

# “IT’S TIME TO HEAR OUR VOICES”

National Trans Youth Forum Report 2015

*Peter Dunne & Cearbhall Turraoin*



Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans Young People in Ireland



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# INTRODUCTION

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The first ever National Trans Youth Forum ('the Forum') took place at Trinity College Dublin and BeLonGTo Youth Services on July 15, 2015. The event was attended by 55 young persons from all parts of the country, and was intended to create a platform for discussing the legal, social and political issues which affect trans youth in modern Ireland. The Forum was initiated as a Trinity College Dublin Equality Fund ('the Fund') programme, and was a joint partnership between four organisations: The Fund, Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI), BeLonGTo Youth Services ('BeLonGTo') and the Irish Transgender Student Alliance (ITSA). In addition, the Forum received generous financial support from ILGA-Europe. In parallel with the National Trans Youth Forum, the Organising Committee, co-ordinated by TENI, circulated an online National Trans Youth Survey ('the Survey') during the month before and after the Forum. The Survey was completed by 161 young people and, with the permission of TENI, the results, where relevant, are reproduced in this report.

Trans youth are among the most invisible populations in Ireland. According to the Irish State, trans children, under the age of 16 years, do not exist. In 2015, on the same day as the Forum took place, the Oireachtas enacted the Gender Recognition Act 2015. Irish persons, aged 15 years or below, are expressly omitted from the statute. Irish adolescents, who are between 16 and 17 years, are entitled to apply for gender recognition but, unlike adult applicants, who enjoy a right of self-determination, 16 and 17 year old individuals must satisfy a number of 'protective' criteria. These 'requirements for recognition' include medical and parental consent, a court order and proving that recognition

is not contrary to a child's 'best interests'. Having regard to the significant obstacles which Ireland's trans youth experience in accessing gender confirming care and securing family support, there is a legitimate doubt that most persons will secure gender recognition before their eighteenth birthday.

The express omission of trans children, and the practical exclusion of most trans adolescents, negatively impacts the well-being of Ireland's young trans communities. Throughout this report, there are numerous examples of how the prohibition on affirming trans identities – a position which is permitted, even encouraged by the absence of legal recognition – significantly detracts from the life quality of trans youth. Refusing to acknowledge a child's preferred gender does not erase or lessen that child's self-identification. Trans young people exist in Ireland; They are a vibrant, diverse and active community. The discussions undertaken during the Forum illustrate how Irish trans youth are critically engaged with the issues affecting their lives, and are committed to reforms which would improve their lived experience. The Gender Recognition Act 2015 does not lessen or undermine that spirit. Rather, it creates a regime where, every time trans individuals seek to access services or accommodations (e.g. education) according to their preferred gender, they are confronted by a legal or social structure which, at best, cannot accommodate, and at worst, is indifferent to, the reality of their lives.

This report reproduces, and synthesises, the opinions and reflections expressed by young participants at the Forum. The primary author was Peter Dunne, with significant input from Cearbhall Turraoin. The report's content is solely determined by the topics and concerns

which Forum participants raised in their group discussions. The report is not intended to study trans youth as a 'social phenomenon' or to provide a professional analysis of trans experiences. Instead, like the Forum, it is a vehicle for highlighting, and prioritising, the views and lived-experiences of trans youth. One of the primary criticisms of the recent legislative process for legal gender recognition was the Oireachtas' failure to properly consider the voice of trans youth. Despite advocates' attempts to underline the needs of trans children, and the inspiring support of certain public representatives, young people were a relatively late, and frequently marginalised, consideration in the parliamentary debates. This report illustrates the significant challenges which continue to confront trans children and young adults in Ireland. Indeed, even where young people can obtain legal gender recognition, they often face additional obstacles which limit enjoyment of a full, self-actualised life. The report suggests a need for a more targeted, rights-focused approach on issues, such as education, healthcare and legal protection.

## **REPORT STRUCTURE AND FORUM METHODOLOGY**

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The report is modelled upon, and largely follows, the operating structures used during the Forum. For reasons of child safety and protection, the Forum was divided into two sections. Young trans individuals aged between 14 and 17 years participated in an Under 18 Forum ("U18 Forum") which was hosted, supervised and moderated by BeLongTo Youth Services. Individuals aged between 18 and 25 years participated in an Over 18 Forum ("Over18 Forum") hosted at Trinity College Dublin, and

facilitated by members of the Forum Organising Committee. The U18 Forum ran over a period of three hours, during which participants discussed four substantive topics: Education, Healthcare, Legislation and Miscellaneous Concerns (including LGBTQI inclusion, family support, etc.). The Over18 Forum ran over a one-day period. Participants were assigned to four groups, and each group rotated to discuss the same substantive topics as the younger Forum.

This report proceeds in four main parts: Education, Healthcare, Legislation and Recommendations. As is evident, the report provides separate discussions for three of the substantive topics considered by participants at the Forum. The final topic, Miscellaneous Concerns, raised questions of a general and diverse nature, and is integrated, where appropriate, into the remaining sections. In the final part of the report, having regard to the specific concerns and challenges raised, the authors suggest a brief list of targeted recommendations for reform.

A central theme throughout the report is the question of family support. While not discussed in an individual section, the existence of a supportive family environment was, for many participants, a catalyst for either negative or positive experiences. Where participants received family affirmation, this often contributed to enhanced life quality and better mental health. Some young people recalled how their parents had become 'equality advocates', working with education and healthcare providers to ensure optimal service provision. One young person spoke of how school officials were unwilling to recognise his preferred gender until his mother confronted the staff and negotiated a mutually

## EDUCATION

agreeable settlement. Other participants suggested that, without their family's approval and assistance, they would never have been able to access necessary medical pathways before entering college.

The primary importance of family structures is reflected in the experience of the numerous Forum participants who did not enjoy parental or other support. Many of the young people, who attended the Over18 event, were unable to reveal their participation at home. While some trans youth express uncertainty over a family's future reaction, others have already experienced significant disapproval or rejection because of their gender identity. In many cases, the absence of family support directly impacts one's capacity to live a full, meaningful life. Many participants voiced concerns that the parental-consent requirement, as set out in the Gender Recognition Act 2015, would effectively deny legal acknowledgement to many (if not most) individuals aged between 16 and 17 years. Similarly, attendees spoke at length of the difficulty in obtaining proper medical treatment without parental assistance to navigate the healthcare system. Many young people – particularly those still living at home – did not feel confident accessing treatment options on their own, while others fear that, even seeking care confidentially might indirectly reveal their identity to families. When reading the substantive content of this report, and the views and opinions of the Forum participants, it is important to remember that, while presented individually, each of the topics addressed – Education, Healthcare and Legislation – intersect with, and exacerbate, different points of vulnerability. The baseline importance of family support should be a constant consideration for readers.

For many young trans individuals, education and education-related services, are the primary influence which affects their gender identity and gender expression. The great majority of Forum participants were still undertaking educational training – at either second or third level – and their interaction with schools or universities had a significant impact on all aspects of their lives.

