

grassroots

the Ógra newsletter



Issue 1 2004





Electronic voting

This June when the Irish electorate goes to the polls for the Local and European elections, a new voting system will be used throughout the country for the first time. Although Electronic voting had been used on a trial basis during the General Election in 2002 and the second Nice Treaty Referendum, this June will see the system rolled out across the country.

Electronic voting will make our elections more accurate, more efficient and more democratic. The counting process will be significantly speeded up which will save the Exchequer substantial amounts in the medium to long term.

According to Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Mr. Martin Cullen, T.D, whose department has responsibility for the introduction of the new system, it is important that we move to electronic voting.

“Current electoral processes are based on 19th century experience rather than 21st century opportunity. The nationwide use of electronic voting and counting does represent the making of modern Irish electoral history, and it does so in a very good way. The results declared by returning officers will be the most accurate and therefore the most democratic ever.”

“Based on the experience of the pilots, there are four-straightforward benefits: it’s easier; it’s more efficient; it improves electoral accuracy and administration; and it eliminates the democratic wastage associated with spoilt votes.”

“Over 300,000 Irish people have used the system in real votes. The response was very positive and it showed that it works in Irish conditions in both straight-choices and the more complex STV system.”

“With every major change there are those who try to undermine it. I think we should get some things clear. The new system has been subjected to rigorous testing by a range of independent agencies. The voting machine has been independently certified in Germany and Holland and an independent code review of the software has been undertaken by an Irish company.”

“The public have rightly always had confidence in the people who administer our elections and these people will continue to administer our elections, but this time with a system which they have chosen which will eliminate human error in voting and counting. It is a system which will, more closely than any before, ensure that the results they declare reflect the exact intent of the voters.”

“I have of course considered the different informed and uninformed comments made about the new system. I am faced with a direct choice: I can listen to wild conspiracy theories about people wanting to subvert our elections or I can listen to our electoral administrators who say that the new system will be the most accurate and democratic ever employed. As far as I am concerned there is no choice.”

At the last local elections 21,000 votes were declared spoilt. Although some of those were done deliberately, the vast majority of spoilt votes can be put down to human error. While it will still be possible to spoil your vote deliberately the electronic system will significantly reduce the number of votes that are unintentionally lost. The Minister reinforced the point of increased accuracy, and therefore more democratic, nature of the system by further discussing the issue of spoilt votes.



According to Minister Cullen it is important we move to electronic voting

He said: “The high level of votes spoiled in election is because of simple things like unclear handwriting or the lack of a stamp on the ballot paper. There is no doubt that some seats can be decided by error. In the last local elections 21,000 votes were declared spoiled, while at the same time 40 seats were decided by less than 50 votes. As a democrat, I believe that every voter should know that if they cast a vote it will be counted accurately and not ruled out because of an innocent mistake.”

For further information on electronic voting check out www.electronicvoting.ie or phone the lo-call number 1890 200406.



A chara,

Welcome to the new look Ógra newsletter, grassroots. The aim of this new publication is to offer our members a more diverse range of articles and opinions that will hopefully generate discussion and debate.

Together with the updated Ógra website we hope this newsletter will allow us to communicate on a more regular basis with the members of Ógra. With any new project there will always be some amount of fine-tuning, so if you have any suggestions or opinions on the newsletter, or if you would like to contribute, please email communications@ogra.ie.



With the Local and European elections only a matter of months away, this edition has focused on the issue of young candidates and young public representatives. As well as talking to two of the youngest members of the Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party, Senator Timmy Dooley and Senator Marc MacSharry, there is also an article on the large number of young candidates that will represent Fianna Fáil in the local elections. We also have articles on the issue of electronic voting, Ireland's term holding the Presidency of the EU, the use of the Irish language and lots more.

Aside from the new publication, there is also plenty else of interest to Ógra members over the next few months. Ógra will hold an organisational workshop on the Friday of the Ard Fheis, which could have significant implications for the future of Ógra. While on the Saturday of the Ard Fheis there will be an Ógra fringe meeting on the topic of "Investing in our Future". The Fianna Fáil Young Candidates Rally with special guest An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern T.D. will take place on Saturday April 3rd at 2.30pm in Chief O'Neill's Hotel Smithfield.

In May the eyes of the world will be on Ireland when An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern T.D. will welcome the 10 new accession countries as President of the EU. While only a month later we face the prospect of the Local and European elections. Recent opinion polls have provided a boost to Fianna Fáil, but if we want to do well in the upcoming elections we will need to get out there and start knocking on doors.

Ógra and its members have a history of contributing significantly to our election results, and if we want the party and our young candidates to do well that will only be achieved with as much help as we can provide. I remember my first election campaign, which benefited considerably from the youthful energy my supporters were able to provide. So I would urge all the members of Ógra to devote as much time as they possibly can to helping ensure a positive election result in June.

Is mise le meas, Michael Moynihan, T.D.

Ógra website: a valuable communications tool

Since its launch nearly two years ago the Ógra website www.ogra.ie has proved itself extremely popular with members and the public alike. In the past 12 months it has received over 25000 hits and is regularly updated with information about Ógra events and press releases. The website is a great means for all Ógra units to promote events in their local area. Over the past few months a number of changes have been made as part of the ongoing project to improve this resource.



These changes include the addition of a local events section, a photo gallery and some necessary maintenance to the Online Discussion Form.

