explained that:

- **Horizon 1: H1**, the red line, represented the current dominant system which is destined to decline and change. Maintaining this was associated with a management mind-set;
- **Horizon 3: H3** the green line, represented a vision of the future we want to make happen and which is present in pockets right now; this was associated with a visionary mind-set;
- **Horizon 2: H2** the blue line, represented innovations in the system which could be designed to sustain the old system (H2-) or to incorporate elements of the new system (H2+); this was associated with an entrepreneurial mindset.

Applied to education, CAFÉ was a point on this journey of change from the current system, H1, to the desired system H3. It was observed that we needed to iterate regularly and H2 needed to be sufficiently close to H1 to gain traction: ‘we need to keep the lights on’.

**H1 System – its strengths and weaknesses:** We were reminded of Wednesday evening’s articulation of what was good about the current system – high standards, integrity of the system, teachers’ passion, schools as safe havens, caring at a personal level (even if the system didn’t feel caring), allowing potential for growth. The areas of desired change were also brought to mind: limited diversity or agency; the focus on exams and 3<sup>rd</sup> level; rigidity; fear, even terror, of change; top-down dynamic; disconnection from early years etc. We needed to hold on to what was good.

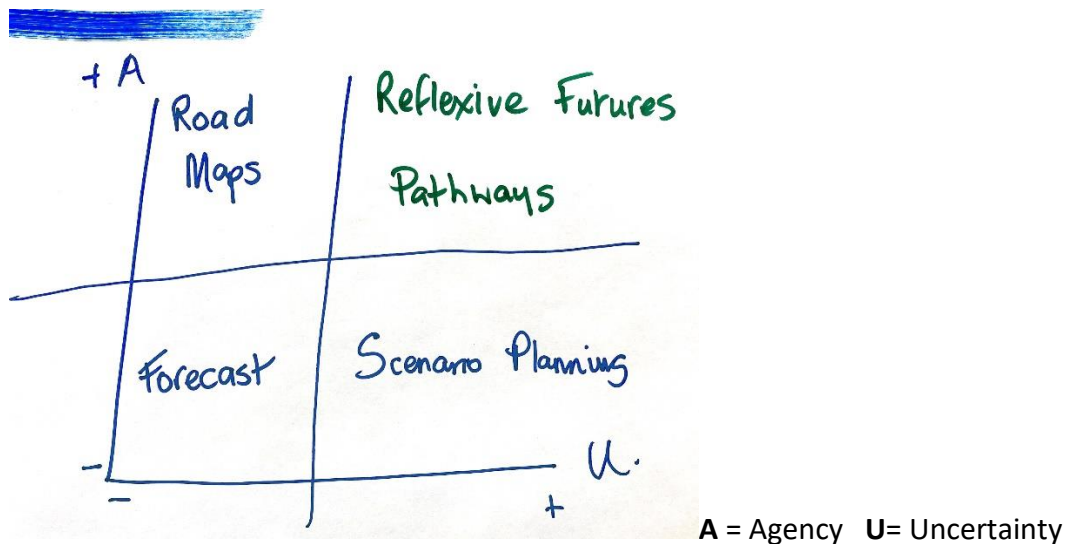
There was injustice in the system. While few would reject supports that are helpful, DEIS was designed to keep the system functioning as it is. What would the proverbial ‘person from Mars’ discern from observation of the system as to what its intent was - what was it designed to do?

**What’s Missing:** A vision of how the system might look twenty years hence in 2042 had elicited talk of an integrated curriculum, partnership, confidence in the use of technology, a humane feel, inclusivity, co-creativity and happiness. CAFÉ could be part of the H2 process of change. Scotland had an innovative first year with ‘no homework’. Universal Design for Learning ([UDL](#)) uses multiple ways of representing knowledge and how to demonstrate learning. Might CAFÉ be innovative in using UDL and hearing stories from multiple perspectives.

**Pathways from H1 to H3:** The challenge was how to get from the current situation to the desired future while retaining the best of what we have at present – how to tune into the elements of H3 that were already incubating? There is typically a tension between the values in H1 (e.g. control/exams) and H3 (greater autonomy) as vested interests and tradition work against the resources and time required to secure change.

Forecasts and road maps which made sense as navigational tools when future uncertainty was low, no longer sufficed for addressing a highly uncertain world – as illustrated in the

below schematic. **Given the environmental, technological, social and political uncertainty that characterise the current outlook, it was necessary to increase agency by engaging more people in the conversation** – as with BEACONS and CAFÉ. Covid was a circumstance characterised by extreme uncertainty and the response had to be created one step at a time. We were in the territory of ‘Reflexive Futures Pathways’.



*‘Traveller, there is no path, the path is made by walking’* Antonio Machado

**Level of Ambition:** The BEACONS process is on the blue (H2) innovation path. CAFÉ needs to be ambitious but not so ambitious that it goes nowhere as has happened with many assemblies. Aiming for ‘good’ instead of ‘great’ could electrify the conversation and make possible what seemed impossible. The terms of reference of CAFÉ need to connect to the blue curve and be usable - otherwise they will be put on the shelf and facilitate the government’s preference for sticking close to the red curve and not rocking the boat.

**National Conversation:** During the centenary of the 1916 rising every parish came on board. How might we use this year, the centenary of the foundation of the state, to make CAFÉ visible in a world-class way with a symbol in every school. There should be sessions in schools based on the Universal Design for Learning, student-centred and equity-based. Schools and citizens should be able to tune into the assembly sessions.

# Values Tension between Current and Aspired Systems

## Values in the Current System



*Strengths + what needs to change in the current system (from Wednesday evening)*

We also heard:

- It is capable of supporting diversity; 'Aistear' is discovery based;
- Its values are instrumental – pathways to jobs;
- The 'right answer' approach is death to creativity;
- It's instrumental regurgitation and bureaucratic;
- The focus is on acquisition of knowledge rather than the development of the child;
- Striving for high-standards with focus on exam results;
- Care, compassion and good will;
- There are no exams in early years and primary – we're not availing of the flexibility and maybe we don't want to;
- The primary language curriculum is very innovative;
- Teacher training is about control and teachers tend to be conservative;
- The goal of the JC is valid but needs to be aligned across the system with creativity and critical thinking – 'blue line' innovation;
- There are two different philosophies informing JC and LC and 3<sup>rd</sup> level has to decommission mindsets;
- There is aspiration and real change but change needs time and space and formative assessment related to the real needs of students; pathways need to be freed up;



- There is need for greater resilience and culture shift is part of the journey – values need to be owned;
- The desired values reside in alternative education;
- Stress and anxiety levels of 3<sup>rd</sup> level students are off the charts – we are living in a very stressful world compounded by social media. We need a strategic view with long-term implementation.