Trans young people recount many diverse, experiences within the education sector. These experiences are shaped by numerous, intersecting factors – such as institutional support,

**“I am 100% certain that, if I had come out in secondary school, it would have been a negative experience.”**

access to resources and family relationships. While it would be impossible to reduce the participants' discussions to any one, common narrative, we can identify common themes. A notable feature of the Forum discussions was that, while certain issues, such as segregated spaces, affect both second and third level students equally, other considerations have a greater impact in one or the other educational settings (e.g. gender-specific clothing requirements impact students more in secondary level institutions). Indeed, even at the Over18 Forum, many of the education-focused conversations recalled discrimination and abuse that individuals had experienced before they left school. With that in mind, the first part of this section centres specifically on topics related to secondary level institutions. In the second part of

the section, the report broadens the analysis to consider outstanding problems which are evident at all levels in Ireland's educational sector.

## SECONDARY LEVEL EDUCATION

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### Expressing Preferred Gender in Secondary Level Institutions

The great majority of Forum participants – both under and over 18 years – reported significant obstacles in freely expressing their preferred gender in secondary level education.

In many cases, young trans individuals, who “come out” in school, receive positive support from their peers. Many participants described their friends and classmates as “good”, “great” or “fantastic”. Several individuals recalled that, when they revealed their trans identity, they experienced only affirmation and positive questions. The incidence of positive reactions within peer groups was significantly higher among younger students. This suggests that new generations of secondary level students share more open and welcoming attitudes to trans identities.

Despite peer support, however, the overwhelming response from educational staff and administrators remains negative. A large number of students reported having “no possibility” of expressing their gender identity. While more students are able to come out in college than in secondary school, many students still report tangible and intangible barriers which restrict their gender expression. One individual stated that “I am 100% certain that, if I had come out in secondary school, it would have been a negative experience.” Many others expressed the belief that, in their particular school environment, it would not have been safe to reveal

a trans identity. Indeed, in one case, a young trans person, who had come out during secondary education, was violently assaulted by other students. These fears are reflected in the Survey results where 32% of respondents answered that their educational institution expressly did not respect their identity and 38% believed that educational affirmation was not relevant for their lives (suggesting that these persons had not even attempted to seek recognition). Only one quarter of respondents felt that their gender was acknowledged in school or at university.

For those who do openly express their preferred gender, there is a wide spectrum of “coming out” or affirmation narratives. Many trans individuals choose to initially share their gender identity only with their closest friends. In some cases, young people have informed friends about their trans identity, with an implied understanding that these other persons will circulate that information among the wider peer group. Unfortunately, on some occasions, Forum participants had been involuntarily outed by friends or school administrators. This often placed secondary level students in a position of extreme vulnerability, where they were instantly confronted with questions that they felt either unable or uncomfortable in answering. Indeed, even where educational staff disclosed a student's gender identity with consent, Forum participants frequently experienced the revelation as overly blunt and sudden.

The most common obstacle to expressing gender identity in educational settings – at both secondary and third level – is staff resistance. One participant noted that, although his friends had offered encouragement, the staff were “generally not supportive”. In some cases,

staff trivialised or belittled a student's identity. In other cases (particularly at third level), tutors and lecturers complained that respecting a person's trans identity created an "administrative nuisance". Secondary level administrators often push back against recognising trans students on the basis that they need to protect the student body or an institutional ethos. Trans young people have been warned that their gender identity could harm or intimidate classmates. One trans student was prevented from attending a school trip until they had obtained permission from all other participants. Other students have been denied access to educational services on the basis of a school ethos which makes no mention – implied or express – of trans identities.

Non-binary youth (persons who do not identify with a rigid male or female identity)

**“The overwhelming majority of Forum participants attended an educational institution where there was no formalised, published policy on gender identity and gender expression.”**

experience particular difficulty in expressing, and finding respect for, their identity. One Forum participant stated: “A real struggle with being non-binary is that you both have to come out and explain. If I was binary-identified, I'd only have to come out as trans. But when I come out as non-binary, I continually have to explain to people what my identity is and why

it is valid.” Many students no longer seek to express their preferred non-binary identity in school (or college) because they faced continual pushback, mis-gendering (from staff and students) and patronising reactions. As result, many non-binary youth are forced into living and expressing an identity which feels neither authentic nor real.

## UNIFORMS

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School uniforms, and other gendered clothing, have a significant impact upon trans experiences in Irish secondary schools. A large number of Forum participants reported restrictions on wearing preferred uniforms. Among Survey respondents, only 16% of individuals were able to wear clothing which was specific to their correct gender. In some cases, prohibitions are absolute. A trans female cannot wear a uniform designated for girls, and a trans male is unable to use a uniform for boys. One young person noted: “Girls are only allowed to wear trousers during certain parts of the year. They make no exceptions. It's really annoying.” Being required to wear inappropriate uniforms or clothing created heightened levels of anxiety for many young people. One student was required to sit the leaving certificate in a skirt, even though the individual does not identify as female. Wearing the skirt compounded what was already a time of immense stress. A number of participants stated that, although their school had no formal requirements to wear a particular gendered uniform, students who did not use clothing, which conformed to their birth assigned gender, would be subject to sustained peer abuse. School officials generally took no steps to prevent uniform-related bullying, thus creating a de facto

ban on wearing preferred uniforms.

In some cases, students arranged a compromise with their school. One student noted that, although he could not wear the uniform designated for male students, he was allowed to attend school in the official sports tracksuit. While, for the young person concerned, this option was preferable to wearing a skirt, such 'third' options reinforce the marginalisation of trans children in Ireland's schools. The optimal approach, as implemented by a number of schools with best practice models, is to respect a student's identity and choice of uniform. Forum participants who were entitled to wear gender appropriate uniforms in secondary school reported a better educational experience. One young person noted: "I wore the uniform that I wanted in my school, and wore a tuxedo to my debs. There was no hassle."

## TRANS POLICIES

The overwhelming majority of Forum participants attended a secondary school (and university) where there was no formalised, published policy on gender identity and gender expression. Across secondary level education, students stated that there was either an express absence of trans-focused guidelines or no information as to whether school administrators had adopted trans-related policies. These results are reflected in the Survey data which suggests that only 15% of students attended an institution with a targeted trans policy. By contrast, 27% of respondents indicated that their school or college had no trans policy, and 48% were unaware whether a trans policy existed. One young person at the Forum stated bluntly: "My secondary school certainly did not have a

trans inclusive bullying policy, to be honest, I can't even imagine the day when they would go down that road!" In many schools, trans issues were simply not within administrators' sphere of consciousness. Even in schools which had adopted sexual orientation policies, there was either no realisation that officials should also consider gender identity or an assumption that trans students would be protected by rules introduced for gay and lesbian youth.

