



**TWENTY
YEARS AFTER
THE BELFAST
AGREEMENT
1998: A YOUNG
PERSON'S
GUIDE TO
THE FUTURE**

Rapporteur: Lydia Griffith

25 May 2018
Queen's University Belfast



Acadamh Ríoga na hÉireann
Royal Irish Academy

SPEAKERS:

DR DIRK SCHUBOTZ: School of Social Science, Education, and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast.

SIOBHÁN FENTON: Writer and freelance journalist.

KOULLA YIASOUMA: Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

BRONAGH HINDS: Senior associate & co-founder of DemocraShe (Chair).

PROFESSOR JOHN MORISON: MRJA, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast.

This event was attended by an audience of approximately 50 guests, including members of the public, students and a group of young people from Donegal. The Royal Irish Academy is grateful to the School of Law at Queen's University, Belfast, and to Donegal Youth Service, which is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the International Fund for Ireland through the Reactiv-8 Program YT, for their support of this event.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

The discussion followed three years of Royal Irish Academy events organised by its Ethical, Political, Legal and Philosophical Studies Committee which have taken the form of a series of 'constitutional conversations', now published on the [RIA website](#). This discussion, which marked the 20th anniversary of the Belfast Agreement, was intended to reach a new and younger audience.

PANEL DISCUSSION:

The conversation opened with a discussion drawing on recent research commissioned by the Young Life and Times Survey relating to local social attitudes, particularly about what constitutes a

'community' in Northern Ireland, and how these communities interact.

Topics discussed included:

- challenges faced by the LGBT community when trying to express an alternative identity in Northern Ireland
- the impact of poverty on the mental health of children living in areas affected by the Troubles
- the importance of the role of women and young people in building the future of Northern Ireland
- the need to broaden the political discussion beyond 'orange and green' concerns so that issues such as marriage equality and immigrant rights are addressed
- youth activism as an alternative to traditional political engagement through the electoral process.

A number of concerns were expressed about the impact of Brexit on Northern Ireland. These included:

- how Brexit might affect Donegal, which is already cut off geographically from rest of the Republic of Ireland
- the lack of a representative voice for Northern Ireland on Brexit as long as the Stormont Assembly fails to sit
- how Brexit will negatively impact the economy and educational initiatives such as the Erasmus Scheme.

There was general agreement that young people in Northern Ireland were being let down during the period where there is a vacuum in government.

At the close of the discussion it was decided that a report of the discussion will be published on RIA website, under the Chatham House rule.

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