*Groups deep in Conversation*

### Values in H3, the Desired System





### *Desired Future (from morning session)*

We also heard a desire for a system:

- Capable of responsiveness and inner renewal;
- Based on UDL principles;
- Providing tools for life;
- Capable of difficult conversations;
- Understanding how learning happens;
- The child is a full participant and there is the widest array of access points;
- Values need to be lived and supported by a public awareness campaign – otherwise the big vision for change doesn't make it into lived reality;
- Some bold initiatives are needed e.g. rid primary schools of texts;
- Should CAFÉ give special voice to those less-well served by the system?

### **How Can CAFÉ help?**

Having reflected on the tensions between the values animating the current system and the values that were needed in the desired system the question posed for group discussion was what did CAFÉ need to do to help make the shift – what stories needed to be heard? How could the current system welcome the new without losing its integrity and how could a new system welcome the best of the current system?

Suggestions appearing in the poster presentations (Annex III) suggested:

- Helping to **bridge** the gap between aspiration/policy and implementation;
- CAFÉ was a staging post in a process, not a destination;
- A **step prior to CAFÉ** was needed to create public awareness of CAFÉ and its potential, testing possible CAFÉ questions and inviting opinions e.g how education has (or hasn't) served;
- CAFÉ could make **alternative education** more mainstream;
- CAFÉ could focus attention on **upskilling teachers** to match the aspirations of policy documents;
- Another poster invited consideration of a system in which the **3<sup>rd</sup> level was agnostic of early-life educational achievement**, the second level functioned as a bridge rather than an obstacle race and primary education was modelled on DEIS;
- Other posters focused on the importance of relationships and connections; **multiple pathways** and cross-curricular approaches throughout post-primary and diverse pathways to further and higher education and work; questioning the need for the LC and suggesting the need for greater supports generally.

In plenary a student suggested that **trust** was the huge piece that was missing. There was a need to define what education was for and to put inclusion at its centre.

## The Studio Artists Collective



### *Exploring Education through Art*

Meanwhile the studio artists collective was working with ideas and art - others went for a walk and returned with insights. Some – see Annex IV - were deeply personal reflections on the education journey while the walkers were inspired by nature to reflect its value in education:

- **The Road less travelled:** For one artist the documented journey through education with all its challenges and obstacles was transformed by the choice of ‘the road less travelled’;
- **Preparing for an unimaginable Future:** The sadness of migrants fleeing the trauma of war animated at least one art piece (below), reminding us how Europe has been convulsed in less than three months, just as we were emerging from the covid pandemic. This together with another art piece depicting the world burning reminded us that we need to prepare for an unimaginable future;
- **Utopia/’Aipotu’:** On a more hopeful note, another piece (below) entitled [‘Aipotu’](#), a palindrome of Utopia, pointed to a simulated world where users can explore biological phenomena in terms of genetics, biochemistry, molecular biology, and evolution. In this ‘aipotu’ education system clarity of purpose, self-awareness and connection to nature formed the basis for harmony, curiosity, open communication, fellowship and constant growth;
- **Inter-generational Creativity:** An child/adult image reflected making ‘me time’ for adult/child creativity;
- **Who owns Education:** This provocative question provided a focus for a more literal work that interrogated why 2<sup>nd</sup> level was the ‘gate-keeper’ to 3<sup>rd</sup> level and wondered how all voices might be heard in the education conversation;
- **Learning from Nature:** Students returning from a walk in the hill created biomimicry works that: (i) wondered ‘what would it mean to be trunk?’ while another image connected a trunk to deep roots and an abundant sky in a movement described as transforming loss into the new and beautiful; (ii) others imagined education reflecting nature that was ‘immaculate’, inclusive and expressive. It was observed by the walkers that going for a walk allowed bottled-up feelings to be expressed.



### *The world is burning & A vision of Utopia*

Poetry and Drama also featured in the harvest process.

## **Closing Reflections for the Day**

Drawing the threads of the afternoon together, we were reminded that the 1972 primary curriculum had already articulated much of what was needed – inclusion, equity, parental involvement and embracing the whole child. However, what was imagined in policy hadn't translated fully into lived reality. How could we and the CAFÉ process contribute? There was expertise in the room without experts.

Closing reflections from the day included:

- **Young people** need preparation for CAFÉ;
- **Equity and Religion:** Aim for an equity-based system removing religion and the opt-out process of sitting at the back of the class if you didn't want to participate in religion;
- **Trust:** Define what education is for vs vested interests – trust is a huge piece of the jig-saw that's missing;
- **Iterative Process:** Pursuing the green line of the three horizons model will be an iterative process needing time for continuous reflection;
- **Abstract/Concrete:** Do we focus on schooling rather than education?
- **Process:** Process is key – the traditional approach needs to be turned on its head; how do we give students agency in a time of uncertainty; the serenity prayer is relevant – having the courage to change the things we can while having the discernment to recognize what can't be changed; our work is that of scaffolding a new structure and in the words of Seamus Heaney's poem 'Scaffolding' we may in the fullness of time *'let the scaffolds fall, confident that we have built our wall'*.

## The Toasting Feast

Proceedings for the day were rounded off with a Toasting Feast in the [Georgian](#) tradition with Ali as the 'Tamada' (Toastmaster) and while no dancing on the tables was performed original poems were recited, songs were sung and heart strings were touched. Creative springs were nurtured into life in preparation for the concluding work on Friday.