The failure to adopt trans-focused policies has significant negative consequences for

**"Bathrooms cause me so much stress! Other students question me and make it difficult."**

trans students. Having never considered gender identity in a meaningful way, many schools struggle to take clear and coherent steps where students subsequently reveal their trans identity. In many cases, schools and universities which are confronted with trans students often rely upon highly reactionary and ultimately insufficient responses. One Forum participant stated that, when they came out as trans, the absence of any clear guidelines for LGBTQI youth resulted in staff "making up the rules as they went along."

Many young people suggested that, by failing to enact trans policies, and to meaningfully engage in a dialogue on gender identity, school administrators were effectively condoning anti-trans discrimination on campus. In the absence of fact-based discussion and guidelines, many students learn about gender

identity solely through the lens of abusive slurs. One young person stated: “When it comes to transgender people, no information is always bad information.” Many participants felt that introducing trans-focused policies was not only necessary to protect trans young people, it would also allow staff and cisgender students to begin meaningful conversations about gender identity and gender diversity. This is all the more pressing because, for the great majority of Forum participants, trans people and trans issues had not been properly covered as part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in secondary school. In many cases, teachers simply refused to discuss any sexual orientation or gender identity topic during SPHE lessons. In other, rarer situations, gender and sexual diversity was presented in a compressed, trivialised form which often devalued the experience of trans persons and contributed to a system of othering non-cisgender identities. One student commented: “In my SPHE class, there was one page that spoke about transvestism and bisexuality. It conflated both concepts...transgender and gay people were always spoken about as ‘those people’. There was never a thought that some of those ‘other’ students might be sitting in the classroom.”

### GENERAL EXPERIENCES IN IRELAND’S EDUCATION SECTOR

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In addition to concerns which disproportionately affect trans experiences in secondary level education, there are numerous outstanding problems which impact generally across Ireland’s education sector.

### USING GENDER SEGREGATED FACILITIES

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The use of gender-segregated facilities creates significant difficulties for trans students. Almost all Forum participants attended a school or university where bathrooms and locker areas were divided between two binary genders. An inability to access facilities which align with one’s gender identity is a central concern for trans young people. As one student stated: “Bathrooms cause me so much stress! Other students question me and make it difficult.”

Irish trans students experience numerous obstacles to using appropriate gender-segregated facilities. In some schools or colleges, staff expressly prohibit trans people from using their preferred facility. Young trans women may be required to access male changing rooms where they experience heightened levels of aggression and harassment. According to the Survey results, only 18% of students felt that their gender was respected in terms of using gender segregated facilities. School officials may restrict access to preferred facilities, but make available a third option, such as a disabled toilet or the staff bathroom. Like third option uniforms, many Forum participants complained that being required to use an alternative bathroom separated them from their peers. Many students felt like they were being dishonest by using the disabled toilet: “Gender isn’t a disability! I always felt guilty using a disabled toilet in case there was a disabled person needing it.” In some cases, young persons expressed a belief that requiring students to use disabled bathrooms legitimised misconceptions about trans persons being mentally unstable or unwell.

Some trans youth reported self-selecting into a staff or disabled bathroom because it

allowed them to avoid numerous micro-aggressions (daily insults, discriminations or forms of oppression, both intentional and unintentional) in general student facilities. While using both their preferred facility, and the facility associated with their assigned gender, trans students experience staring, laughter, abusive comments and open confrontation. In many cases, other students would leave a bathroom en masse when a trans young person entered. Even where trans students do not confront express hostility, numerous environmental factors create a hostile space. Several Forum participants referred to the unique challenges which young trans men experience in male bathrooms. One individual spoke of feeling humiliation when he had to leave a male restroom because there were only urinals: "The other guys gave me stares as if to say 'just use the urinal.'" Similarly, numerous persons spoke about the difficulty in changing sanitary towels without proper disposal units in male toilets: "There is a continual fear that somebody will discover what I'm doing...I keep thinking 'oh my god! Somebody is about to look under the door!'"

Almost all Forum participants expressed frustration at the absence of gender neutral bathrooms in their educational setting. This concern was most acutely voiced by non-binary individuals, who felt that existing male/female options amounted to institutional erasure of their identities. However, even among those who do not identify as non-binary, there was a sharp preference for gender neutral facilities which de-emphasised gender as the gate-keeper of access and encouraged cisgender students away from overt gender policing. Few, if any, secondary schools provide students with an express "gender neutral" option. Facilities which

are open to male and female students are often only available as a disabled option. At university, most campuses provide at least one gender neutral restroom. However, these facilities are often under-publicised and placed in inaccessible parts of campus. One participant noted anger at the location of gender neutral facilities on their campus: "It's completely unacceptable that I would be expected to walk 25 minutes every time I want to pee in comfort!" The failure to provide non-male/female restroom options can have negative health consequences. Numerous participants recounted abstaining from bathroom use for several hours because they were unable to locate an appropriate toilet.

## EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

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Trans young people report that their gender identity noticeably curbs their participation in extra-curricular activities, particularly sport. Across both secondary and third level education, dividing activities along gendered lines means that large numbers of trans students are unable to meaningfully engage in non-educational pursuits.

A striking number of participants either did not take up, or ceased, involvement in sports as a consequence of expressing their preferred gender. One young person "stopped playing sport because of segregation" while another youth "never took up boxing or rowing, the two sports that [they] would be interested in." Trans young people give two main reasons for abstaining from sport. First, individuals are often prevented from engaging in activities according to their preferred gender. Only 9% of Survey respondents could participate in sport according to their preferred gender. A number

of young trans men noted that, even after they had completed a process of social and medical transition, they were still unable to join men's sports teams. This placed the individuals in a state of limbo. For reasons of (supposed) safety, they were separated from other men. Yet, they also felt uncomfortable, and indeed were frequently not welcome, competing against females. Second, even where trans young people are not subject to express limits on joining sports teams, individuals are often coerced by social pressure to self-select out of sport. Many participants noted that, while there was no overt gender segregation during their physical education classes at school, students automatically divided upon gendered lines and it would have been unthinkable for most trans people to play with their preferred gender.

Non-binary persons experience particular obstacles in accessing extra-curricular pursuits. There are rarely, if ever, gender neutral sports competitions in which non-binary persons may compete. Non-binary actors report being type-cast in school or university dramatic societies. One individual noted that society directors would only consider that person for female roles, even though they identify as non-binary. Overall, participants spoke of a pressing need to re-evaluate perceptions of gender in extra-curricular settings. Gendered assumptions and misunderstandings dramatically reduce trans participation in non-educational activities – with knock-on consequences for health, well-being and the opportunity to develop important interpersonal relationships.

## RESPECT FOR PREFERRED NAME AND PRONOUN

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Irish trans students report mixed experiences in terms of respect for preferred pronouns and names. As noted above, many young people are experiencing increasing acceptance amongst friends and wider peer groups. While respect for trans identities is certainly not widespread, younger Forum participants appeared to enjoy greater levels of friend and year-group support. Many trans students stated that, where a class-mate misnames or mis-genders them, it is now as likely to be a genuine error as an attempt to undermine trans identities.

