



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Speech by Heather Humphreys TD
Minister for Rural and Community Development
Rural Youth Assembly
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Good afternoon everyone and can I just say how delighted I am to be here with you today, at this very first Rural Youth Assembly.

I know that you have spent the morning holding really good discussions about the issues that impact young people living in Rural Ireland.

My job as Minister for Rural and Community Development is about making our rural communities better places to live, to work, to visit, and to grow up in.

I'm really passionate about that role. I myself live on a farm in a place called Aghabog in County Monaghan – which I can tell you is about as rural as it gets!

This Assembly is a really important event.

It gives both me and the officials in the Department of Rural and Community Development the chance to hear your ideas in terms of what you think we should be doing differently to improve rural Ireland.

Some of you may have heard about *Our Rural Future*.

Our Rural Future is the name of the Government's five year policy for Rural Ireland.

It is the most ambitious strategy for our rural communities in decades – and that's because I believe we need to be ambitious for our towns and villages.

When we were developing *Our Rural Future*, we met with groups of young people, to hear their opinions, and actually this event today was one of the recommendations that came out of those discussions.

We also heard from young people about how living in rural Ireland impacted on all aspects of their lives, including their family, their social life, their education, their employment and career options.

Since then, we've lived through 20 months of a global pandemic, which unfortunately still remains with us.

While Covid-19 has impacted on all our lives, I'm conscious that it has been particularly difficult for young people living in rural areas.

You haven't been able to travel like you used to because of the restrictions.

And you've spent a lot more time meeting your friends and school colleagues over the likes of Zoom, Facetime and Teams.

But there is one big opportunity that the Pandemic has thrown up for us.

And that's what we call Remote Working.

I'm a huge believer that Remote Working can be a game-changer for Rural Ireland.

It reduces people's commutes and improves our carbon footprint.

And it's better for our local businesses because it allows people to work from within their own community.

But above all, Remote Working gives people a better quality of life.

And so that's why, as Minister, I'm developing a range of measures with my officials and Government colleagues to ensure that Remote Working is a big part of all our futures.

Conclusion

So, once again, it's great to be with you all this afternoon.

I want to thank all those who facilitated the holding of today's event, including representatives from Foróige, Youth Work Ireland and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

I want to particularly thank all of the young people who participated today; who shared their thoughts and opinions and experiences with the rest of the group. I sincerely appreciate your contributions.

This Rural Youth Assembly will remain an important part of our efforts to continue to listen to those living in rural communities and we want to consider the recommendations you have made today as we develop our policies.

And remember this: You are the voices of the next generation.

You are the people who will lead your communities and shape their future.

I encourage you all to take confidence from today's event and continue to be active voices in your communities. You are the people who will make the difference.

Go raith maith agaibh.

ENDS