*A toast*





## Preparing for the Citizens Assembly for the Future of Education

### Friday – Harvesting the Insights



### *Time to bring home the Harvest*

**What can we see clearly now?** On Friday morning, the final session of the symposium, we were invited to bring our best thinking to creating helpful output for those charged with guiding the citizens' assembly process – what we thought and why. Work groups were organized around five themes:

- Choosing questions for the assembly;



- Pre-assembly work;
- Assembly itself;
- Post-assembly and
- Young people at the centre.

A sixth options was to go for a walk with the idea of being able to contribute to the process.

We were reminded to bring our freshest thinking to the challenges of policy vs lived reality; community and relationships; having time to think; the purpose/why question; process and agency; transitions and pathways; religion, diversity and bureaucracy.

It was observed that the rhythm had changed, we had stopped thinking what we came with – perspectives had shifted. It was important to let things be as they are without getting attached to particular outcomes. The sustainability of our processes had to be borne in mind. Teachers needed the Easter break just to recover. And what was the student experience?

### Choosing the Question

The following summarises the conclusions of the group that focused on what questions CAFÉ should address; there is a more expansive consideration of the same issue by the entire group (at the Thursday session) at Annex II:

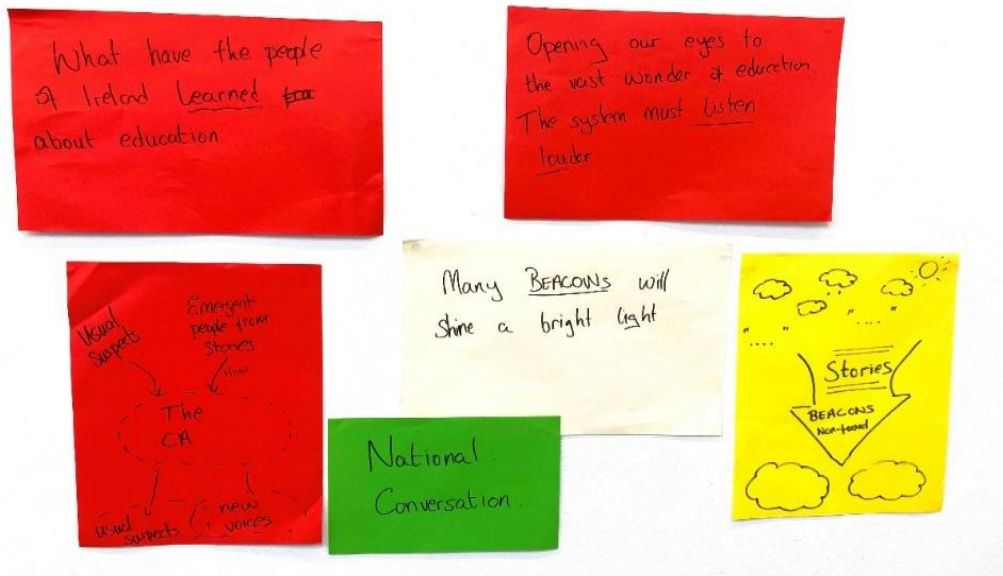
- **Purpose:** Purpose, diversity and sustainability. The overarching question is the purpose of education; might this be translated into more specific questions about what we want from our education system;
- **Core Question:** Can we suggest a central question – the vision question – with a sub-set of questions addressing provision etc. Might the participants have some agency in setting the question(s) – some former chairs found the terms of reference overly-prescriptive;
- **Shared Values:** Huge changes have come about as a result of greater diversity of the population. Technology change means people are living in many different virtual bubbles. In this context education should facilitate a sense of community and help shape shared values. Might inclusion and diversity be shared values? What values should we ask the system to promote?
- **Provision/Patronage:** There is a lack of choice in most places in relation to primary school – there is a constitutional question. Can we frame the patronage issue more widely in terms of school provision;
- **School culture:** You need to want to be in school. We (students) spend 18 years of our lives in the system during the most formative years of our lives. If it doesn't provide the right container you won't grow into the person you need to be.

In plenary this 'questions group' suggested an overarching question such as 'how can education build a successful and sustainable society?' with space under this for a sub-set of questions.

The importance of how CAFÉ was hosted was underlined in both the poster presentation at Annex V and in plenary contributions:

- 37

## Pre-Assembly

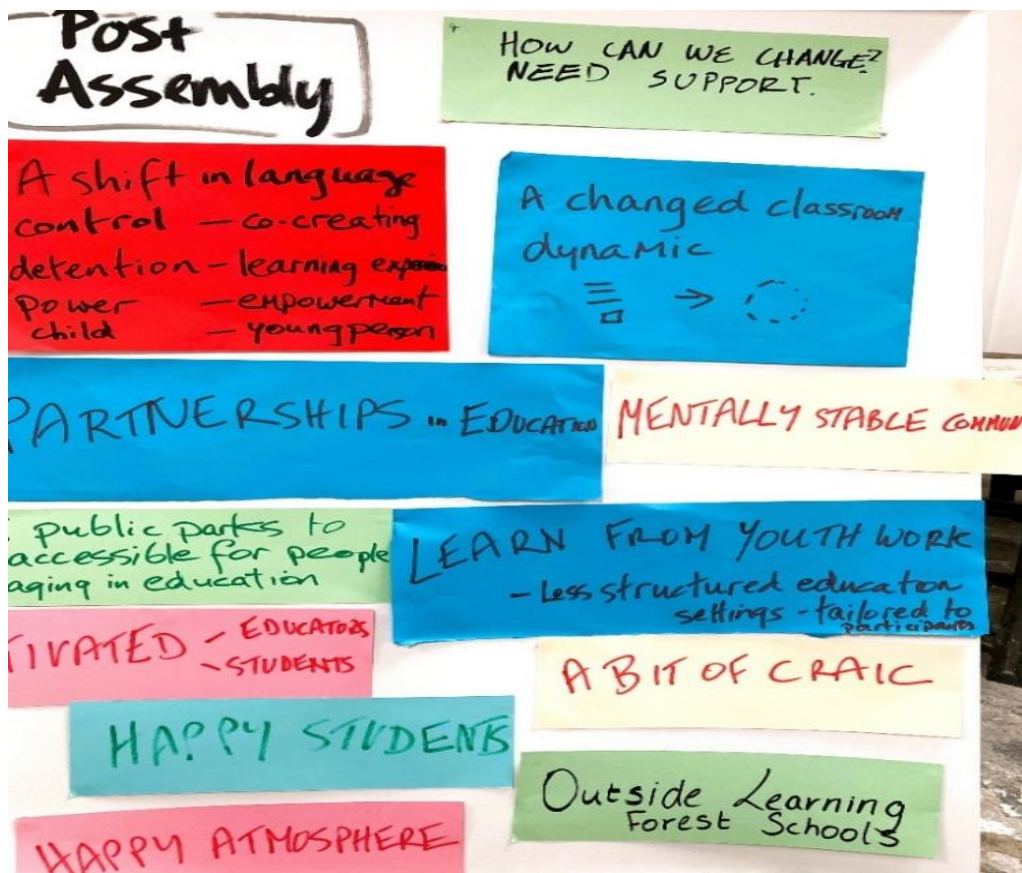


### *Shining a bright Light*

There was a strong feeling – in both plenary and in the poster presentation at Annex VI -that optimising the effectiveness of CAFÉ required that the ground be well prepared beforehand through engaging wider society and, in particular, young people:

- **Broader engagement:** Many BEACONS will shine a bright light – what have the people of Ireland learned about education? Prompt as many people as possible to reflect. We must allow new voices to be heard – to broaden the category of ‘usual suspects’ so that unusual suspects can share stories with CAFÉ;
- **Quality of Listening:** It’s important to open eyes. The system must ‘listen louder’; build empathy through stories;
- **Start Immediately:** using multiple methodologies including stories; avoid surveys – they miss the colour;
- **BEACONS:** If they start now they can build a great light that illuminates the CAFÉ process; build the capacity of the system to host conversations;
- **Empower the Young** to keep what’s best and change what doesn’t serve them and the planet. The engagement process needs to be age-appropriate; include the voices of those who dropped out of the system; use the BEACONS process and really listen.

## Post-Assembly



Those addressing the post-assembly question focused on the means by which we could recognize that change was taking place – how relevant education was in preparing people for to the needs of society, proof of action, visible results – more posters at Annex VI:

- a shift in the **language of education** from control to co-creation; from power to empowerment; from child to young person;
- Everyone reaches their own potential with **parity of esteem** for different aptitudes;
- a changed **classroom dynamic** – with priority to happiness vs proof of action; teachers are trained to nurture happiness; school settings are tailored to greater participation;
- **release from the 'exam thing'** for both students and teachers with more pathways to higher and further education; life without the leaving certificate and assessment re-imagined; greater subject choice;
- more learning **outside** with attention on being active and the release of stress;
- mentally-stable community;
- young people have **voice** and teachers are **valued**;
- Alternatives to the Leaving Cert are explored;
- A whole-of-government approach is adopted to realizing the CAFÉ vision.



## Young People at the centre



*Please Listen to us and show us you've heard*

The young people who made up about 25% of the attendees were placed centre-stage in the physical lay-out of the venue and they produced a rich harvest of output – see Annex VIII - on how CAFÉ should be structured to hear their voice and, more importantly, ensure that their views were taken seriously as reflected in the Lundy model:

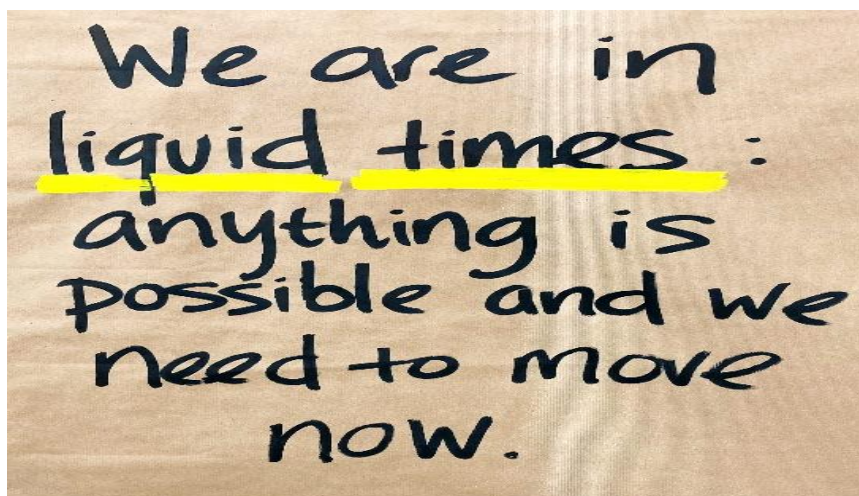
- **Preparation:** Mixed-age groups of 2<sup>nd</sup> level students should be hosted to do **facilitated workshops** with primary students and capture perspectives; send proposals as preparation such that it's clear that young people are at the centre of the process; a letter should be sent to each home inviting young people to **share their thoughts** – the literature should move them to really reflect on what they think about their own education; allow for the anonymous sharing of opinions; employ different methods to get feedback e.g. social media;
- **Mini-assemblies:** Host mini-assemblies with students from a variety of schools; influence students to participate by sharing your experience; knowing that your opinion matters and is taken seriously, matters.
- Create an assembly of teenagers/2<sup>nd</sup> level students from different schools and send delegates from this assembly to primary schools;
- Different groups of young people from around the country meeting first, then coming together in a larger assembly; anonymously sharing your opinions, while knowing that they will be taken seriously will make a difference;
- **Format:** the assembly should be a mix of the old and the young with sessions dedicated to young people speaking and older people listening; trained facilitators



need to bring out everyone's views; young people should be able to share stories directly inputted to the assembly;

- **Facilitation:** in consulting with schools be mindful that group work can involve disclosure of trauma – the facilitator needs to have basic skills to manage the moment and link to local pastoral care;
- **Creative media:** Using a mixture of media that is interesting captures the attention of young people e.g. graphic recording and use methods we like such as walking, sport and drama;
- **Who is listening:** this was a recurring theme – will the government and the department of education demonstrate that our views are being listened to and are having impact; the value of what young people think is underestimated and they need encouragement to voice what matters to them. Young people can't share their opinions unless they're given the opportunity to engage; their views/opinions need to be valued in order for their voices to be heard.
- **Our Future:** The assembly is important to our future: 'Nothing about us without us'.