Many Forum participants noted that friends and colleagues are more prone to forgetting non-binary identities than the identities of trans students who identify within the male-female gender binary. For many cisgender persons, non-binary identities are perceived as less tangible or concrete than identifying as male or female. Many non-binary individuals stated that, the fact that friends misgendered them more than other trans persons, increased their sense of stigmatisation and isolation.

As with general expressions of gender identity, trans students report greater resistance among educational institutions and staff members. According to the Survey results, only 27% of respondents felt that education institutions respected their preferred name and pronoun. The majority of Forum participants stated that their school or university would not change official records without a deed poll. This results in trans students expressing and presenting with one identity, but having to use another identity while interacting with teachers and administrators. It also means that, where

students have formed meaningful relationships with classmates according to their preferred gender, they run a continuous risk of being outed anytime official information is published. The requirement to obtain a deed poll expressly discriminates against poorer and non-national students, who may lack sufficient resources or institutional knowledge to undertake the process of legally changing names.

In addition to official recognition, some education providers also refuse to respect their students' identities in less formal settings. A number of young people spoke about being in class with a large number of cisgender female students. Even though the individuals had informed their professors about their male or non-binary identities, the professors insisted on collectively referring to the group as "girls" or "ladies". Many young people stated that such experiences were humiliating, devalued their self-worth and made them feel like they had no place within the classroom.

### EXPERIENCE WITHIN h SPACES

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While there may be little discussion of trans identities in Irish secondary schools, many young people hope to enjoy a more open, accepting environment when they reach college. While all university-level participants had encountered or experienced LGBTQI spaces at their university, many felt that current structures were insufficiently trans-inclusive. One participant stated: "In some college LGBT socs [societies], there is a real absence of trans folks. The committees often do their best, but they may be unable, or worse, they may feel that they are unable, to look after trans issues." Non-binary individuals often feel particularly removed from wider queer

space. One young person stated: "LGBT societies are often cis-male dominated. These guys don't really understand trans issues....so there is no way they are going to get my non-binary identity." For many non-binary persons, it is particularly upsetting having to explain and justify themselves in an environment which is meant to be safe and affirming.

Concerns regarding the place of trans individuals within wider LGBTQI spaces were reflected in more general discussions around queer politics, inclusion and visibility in Irish society. Some participants – both in the older and younger forums – felt that divisions – among trans and cis communities, and within Ireland's trans community itself – significantly detract from a person's life quality. Questions were raised about the extent to which trans individuals do and can identify within broader LGBTQI life. While some heterosexual-identified participants did not feel an obvious link with LGB networks, others suggested that, while they self-select into the LGBTQI umbrella, they often experience a hostile or negative reaction. In responding to the Survey, 76% of individuals suggested that trans issues were not given sufficient attention within Ireland's LGBTQI community. There was significant frustration at the 'tokenising' and even 'sexualisation' of trans identities within wider queer life. Forum participants recalled being expected to reflect a 'supposed' trans narrative, and being subject to invasive and humiliating questions from gay and lesbian peers. In general, while many Forum participants were satisfied that certain LGBTQI-identified groups, such as BeLonGto work hard on trans inclusion, there was a sense that increased progress could be made in specified areas.

In terms of community space, a central concern for many young people is the feeling of being excluded from trans communities. Some participants cited an implicit culture of gender policing where other trans persons, particularly older community members, espoused a rigid, trans narrative which all persons – irrespective of their lived experience of gender – are required to follow. Many trans youth worry about perceptions that they are ‘not trans enough’. Such concerns frequently arise in the context of medical interventions. Where young people may choose to access no (or only limited) healthcare treatments, others may feel entitled to question or undermine their trans identity. One Forum attendee stated: “I had an older trans person lose their cool with me, completely furious when I said I might consider keeping my original genitalia. They blew up, said they worked for years to have that opportunity and that ‘you’re not going to take it?’ It was horrible.” There are also questions about access to trans spaces, and who should have entitlements to enter: “I was once part of a support group where an argument happened amongst members about who was allowed in the group, who gets to come in here...Crossdressers? People who are very feminine or masculine? The other people were hugely defensive about their space. I felt that especially people who were non binary were being pushed out.”

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

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Throughout the discussions on education, many young trans individuals continuously returned to the importance of context. Across both second and third level education, numerous trans students have enjoyed positive, life-affirming

experiences. These experiences may be both related and unrelated to a person’s gender identity. They include positive acts of extreme kindness and support, but have also arisen where a student is merely allowed to live their life without constant consideration of gender identity.

In the great majority of cases, where trans youth have experienced kindness or affirmation within educational settings, the student involved was at pains to emphasise the specific context of their story. Acts of support were often carried out by one particularly understanding staff member or friend. Where a young person discovered an ally within a school administration, they frequently began conducting all official school business through that individual. While this afforded students an enhanced educational experience, it did not reflect wider trans-focused attitudes within the institution. Indeed, many Forum participants noted that, where they experienced support, it was often in the face of more general transphobia. In some cases, young trans people, who had previously been supported by sympathetic staff members, were required to radically change their behaviour where those officials left a school.

Similarly, many Forum participants, who reported never experiencing anti-trans discrimination within their secondary school or college, explained that they were particularly selective in choosing to whom they would reveal their identity. Many people refused to disclose their gender identity until they were certain of how the other party would react. Once again, in such situations, the absence of any widespread abuse is not evidence of general acceptance for trans people within Ireland’s education system. As one participant stated: “I never came out to

# HEALTHCARE

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anyone in school, so I never experienced abuse. But I'm 100% positive that, if I had told my friends or teachers, the consequences would only have been bad."

The right of trans youth to access appropriate healthcare is an area of intense debate. While medical research increasingly shows the benefits of highly regulated early intervention, many professionals and policy-makers still oppose all transition-related healthcare for persons under the age of majority. Trans young people – both under and over 18 years – report significant structural barriers in accessing transition-related care. While some Forum participants did enjoy positive medical experiences, knowledge gaps, structural deficiencies and a lack of available resources all combined so that the majority of young people lack necessary and life-affirming services. In some cases, institutional transphobia not only blocks access to gender confirming care, but also reduces the likelihood that trans young people will seek even general medical services. Failure to respect a person's true identity means that Forum participants had abstained from important medical check-ups, or allowed existing healthcare conditions to deteriorate. Overall, young people report a healthcare system that is insufficient for addressing their needs and which contributes to a culture of negative healthcare outcomes for Ireland's trans youth.

## KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND ASSUMPTIONS

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Trans youth encounter significant knowledge gaps among healthcare professionals in Ireland. Almost all Forum participants, who had accessed either general or trans-specific medical services, reported that the person assigned

to provide treatment lacked a baseline understanding of trans identities. Reflecting on their experience within the Irish medical system, one young individual stated: "There is a real need for greater knowledge and sensitivity training among doctors."

