

Three Loreto students represent Ireland at 'Your Europe, Your Voice' event in Brussels

This May, three students from Loreto (Rebecca Murphy, Sorcha O'Boyle and Fiona Kenealy) along with their teacher Ms K. Murphy, got the opportunity to travel to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) headquarters in Brussels where we represented Ireland at a young plenary session along with three representatives of each of the 27 member states. During the course of the trip, we debated youth issues in Europe such as youth employability, third level education and student loans. We had received a large document entitled 'Youth on the Move' which consisted of proposals in line with the Europe 2020 strategy. We were split into three groups: employers, employees and other interests, where each of us represented one of these groups. We debated the proposals, not only from the viewpoint of these groups but also from the view point of our country.

Following a personal tour of the EESC building with Pdraig Walsh, who represents farmers in Ireland in the EESC, we were thrilled to find ourselves at the centre of heated debates in the EESC headquarters, along with young people from all over Europe aged 16-18. Having debated a series of eight amendments, fifteen were chosen that were considered to be the most relevant to the lives of young Europeans. In a large plenary session, surrounded by state of the art technology and over eight languages to choose to hear the debate in, twelve amendments were made to the original document which was debated in Strasburg last week by the EESC who took those amendments into account.

It wasn't all work though! Each of us shared a room with another participant from a different country and with everyone on Facebook, we plan to keep in contact with as many people as we can. The Scottish delegation was particularly friendly and we have exchanged contact details with the possibility of a Celtic exchange in the next few years.

On our last night in Brussels, we had a bit of a party with music, dancing and great fun. Our trip to Brussels was unforgettable and we know how lucky we were to be able to attend. Overall, it was an amazing experience which has deepened our interest and understanding of the European Union and of Ireland's standing within it.

By Rebecca Murphy