### Close of Proceedings



As participants prepared to return to the everyday world, final words were shared:

- CAFÉ is part of a life-long-learning journey;
- There are practical tools to enable student voice – the [Lundy Model](#) of participation, the [Our Voice Our Schools](#) website;
- [Restorative Practice](#) is also worth adoption more widely;
- As commented by a student at a BEACONS event this feels weird but in a good way;

- Creativity entails a leap of faith, not knowing the answer in advance – it's good to be leading this process;
- This work and way of working is relevant not just to the departments of education and higher education; the wider civil and public service has an interest.

The symposium concluded with deep gratitude to all – hosts, facilitators and, in particular the attendees who took the time and made the act of creative faith to participate.

31.5.22

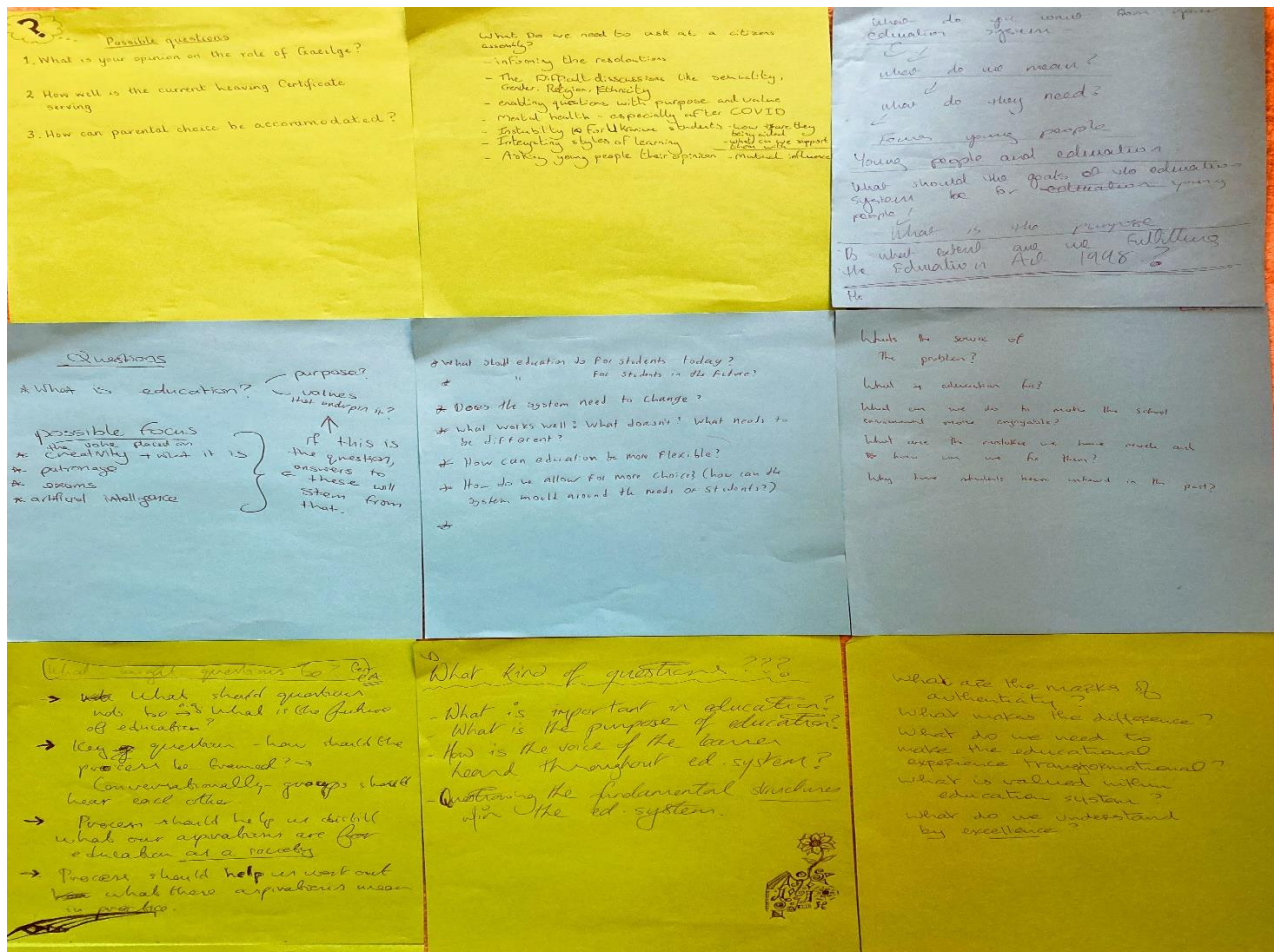


really happening; different priorities – learning vs creativity etc. - system needs to fit everyone and it can't;