Many healthcare professionals have no formal or informal knowledge about gender identity, often conflating trans identities with other concepts, such as homosexuality. When one participant recently attended their local healthcare clinic for a trans-related medical concern, the treating GP proceeded on the basis that the individual was "gay". Other participants have encountered medical professionals who assume trans-identities are a "fetish" or that having a trans history means a person is a "transvestite". Few, if any doctors, have previously encountered trans individuals, either personally or professionally. Participants noted that Irish healthcare professionals particularly struggle to engage with non-binary identities. Even medics who have a general understanding about gender identity often have great difficulty in treating patients who fall outside the male-female spectrum.

Overall, the great majority of trans young people reported having to educate their healthcare provider about gender identity and gender expression. This phenomenon is reflected in the Survey results where 53% of respondents indicated that they educated a healthcare provider. In many cases, this has knock-on effects for the provision of services. Forum participants expressed frustration that too much time, which should be spent diagnosing and treating healthcare issues, is currently wasted giving healthcare providers elementary information about trans identities. One young person

complained that their “personal development” was continuously being stunted “because successive medical teams never understand who I am.” Other young people feared that having to educate doctors or nurses could create adverse medical outcomes: “I’m constantly worried that I will educate my doctor incorrectly.” In some cases, Forum participants were able to report that, while their healthcare provider did not fully comprehend gender identity during their first consultation, the individual had “come up to speed” by the time they next met. Such independent research is good practice, and facilitated a respectful, trusting relationship between young person and provider. However, in general, trans youth complain that the constant need to inform healthcare professionals about their identities places burdens on trans patients, which are not shared, and would not be accepted, by cisgender peers.

**“Almost all forum participants, who had accessed either general or trans-specific medical services, reported that the person assigned to provide treatment lacked a baseline understanding of trans identities”**

Where healthcare professionals lack knowledge about gender identity and gender expression, medical treatment systems have been designed on the basis of uninformed, and frequently

incorrect, assumptions. Numerous Forum participants referred to the “single medical transition” myth. Without proper understanding, healthcare providers often assume that there is one, unitary process for undertaking a medical transition. Trans youth who present before healthcare professionals, seeking transition-related care, are expected to adhere to a common narrative and desire common treatment: “One of the real difficulties that individuals experience in the healthcare setting is having to deal with an expected narrative. There is an assumption that all people who access healthcare will want the same treatment and have the same histories.” Trans young people, who deviate from the standard “trans story” often encounter resistance from healthcare professionals. In some cases, doctors and nurses have told young individuals that they “are not really trans”, and have attempted to withhold important treatments. More than one Forum participant had been encouraged to lie about their trans history so as to satisfy general assumptions about gender identity. The great majority of young people agreed that there simply were not sufficient, individualised healthcare structures in Ireland. Gender identity is a personal process, and medical options should be available which do not seek to push young people into treatments that are neither necessary nor desired.

**STRUCTURAL DEFICIENCIES**

Young Irish trans persons encounter significant structural deficiencies in the provision of care. Perhaps the most pressing concern is the absence of any clear medical-transition pathway. Almost all Forum participants, who had attempted to access gender confirming

treatment, reported that there was no clear entry-point and roadmap for obtaining proper healthcare. One individual stated: “There is a real lack of a clear starting point for patients... there are huge waiting lists, and there is no time scale for patients to budget and to plan their transition.” In many cases, young trans persons were unable to access basic information about available medical services. Some Forum participants made enquiries at their local GP’s clinic only to be met with blank faces and stares. Others were directed to the HSE website, but could find no advice about accessible services in their geographical area. A large number of young people suggested that the only reliable way to obtain healthcare information was through “social media” services, or by “word of mouth”. A striking percentage of Forum participants had accessed knowledge about medically transitioning from peers rather than health professionals.

Many young people complained that the provision of gender confirming treatments, where available in Ireland, was inconsistent and disjointed. Individuals reported a general failure to create coherent, holistic treatment schedules. Different healthcare providers often take no steps to integrate the various components of a medical transition pathway, with the result that young people experience significant delays in their treatment. One Forum participant noted: “There was no combined or joined-up strategy so that I had to wait while my psychologists and endocrinologists engaged in a lengthy back-and-forth communication.” Long waiting lists also contribute to disparate levels of treatment. Young people often have to wait significant periods of time to access medical clearance, and this in turn slows down all other

aspects of the transition process.

A number of Forum participants expressed a fear that existing structures within the health-care system would be insufficient to protect their privacy and patient confidentiality. Many young people, especially those living in close-knit rural communities, were afraid that, if they “came out” in a medical environment, this information would be revealed to third parties, including the individuals’ family. Many young people knew that, as a general rule, doctors are not allowed to disclose a patient’s health information to other persons. However, they believed that, in the specific context of trans children and adolescents, proper procedure would not always be followed. Fears about privacy were particularly prevalent where the “entry-point person” for accessing medical services is a local GP. One Forum participant stated: “I am concerned about coming out to the family GP. I’m afraid that my trans identity may be revealed to my parents to whom I am not already out...I don’t have the money to access another provider so I have to keep using this person.” In one case, a young individual was outed to their parents by a psychologist, causing deep emotional stress.

**“I am concerned about coming out to the family GP. I’m afraid that my trans identity may be revealed to my parents to whom I am not already out”**

Many trans youth questioned why Ireland had not yet adopted best practice models,

such as those in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Indeed, some Forum participants suggested that general levels of health care would be much improved if the HSE adopted a policy of “informed consent.” Overall, trans Forum participants had a highly negative opinion of the current healthcare structures in Ireland. One individual suggested that, having regard to existing deficiencies, they would be very apprehensive about undertaking a medical transition in this country. A small number of Forum participants were already receiving gender confirmation care in the United Kingdom. An interesting note of contrast arises with the online survey results. According to the Survey data, a significantly higher number of individuals had accessed healthcare in Ireland, and had greater levels of satisfaction than those expressed during the Forum discussions.

## LACK OF RESOURCES

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A lack of resources creates important obstacles for trans youth who seek to access gender confirming treatments in Ireland. Complaints about resource availability primarily manifest themselves in two ways. First, Forum participants reported that there simply are not enough treatment providers. There are a limited number of transition service providers in Ireland, and they tend to be located in urban areas. Thirty-six per cent of Survey respondents also identified insufficient availability of local services as a primary concern. Many young people, who live in rural locations, complained about the significant hardships of travelling to Dublin or Galway anytime they needed treatment. For young individuals who are not “out” to family members, such trips can create both emotional

and physical strain. An absence of available services also means that, linked to the discussion above, individuals face long waiting periods while seeking to undergo proper treatment. One Forum participant reported: “One of the major problems in accessing healthcare is the waiting lists. There is no timeline for how long it will take to start and complete treatments. There is not even a ballpark estimate.” Some young people have had to wait more than six months simply to get an entry-level appointment. Others, who have managed to get a time slot with a healthcare professional, have been forced to wait five hours after their appointment was scheduled. According to the Survey results, 46% of respondents cited waiting lists as a structural barrier to accessing proper healthcare. Overall, Forum participants reported that the “chronic shortage” of transition-related services in Ireland means that trans youth are not receiving medical treatment in a sufficient or timely manner.

Second, Forum participants also spoke of a lack of resources in the context of their inability to pay for treatment. Many young people were unaware of the extent to which the Irish State would reimburse gender confirmation treatment costs. A large number of Forum participants suggested that the primary existing barrier to undertaking a medical transition was their incapacity to pay for necessary treatments. This was also reflected in survey responses where 35% of individuals referenced financial constraints as a significant obstacle. One individual at the Over18 Forum, who is about to enter university, stated: “I am not able to afford gender confirming healthcare at the moment. I am waiting to reach college so that I can access a GP and mental health care.” In some cases,

young trans individuals are not yet out to their families, and therefore are reluctant to seek assistance in payment for medical services. Other young people, who have revealed their trans identity, spoke about significant parental pushback: “My parents will not provide me financial support to access a GP in order to seek gender confirming healthcare.” Overall, Forum participants suggested that there needed to be much clearer information about how trans young people can access transition-related care in an efficient, affordable manner.

### COMPROMISING HEALTHCARE

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Forum participants report that knowledge gaps and structural deficiencies compromise young people’s right to health in numerous ways. First, trans individuals, particularly trans children under the age of majority, are denied access to appropriate medical services. Despite existing evidence of the benefits of early intervention, many Forum participants were denied access to puberty blockers. One individual noted: “Doctors make us go through puberty...no matter how much stress and pain it causes.” Second, existing knowledge gaps mean that healthcare providers are often reluctant to offer transition-related care. Even doctors who are sympathetic to trans youth argue that, given their limited knowledge of gender identity, it would be inappropriate to prescribe and administer treatment. While it is clearly good practice for doctors to refrain from unfamiliar care techniques, widespread absence of knowledge means that, in many cases, young trans persons are left in a situation where no healthcare professional is willing to begin their treatment pathway. Finally, many Forum participants noted that,

where their trans identity is discovered, it often becomes the focus of medical treatment, to the exclusion of all other healthcare concerns. One young person spoke of “transgender broken arm syndrome” – the idea that, where a trans youth presents in hospital with a broken arm, medical professionals still assume that the injury must be connected to gender identity. Another individual recounted that, “when I went for dental care, which was unrelated to my gender identity, the dental staff made a follow up call in relation to my transitioning.” In many cases, Forum participants had concluded that, wherever possible, it is best to avoid discussing one’s gender identity in a healthcare setting. As one individual stated: “I think that it would be insane to bring up my gender identity with general healthcare providers.”

### ISSUES AFFECTING TRANS YOUTH UNDER THE AGE OF MAJORITY

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Like their older peers, participants in the U18 Forum expressed frustration that healthcare providers in Ireland lack sufficient knowledge of trans identities. One young person noted: “I go to my doctor once a year...the last time I saw him, I told him that I was transgender. He had absolutely no clue what I meant.” Many participants expressed doubts about the capacity of Irish healthcare professionals to provide appropriate transition-related care when there is widespread misunderstandings about the complexity of gender identity.

Trans children struggle to overcome significant structural deficiencies in the Irish healthcare system. Out of 13 individuals who sought to access gender confirmation treatments, seven encountered major obstacles. A primary concern for all Forum participants was the

## LEGISLATION

absence of information about available clinical options. One individual stated: “I think the worst thing about healthcare in Ireland is that there simply isn’t any clear route through it.” While, within the healthcare system, important flaws were identified, many young people suggested that their greatest problem is simply finding an accessible entry point.

Lack of access is a particular concern for children in rural areas and those who continue to live in their family home. Where a young trans person is located outside of an urban centre, they may be several hours drive from the nearest healthcare treatment facility. Trans children in rural Ireland also express a fear that, given the close knit structure of their town or village, revealing a trans identity in the local healthcare centre may ultimately lead to a wider, involuntary public “outing”. Problems with access equally affect trans children who continue to live with, and remain financially reliant upon, parents or guardians. Some young people hold off seeking medical treatment because it would require revealing a trans identity to non-supportive parents. Numerous Forum participants had been blocked from accessing necessary treatment because one or both parents was refusing to provide consent. Overall, trans young people considered that decisions, which related to their health and wellbeing, were too often being made without proper consideration of individual need and best interests.

In 2015, Ireland became the final Member State of the European Union to adopt a framework for the official recognition of preferred gender. Under the Gender Recognition Act 2015, individuals, over the age of 18 years, can obtain state acknowledgement of their true identity by a process of self-determination. For adult persons in Ireland, the Gender Recognition Act 2015 does not require medical treatment or divorce, nor are applicants expected to prove that they have lived in their preferred gender for a specified period of time. The enactment of self-declaration is a significant victory for Ireland’s trans community. It recognises that gender identity is an inherently personal process, and that trans individuals should not have to depend upon third-party approval to validate their identity. However, as noted in the Introduction, the Gender Recognition Act 2015 largely excludes Ireland’s trans youth. Children under the age of 16 years are absolutely barred from making an application. Similarly, adolescents aged between 16 and 17 years must satisfy a number of onerous legal and medical requirements which, in practice, may create insurmountable barriers before an individual’s eighteenth birthday. In addition, the Gender Recognition Act 2015 makes no provision for non-binary identities, and fails to specifically acknowledge Ireland’s intersex community.

Issues concerning legislation – particularly legal gender recognition – are extremely important for trans youth in Ireland. While most Survey respondents reported using identity documents daily (or nearly every day), the vast majority did not have identity markers which accurately reflected their preferred gender. The Forum participants – both those who attended the older and younger events – discussed the question

## UNDER 18 FORUM

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of existing (and future) legislation under three primary headings: (a) satisfaction at the passage of the Gender Recognition Act 2015, and the introduction of self-declaration rights; (b) strong disappointment and disapproval at the exclusion of youth and non-binary identities, and the failure to expressly acknowledge intersex concerns; (c) a call for further legislation, which would both incorporate those excluded groups and address additional, trans-related concerns, including hate crimes and non-discrimination rights.

Participants in the U18 Forum expressed considerable satisfaction with the passage of legal gender recognition in Ireland. There was significant approval of the Government's decision to establish a regime based on self-declaration as opposed to a scheme that would require a healthcare professional to certify and corroborate an individual's gender identity

### GROUPS EXCLUDED FROM THE ACT

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In terms of legislation, U18 participants were primarily concerned with the total exclusion of children under the age of 16 years, and the introduction of significant procedural barriers for applicants who are aged between 16 and 17 years. Many U18 individuals felt that the Irish state could not legitimately claim to recognise self-determination rights, when law makers retained a residual power to exclude young people without proper justification.