- **Fear of Change:** people are scared of change; people don't like change; tradition; 'it was good enough for us' attitude; risk – when Ireland performs well internationally, it's hard to make the case; we focus on barriers rather than on positives; what is it about our culture; change is always hard; difficulty of creating policy that's inclusive and meets all needs; fear – refusal to learn; fear of change; how do we change it – can it be not adversarial;
- **Inertia:** It's hard to look for change when you are within it (parents and teenagers); many feel the system is OK and fair; it's complex; change takes time and no one wants to be the 'test case' i.e. the first group don't benefit; people/teachers are protective of what they know to be good; need everyone on board – introducing a new curriculum takes time; teachers just get on with things and make them work – too compliant; it requires radical intervention; change is difficult; change is hard – tradition and memory persist, interests prevail; over-focus on measurement – governance = compliance; students and parents are transient so, when we go to effect change, they have moved on – could we engage earlier; capturing student voice could help with transience;
- **Vested Interests:** stakeholders look at their own interests; people not working together; unaccountable privilege; the hidden curriculum - the current system serves many well; different needs of teachers and students; suits the powerful, the ones making the decisions – politicians; it suits some elements of the system; change will benefit some and not others; everyone has too much skin in the game; we all have opinions – it has served many people so well; vested interests – inertia; bureaucracy; vested interests; hidden agenda/curricula/culture within education;
- **Decision-making:** People with the power to change are a product of the system; decision-makers in Ireland have already succeeded in education – it has worked for them; people making changes aren't always the right people with the relevant understanding; Finnish perspective – humble politicians important; so many voices – who decides? no one knows 'the right answer'; different perspectives on what is needed; big decisions need to be made – if you remove the CAO and the church, change has to be negotiated through the political system which is difficult; the role of the media is important; lack of involvement in decision-making; too many voices; best people to create force are parents of toddlers looking to the future; decision-makers within the department; need to bring teacher unions on board as key stakeholders;
- **Time/Space:** very little time to reflect and learn from mistakes; there are existing structures to empower change such as 'Comhairle na nÓg' and student councils but there is a lack of time and space for collective reflection; it's time to trust young people and use existing structures; place and space to facilitate learning and conversation; mandatory subjects creating pressure – less exams as in Ukraine;
- **Irish Language;** the Irish language is a barrier to the teaching profession.



## Questions for CAFÉ (from Thursday – everyone involved)



*This is but a sample of the posters on the question of 'the question'*

### Purpose

- **Overarching question:** What do we want from our education system? What is the purpose of our education system? Is our education system fit for purpose – reflective/responsive to 21<sup>st</sup> century life?
- How can our education system support us to be our best society and selves?
- What is our vision - a sustainable society?
- What are the pillars for a sustainable future in education?
- What do we want from our education system? What do we mean by holistic education?
- What is the purpose of education – values of fairness and equity?
- What is the purpose of education – diversity, the role of technology?
- How can our education system build a successful and sustainable society?
- Is the education system fit for purpose?



- What is the purpose of education – what are our values; compass for decision-making;
- What is important – what is the purpose of education?
- What do you want from your education system – what do we mean – what do they need?
- Questioning the fundamental structures in the education system?
- What is education – its purpose and the values underpinning it? **If this is the question, answers to the following will stem from that:** the value placed on creativity; patronage; exams; artificial intelligence;
- What is education for?
- What is the purpose/principles/values of education? Is it meeting those purposes?
- Can it have a common purpose(s)?
- What are the important things – how can education help a human being to flourish?
- What is the meaning and purpose of the Irish education system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- Could we imagine a 100-year vision?
- What are the marks of authenticity – what makes the difference?

## Values

- What is valued within the education system?
- Education system should put forward a set of values without being prescriptive; do we want a set of shared values? Education for personal development/relationships?
- What values do we want to give young people – adaptability, sustainability, creating a sustainable future;
- What values do we have to inform our decision-making?
- What values do we want the education system to promote?
- Enable questions with purpose and value;
- What do we value in the system? Let's not throw it away! Fairness, equality of opportunity need to be kept at the forefront – we cannot introduce more opportunity for inequality in introducing changes;
- Does the current system provide fairness and equity of access and experience e.g. in relation to patronage and the leaving certificate;

## Student Focus

- Is our current system in service of young people?
- Asking young people their opinion – mutual influence;
- How is the voice of the learner heard throughout the education system
- What are the concrete obstacles for young people?
- What supports can we offer teachers to help them to enable disadvantaged students?
- Integrating styles of learning;
- Young people: What should the goals of the education system be for young people?

- What do we need in order to make the educational experience transformational?
- What should education be for students today and in the future?
- What do I care about my children's experience of education?
- Are we empowering our children and all their individual needs?
- What can we do to make the school environment more enjoyable?
- Why have students been unheard in the past?
- How can we reduce stress in the schools?

### **Disconnect between Policy and Practice**

- Why is there a disconnect between what is designed and the experience? Is policy good enough? What are the barriers to implementing policy – unions etc.? Why are policies not trickling down?
- Is our education system appropriately centralised/decentralised?
- Are resources being used fairly and efficiently? Are resources producing the intended outcomes?
- Are we using resources appropriately/efficiently/fairly to meet the aims of education?
- Where are the pinch points currently?
- The disconnect between the experience and what the vision of what system is trying to provide – why is this?

### **Process of Change**

- What should the question not be e.g. what is the future of education? Rather how should the process be framed – conversationally, groups should hear each other;
- Process should help us distill what our aspirations are for education, as a society; the process should help us work out what these aspirations mean in practice;
- How can education be more flexible?
- How do we allow for more choice (how can the system mould around the needs of students?)
- How does education become better understood by the general public?

### **Change & Change Agenda**

- What do you value in the current Irish education system - what would you like to change?
- Does the system need to change?
- What have we got to gain/lose by radical change?
- How can we make the senior cycle more fair and inclusive?
- Addressing inequality, inclusion, leaving cert reform, transitions, CAO system, the purpose of the leaving cert?

- Difficult discussions like sexuality, gender, religion, ethnicity, mental health (especially after covid); how are Ukranian students coping?
- Are you going to change the educational program for Ukrainians?
- What works well? What doesn't? What needs to be different?
- What are the mistakes we have made and how can we fix them?
- To what extent are we fulfilling the Education Act 1998?
- What is your opinion on the role of Gaeilge?
- How well is the current Leaving Certificate serving?
- How can parental choice be accommodated?

### **Patronage**

- Does the patronage model promote fairness and equity?
- How can education support religious diversity?
- What's the role of denominational religious education in state-run schools?
- Education provision – too many competing providers? How is provision made; patronage;

### **Other**

- Can any system respond to all the diversity and 'meet all the needs'?
- Assessment is complex and the language is confusing – fear has to be overcome.
- What do we understand by excellence?

## How can CAFÉ help?

What could we ~~do together~~ <sup>CAFÉ do to help</sup>?