U18 participants overwhelmingly support the legal recognition of young, non-binary and intersex persons. One individual suggested that the exclusion of young people from the current legislation creates the impression that, as far as the Irish state is concerned, trans children do not exist. It also undermines the identity of U16 trans youth, implying that they are 'confused' or 'mistaken' about their trans identity. Concern was expressed that, where young people are 'out' in a school or social environment, the absence of legal recognition will create vulnerabilities whereby (a) a young person may be required to involuntarily reveal a previously non-disclosed trans history or (b) may be refused validation of their preferred gender because, in law, they are tied to an incorrect, birth-assigned gender.

**“One individual suggested that the exclusion of young people from the current legislation creates the impression that, as far as the Irish state is concerned, trans children do not exist.”**

U18 participants were particularly interested in considering possible strategies for recognising non-binary identities. A common suggestion was that persons, who identify as neither male nor female, and thus who are not accurately described through the imposition of “F” or “M” gender markers, should be entitled to obtain an “X” designation. A number of participants observed that “third gender” recognition had been extended to trans communities in other countries (such as India and Australia). There were also suggestions for a broader gender recognition model, whereby persons should be allowed to define the terms of their own gender (e.g. through the possibility of a ‘fill-the-blank-space’ option on official forms).

U18 participants expressed frustration with the apparent lack of knowledge among politicians and purported experts. For many young people, officials’ ‘unfamiliarity’ with trans youth was particularly clear during the protracted debates on legal gender recognition. At many points in the legislative process – both formal and informal – policy makers voiced generalised assumptions about the validity of young trans identities. Not only were these assumptions often incorrect or uninformed, but also, where unchallenged, they were important factors in

driving the near-total exclusion of trans minors. U18 participants expressed a clear desire that law makers would receive increased education and training on issues relating to gender identity. Many young people suggested that, without better knowledge and understanding, it would be extremely difficult to achieve non-binary recognition.

#### **OTHER LEGISLATION**

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U18 participants also strongly supported further legislative initiatives, in addition to gender recognition, which could begin to address many of the outstanding challenges which still confront Ireland’s trans youth (e.g. hate crimes, discrimination, etc.) There was a desire that any such legislation would be drafted in sufficiently broad terms so as to respect all trans identities, particularly those who do not identify with the ‘male-female’ binary.

## OVER 18 FORUM

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Participants in the older Trans Forum debated many of the same issues addressed by their younger peers. In general, individuals were pleased with the enactment of the Gender Recognition Act 2015. Many participants expressed significant surprise that, having opposed a self-declaration model for a considerable period of time, the system ultimately adopted is based on self-determination. However, like younger participants, the Over18 group expressed considerable disappointment at the omission of trans children and non-binary identities. They also called for greater express recognition of intersex experiences.

### GROUPS EXCLUDED FROM THE ACT

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As in the U18 Forum, older participants discussed several different options for non-binary recognition: (a) a third gender marker option, such as “X” or ‘Other’ (although concern was also expressed that the latter choice might further marginalise or ‘other’ trans communities); (b) allowing people to choose whether to declare their gender or not, and if so, to write in their own choice of identity rather than selecting from a list; and (c) removing gender from documents altogether.

Participants in the older Forum did not reach a consensus on the most desirable option, although a small majority did favour the de-gendering of legal documents. Some individuals expressed a concern that, having struggled for a considerable period of time to gain recognition of their preferred gender, removing gender markers from official documents would rob trans individuals of a primary source of legal affirmation. There were also suggestions that legal gender (and information regarding trans

history) should be retained for access to healthcare services. Some individuals felt that, where a person enters a healthcare pathway – whether for general services or gender confirming treatment – it would be preferable for medical staff to have a full record of that person’s medical history and sex characteristics. This would be more medically accurate than a nebulous gender marker, which would group together people of the same gender regardless of their cis/trans status and healthcare needs. In this context, some participants felt that medical details, such as intersex history, transition-related care (including surgery) and on-going treatment are important healthcare factors which doctors should be able to take into account when administering care. Participants did not agree what information should be available, nor was there consensus on how medical staff should obtain access. However, it was clear from the discussions that the specific utility of gender, in individual situations, is a question of particular debate among Ireland’s trans youth. The majority of participants did appear to favour a model whereby parents and children would not have to declare a legal gender until a child is capable of offering informed consent. Such a framework has already been adopted by the Maltese legislature under the Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics Act 2015.

### OTHER LEGISLATION

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Older participants expressed strong support for hate crimes legislation, protecting the physical integrity of intersex infants and anti-discrimination guarantees, including bathroom access. In some cases, the Over18 attendees were surprised to learn about the relative invisibility

of trans people in Irish laws. Many participants believed that they enjoyed greater legal protections than is currently the case. In line with issues around family support, discussed in the introduction, many young people cited transphobic family abuse as a central concern, and encouraged the strengthening of child protection laws to ensure that all trans children experience a safe, secure and affirming home environment.

### **POLITICAL VISIBILITY, INTERACTION AND KNOWLEDGE**

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U18 participants voiced concern at the apparent erasure of intersex and non-binary identities during the legislative campaign for legal gender recognition. There was a general perception that advocacy groups, such as TENI and BeLonGTo, had used insufficient resources to highlight these issues. There was also anger that trans and gender non-conforming persons had been almost fully excluded from wider debates around marriage equality, even though the 2015 Referendum also affected trans marital rights. One participant stated: "During the referendum all the politicians said this is great for gay and lesbian people but they never said 'it's good for bisexual people or trans people'. I was canvassing for marriage equality; the advantages for the Gender Recognition Bill were never, ever mentioned. I was the only one mentioning it."

In general, Forum participants had mixed experiences interacting with politicians, particularly during the campaign for legal gender recognition. Some individuals expressed disappointment that Irish law makers are largely disengaged from trans concerns. Some public representatives were consistently slow in replying

to trans-related questions, and often treated trans inquiries as 'non-serious' or 'frivolous'. Other persons praised policy makers for the warm, welcoming and respectful discussions to which they had been party.

One recurring theme throughout the Over18 Forum was the comparative absence of knowledge and education around the Gender Recognition Act 2015. Many attendees were unaware of the details of the legislation, and other important protections (such as employment non-discrimination). This was so even though some participants intended to seek gender recognition, and had been exposed to acts of discrimination prohibited by law. Many participants felt that the relative invisibility of trans narratives in political debates, and wider news media, made it difficult to access correct, up-to-date information on trans rights. There was general agreement that, failing to properly educate trans communities, particularly young trans individuals, about their legal protections, renders trans persons increasingly vulnerable to discrimination and abuse.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Amend the Gender Recognition Act 2015 so that trans youth can, irrespective of their age, obtain State acknowledgement of their preferred gender through fair, accessible and appropriate application procedures.
- Amend the Gender Recognition Act 2015 so that, in accordance with international standards of best practice, persons aged 16 and 17 years can self-determine their legal gender
- Amend the Gender Recognition Act 2015 to specifically acknowledge intersex identities following consultation with, and directed by the views of, intersex people as to what system of legal recognition would be preferable. Legislate to protect intersex infants from medically unnecessary surgeries.
- Amend the Gender Recognition Act 2015 to specifically recognise non-binary identities following consultation with, and directed by the views of, non-binary people as to what system of legal recognition would be preferable (there may be a need for further discussion and debate amongst non-binary people in order to make this determination).
- Provide training for education, healthcare and public service staff on non-binary sensitivity, and ensure that non-binary young persons can access basic services without discrimination.
- Adopt comprehensive guidelines for education institutions which emphasise trans affirmation, particularly in areas such as bathroom use, uniform requirements and respect for preferred name/pronouns.
- Ensure that education institutions incorporate a trans non-discrimination framework in their equality and non-discrimination policies, and that institutions properly enforce trans protections.
- Adopt a comprehensive healthcare pathway for gender confirmation treatment in Ireland. Increase available resources, which reduce existing waiting lists and provide greater access for trans young persons living in rural areas.
- Ensure that, in appropriate circumstances, trans access to medical services cannot be obstructed by reluctant parents.
- Educate healthcare professionals about the diversity of trans identities, and end practices which condition treatment on satisfying a 'standard' trans narrative.
- Greater efforts should be made by politicians and political parties to create a trans affirming environment and full participation of trans people in Irish political life. This should include politicians being more mindful of trans issues and the views of trans people, as well as encouraging trans people to raise issues with their representatives, within their parties and to stand for election.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Trans Youth Forum ('the Forum'), and this report which shares its outcomes, was the product of a considerable amount of work, undertaken generously by many individuals, for which significant thanks must be offered. The entire project would not have been possible without the support of the Trinity College Dublin Equality Fund. The authors first visualised the Forum through the lens of the Equality Fund's important work, and have been extremely grateful for the Fund's continuing generosity and patience since November 2014. As two current Trinity students, the authors are immensely proud that the College took on, and funded, this important work. In particular, Luke Field (former Equality Officer) and Aoife Crawford have offered significant help and advice in planning and carrying out both the Forum and the report-writing process.

The Irish Transgender Student Alliance supported the Forum from an early stage, and were a constant presence at organising sessions. In particular, Toryn Glavin showed immense generosity and skill in coordinating, publicising and running the Forum events, particularly in moderating the Over18 education discussions. BeLonGTo Youth Services are justifiably recognised, at an international level, as an example of best practice for addressing LGBTQI youth needs. BeLonGTo have been, since the initiation of this project, simply wonderful in their support, assistance and advice. The Forum, and the report, benefit considerably from the voice of young trans people under the age of 18 years. This would not have been possible without the logistical and professional support of BeLonGTo. As noted, the U18 Forum was specifically hosted and facilitated at BeLonGTo's Dublin offices. The authors

are particularly indebted to Lisa McKenny and Gillian Brien, whose personal commitments to the project had a huge influence in securing the Forum goals. Moninne Griffith and Carol-Anne O'Brien provided invaluable feedback during the writing stage. We are very grateful for their thoughtful advice and suggestions, which have significantly enhanced the report's structure and content. Throughout the planning process, BeLonGTo were frequently represented by Alex Lawson and Daniel Zagorski. Alex and Daniel not only provided vital input in structuring the Forum itinerary, but also acted as moderators for the U18 Forum, carrying out their roles in a sensitive and professional manner.

On the day of the Forum, the Organising Committee were extremely fortunate to have the assistance of Ben Power, Aoife FitzGibbon-O'Riordan, Janet O'Sullivan and JessicaMarie Dean. Ben graciously agreed to act as a discussion moderator, and fulfilled this role with significant skill and care. Aoife and Janet both agreed to act as note takers. The authors are hugely grateful for both Aoife and Janet giving their time. Without their precise, detailed work, this report would simply not have been possible. Finally, throughout the day, Jessica offered support and care for individuals who experienced difficulties or had to step away from particular discussions. The issues considered as part of the Forum programme were extremely sensitive, and had the potential to trigger memories of past trauma. Having Jessica on hand was a significant comfort for many participants, and the authors really appreciated her presence.

Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) was a central pillar in organising the National Trans Youth Forum. The Forum is the brainchild of Board Member, Simon

Blanckensee, whose energy and passion for advancing youth equality have been an inspiration throughout. The authors are extremely grateful for the support and advice (and the sheer number of hours) that the TENI staff and board dedicated to this project. Board member, Lee Jollans, has been present since the first planning meeting, and was hugely generous in structuring the Forum day, suggesting nuanced discussion questions, and acting as moderator for the Over18 event. The Organising Committee was also very lucky to benefit from the input of Board Member, Sam Blanckensee, during the initial planning stages. Sam's advice and encouragement were greatly appreciated, and the Forum was much enhanced because of Sam's participation. Working in consultation with TENI, Oscar James authored a parallel report on the results of the online survey. Oscar's report is an impressive, highly significant body of work, and we were so grateful to be able to draw from its findings. Gordon Grehan was instrumental in the Forum's pre-organisation, and was in no small way responsible for ensuring that so many young people (particularly those outside of Dublin) were able to attend. Vanessa Lacey has perhaps done more than any other person to advance, and promote, the rights of young trans people living in Ireland. Vanessa specifically travelled to Dublin the week before the Forum to provide training on facilitation. The authors are hugely grateful to Vanessa for offering this support. Catherine Cross is TENI's current Family Support and Education Officer. We are hugely grateful for the work that Catherine does in this important area, and for her on-going commitment to supporting trans youth. Jack O'Sullivan played an immense role in the Forum organisation, and the day-long operations.

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Of course, the National Trans Youth Forum could only have succeeded with the generous participation and buy-in of Ireland's trans youth. Since its inception, this project has always been about highlighting the voice and experience of young trans persons. The authors are immensely grateful to all participants – those who attended the Forum and completed the online survey – who contributed to this process. We hope that our work accurately reflects the views expressed by young people during the Forum discussions, and that the report can meaningfully contribute to the movement for trans equality in Ireland.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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<b>Transgender</b>	Refers to a person whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. This term can include diverse gender identities.
<b>Cisgender</b>	A non-trans person (i.e. a person whose gender identity and gender expression is aligned with the sex assigned at birth).
<b>Gender Identity</b>	Refers to a person's deeply-felt identification as male, female, or some other gender. This may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth.
<b>Coming Out</b>	The process of accepting and telling others about one's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Many trans people will 'come out' as a different gender to the sex assigned at birth and may begin a social or physical transition (see definition of Transition).
<b>Gender Non-Binary</b>	An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside the gender binary of male or female. This includes individuals whose gender identity is neither exclusively male nor female, a combination of male and female or between or beyond genders. Similar to the usage of transgender, people under the non-binary umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms (See definition of Androgynous, Gender Fluid, Genderqueer, Gender variant).
<b>Intersex</b>	Refers to a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male.