- Help Bridge gap between Aspiration/Policy & Implementation
- Pre-step: Public Awareness  
Invite Opinions: ESRI Survey  
Inform what's happening <sup>+ What CAFÉ can do</sup>  
Invite Student Input - Test <sup>Q</sup> Questions
- [CAFÉ: A Staging Post - Not the End]
- Questions to Public: How has education served you? or not?  
How did others succeed in spite of the system?
- Making the Alternative more mainstream.
- Upskilling/CPD to support Teachers Match the Aspirations in Policy documents

IF 3rd LEVEL ENTRY IS AGNOSTIC ON EARLY-LIFE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS..  
(DOES THE WORLD CHIAPE?)

3rd LEVEL { DAMN) WALL?  
BLOCK?  
HURDLE?  
OR A BRIDGE?

2nd LEVEL {

PRIMARY { DEIS AS A MODEL

Signed: D.D.  
Z.T.C.

Relationships are more key than we ever thought

Time to think, reflect & think about thinking is paramount.

How CAN MULTIPLE PATHWAYS AND CROSS CURRICULAR APPROACHES BE OFFERED SIMULTANEOUSLY THROUGHOUT POST PRIMARY SCHOOLING?

New & more diverse pathways to further, higher education & the world of work.

CONNECTIONS.

TEACHERS CARE BUT DON'T HAVE TIME.

DO WE NEED PRESURISED LEAVING CERT SYSTEM?

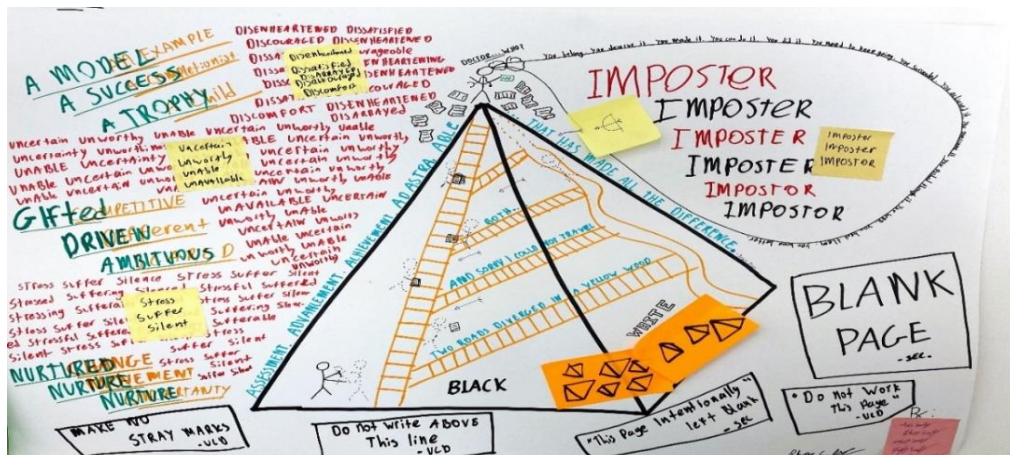
RE-IMAGINING POST PRIMARY TOWARDS A GRADES-AGNOSTIC 3rd LEVEL SYSTEM.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE? NEED SUPPORT.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM COVID? MEDICAL SUPPORT NEEDED



## The Studio Artists Collective



## *The Road less Travelled*



## *The World is Burning*



*Girl in the Corner (Ukraine)*



## 'Me Time' for creativity



*Imagining Utopia/AIPOTU*





*Imagining what Education could be*



*2nd level as Gate-keeper*



*A 'C' for the adults*



*What would it mean  
to be "trunk"?*

## Pre-Assembly

How do you get the  
Voices of the students in  
the system (under the age  
of 18)?

get the ~~voices~~ voices  
of students (under 18) who  
dropped out.

→ if you haven't heard your  
minutes what they say is often  
misleading.  
"You want really on all  
teachers to get the information  
that you have to be outside people  
to whom it is done properly."

Marginal system of citizens  
irrevocably?

→ teachers style events?  
• it only a system style student  
has to be like there.  
they do not get the other students  
voice.

Don't use the same  
system actions to  
polarise. Eg  
10 year old and 17  
year old will speak  
better with different  
parents

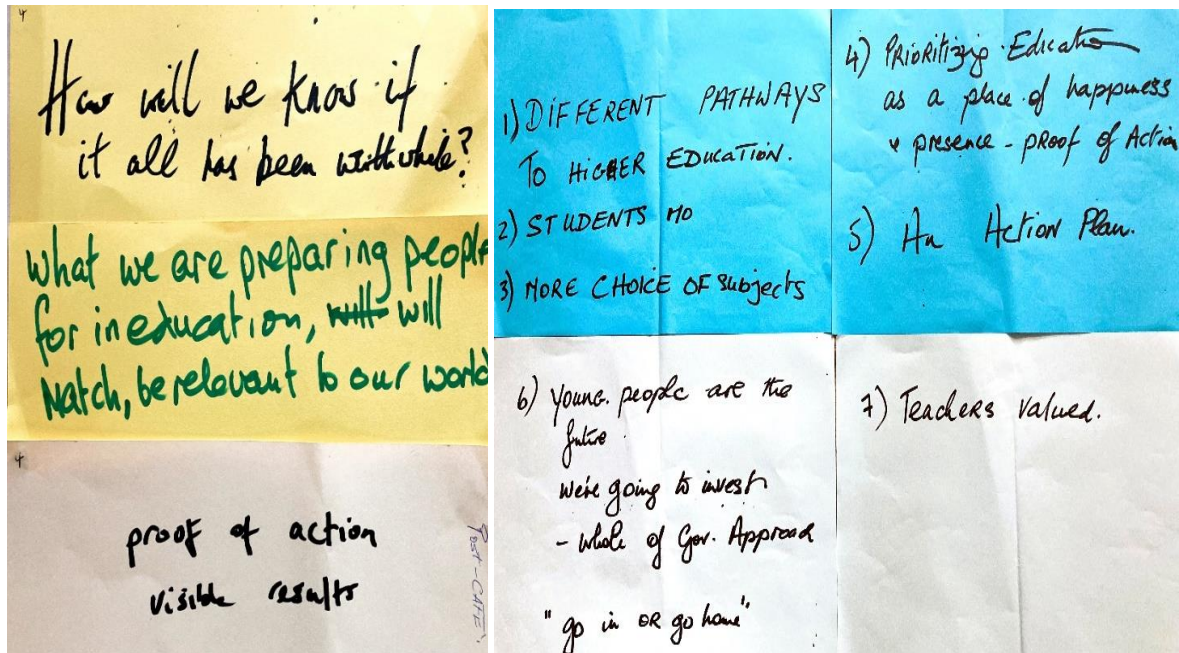
Don't make it into a purpose  
game (eg choose winners).

actively talk to the young people

Don't let them out all the age of  
16 (under age)  
it is really important to still have  
have their voices.  
(teachers)

ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE  
TRUST THAT THEY KNOW WHAT THE NEED  
EMPOWER THEM + SUPPORT THEM TO  
KEEP WHAT'S "GOOD" IN OUR SYSTEMS.  
process  
AND AUTHORISE THEM TO REJECT AND  
CHANGE WHAT'S "BAD" FOR THEM AND  
THE PLANET. WITH URGENCY! Please.

## Post-Assembly





## Young People at the Centre

# Young people at the Centre

### The Lundy Model

**Space**  
CAMP must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views

**Voice**  
CAMP must be supported to express their views

**Audience**  
The views must be listened to

**Influence**  
The views must be acted upon, as appropriate

How to express your views  
- different groups have around the country meeting first then coming together into a larger assembly  
- Anonymously sharing your opinions, whilst knowing that it matters, will make a difference, and is taken seriously.  
Through things we like. Walking? Sports? Drama?

How will you be supported to share your views?  
- share through an online survey  
- knowing that everyone else is doing the same thing as you, and being comfortable with sharing, even if it's unpopular.

The Young Person's Share directly inputted into Decision Making of Young People (Hans Schuler 2018)

Who is listening?  
What will happen next?  
- The government, the department of education your peers (understanding)  
- Your views are being listened to, and are making an impact.

Young People Matter to Young People

Pre-assembly Events  
- mixed group of second-level students to do facilitated workshops with primary students and capture perspectives

Students' Personality is more important than grades

How will young people best engage?  
- healthy relationship with teachers - mutual respect to learn if you like the person who's teaching you  
- activities - harder to pay attention to the one thing especially if it's just the teacher talking  
- healthy teaching practices  
- choice of learning e.g. from technology or from the book  
- people learning that feel like you're writing a sentence onto a page - more so if the information is more relevant  
- more assembly with kids from other secondary schools - more opinions

Young People

Thought is the thoughts of young people and values their thoughts

Opinions  
Young people also have opinions that of the age understand due to the understanding of their values and opinions

Young People  
Up and share their opinions unless they give the opportunity to engage.

The format?  
- 1. Assembly, mix of old people + young  
- Sessions with young people speaking, older people listening  
- Facilitators bringing out everyone's views they need to be heard

Sending A letter to ENGL HOME min. JUSTICE  
There is under there  
THOUGHTFUL PROBLEM SOLVING  
THEM AND REALLY MAKE THEM THINK ABOUT THE  
MAN THEY REALLY THINK ABOUT THEIR OWN EDUCATION

Online Practice  
- Challenge, Disruption, Impact of COVID-19  
- National Student Engagement Programme (NSEP)  
- Counselling, no risk  
- Social  
- Creative  
- Knowledge  
- Student Survey etc  
- "Our Future Our Voice"  
- Our Voice Our Schools

Send Feedback  
are prepared to listen that information being their voice at the Centre

## Symposium Attendees

### Preparing for The Citizens Assembly on the Future of Education: 11-13 May 2022

Name and organisation	
Shane Bergin, School of Education, University College Dublin (UCD)	
Thomas Ahern, JCT	
Catherine Byrne, CAFE support group	
Áine Bird – Burrenbeo Trust	
Prof Pól Ó Dochartaigh, NUI Galway	
Jimmy D’Arcy - GAA	
Brigid Golden, The DICE Project, Mary Immaculate College	
Jennifer Horgan. Cetss	
Seosaimhín Uí Dhomhnalláin, Scoil Mhuire, Ennistymon	
Máire O'Higgins Larkin Community College Dublin	
Michael Shevlin, Trinity College	
Chris Chapman - facilitator	
Germaine Noonan, Business in the Community Ireland	
Gary Granville, Professor emeritus, NCAD	
Emma Farrell, UCD/Gaisce	
Ro Aitken. UCD School of Education	
Colm O’Connor, Principal, Educate Together	
Kathryn Crowley, ex primary principal	
Don O' Leary – Cork Life Centre	
Yvonne McKenna, Gaisce - The President's Award	
Craig Hayes, Cork Life Centre	
Kate Delaney, Creative Ireland Programme, DTCAGSM	
Eithne Woulfe, SSL and AMRI delegate	
Claire Matthews, Firhouse Educate Together Secondary School	



Jenny Morton – parent	
David Donohue, artist/creative writer	
Rhys Scully, Student	
Tomás Ó Ruairc, DES	
Michelle Keane – Chair, Teaching Council	
Patricia McCarthy, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin	
Grainne Cullen, Department of Education	
Áine O Sullivan, Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS)	
Gerard O'Sullivan, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	
Aoife Mullen, Acting Senior Official, INTO	
Mary Lyons, CBS Ennistymon	
Lucy Fallon-Byrne (former head of reform in DPER)	
Norah Sweetman, TCD	
Tom Collins, former President of NUIM	
Rebecca Gorman, TU Dublin Students' Union	
A Mulcahy, Teachers' Union of Ireland	
Sharon Skehill, Early Childhood Ireland	
Jane Suiter, DCU	
Anne Murray, Department of Education	
Joan Kiely, Marino Institute of Education	
Yvonne Keating – Deputy Chief Inspector, Department of Education	
Jim Brown, former President NUIG	
Brian Fahy – Teaching Council	
Yulia Arikh – from Ukraine	
Mable O'Boyle – student	
Ali-May Cowper – student	
Sadie O'Brien – student	
Casey Tuohy – student	
John Sheridan – student	
Adrian O'Leary – student	
Brian McNamara – student	
Sofia Udovychenko – Ukrainian student	
Mariia Piven – Ukrainian student	