The Ógra discussion forum is the most popular element of the site. Unfortunately it had to be deactivated for some time to allow some alterations be made to the supporting database. Without a doubt this forum will soon be full of vigorous debate and healthy discussion. Other aspects of the Website are also very valuable tools for the promotion of Ógra Fianna Fáil. These include the Photo Gallery and Local Events section. All Ógra units are encouraged to submit articles and photos for publication either by clicking on the link on the page or by sending an email to communications@ogra.ie. There is also an online opinion poll. Ógra members are invited to submit suggestions for new poll topics to the above email address.

Over the coming months further improvements will be made. The online membership and newsletter sections will be refined, and a new feature on Fianna Fáil's Young Candidates for the Local and European Elections 2004 will shortly be launched. Please take the time to explore this site thoroughly and to contribute new content. Your views on how this site can be further improved would be most welcome. Comments should be sent to National Youth Officer Aidan O'Gorman email aidan@fiannafail.ie

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Design and layout by
11 Sallymount Ave, Ranelagh, D6
P: 496 7270



Senator Timmy Dooley



A former third level representative on the National Youth Committee of Ógra Fianna Fáil, Senator Timmy Dooley was elected to Seanad Éireann at the first attempt in July 2002. From Mountshannon in Co. Clare, Timmy is a former member of the Committee of 15 and is one of the youngest ever chairmen of the Fianna Fáil Cairde Fáil committee.

GR: When were you involved with Ógra?

T: I first got involved with Ógra when I joined the Kevin Barry Cumann in UCD. I had always been interested in politics and current affairs and I thought it was a natural progression to join Ógra when I went to university. In my first year there I became the first year rep on the officer board, and in later years went on to become PRO and then chairman. The Kevin Barry Cumann then, as it is now, was one of the biggest cumann in the country and was very active. It provided an access point to the activities of the Ógra nationally such as youth conferences and the youth committee. It was during my time in UCD that I was elected as third level rep on the national youth committee.

GR: How did your Ógra experiences prepare you for life as a public representative?

T: Ógra provided a great forum for getting involved in debate and to get involved in the preparation of position papers and budget submissions. I think this work, together with general Ógra activity, assisted me greatly in developing a clear understanding of the issues of national importance and helped provide me with a clearer understanding of the workings of the party and the Government.

GR: Did you find that being a former Ógra member helped you when you decided to run for the Seanad?

T: Definitely. Being a member of Ógra provided an access to the major network of the party and serving as a member of Ógra on the National Youth Committee certainly helped me progress through some of the various structures of the party to become a member of the National Executive as part of the Committee of 15. Ógra certainly provided me with a stepping stone on which to build a platform within the party and that ultimately was what gave me the opportunity to make a successful bid for the Seanad.

GR: Do you think Ógra has changed since you were a member?

T: Well it's about ten years since I was in Ógra and I probably don't have as close a link with it now as I did. But from the people that I know in Ógra today, it's clear to me that they still continue to do important work. I think the National Youth Committee has grown in size, there is certainly greater representation for third level and I think these are all positive developments. Ógra

continues to take a position in terms of issues of national importance and indeed local importance. It continues to inform debate within the party and encourages young candidates to seek election. I also know from my attendance at recent youth conferences that the ability to maintain the proud traditions of Fianna Fáil - of working hard and playing hard - are still very much a central theme of Ógra.

GR: How important do you think Ógra is to Fianna Fáil?

T: Ógra is a vital element of Fianna Fáil because without young people getting actively involved Fianna Fáil would eventually die out. You only have to look through the current membership of the Oireachtas and see that the vast majority of them worked their way through Ógra before going on to be elected.

GR: Both you and Senator Marc MacSharry were on the National Youth Committee at the same time. What was that committee like?

T: I would think it was very much like the committee that is there today, other than the fact that there were fewer members on it. It was businesslike in its approach to organising conferences and organising position papers within the party. It was a hard working committee made up of a number of terrific individuals and I enjoyed my time on it.

GR: Do you think that Fianna Fáil does enough to promote young candidates?

T: Well I would say that there is always more that could be done as it is vital that we continue to have young people coming through the system so as to keep the party fresh and energetic, and to best use the energy that exists within the party. But I think our record is very good on that score and Deputy Michael Moynihan and the Taoiseach deserve to be congratulated for encouraging so many young people to go forward. As you know the Taoiseach has a strong record of helping young people to get involved in politics and has brought a large number of young members into the party. But for these elections I think Fianna Fáil has put together a young team to be proud of, with a large number of individuals who will have a bright future in the party.

GR: Finally how are you enjoying life in Seanad Éireann? Is it like you expected?

T: It's all that and more. I was greatly honoured to be elected to the Seanad. A lot of the work of the Seanad doesn't make national headlines but those involved in politics realise the vital role it plays. It has been an honour to be part of that experience and to be a small part of a Government team that has achieved so much since coming into office in 2002.

"Being a member of Ógra provided an access to the major network of the party"

Dates for Your Diary

Date	Event	Venue	Time
Sat April 3rd	Dublin Area Ógra CDC Consultative	Chief O'Neills Hotel Smithfield Dublin	12.00pm
Sat April 3rd	Young Candidates Election rally	Chief O'Neills Hotel Smithfield Dublin	2.30pm
Wed April 7th	Dublin 3rd Level Monster meeting	The Mansion House (Hosted by Lord Mayor of Dublin Cllr Royston Brady)	7.00pm
Sat May 1st	10 new states join the EU	All over Europe.	
June 11th	Local & European elections 2004	Nationwide	7.00am – 9.00pm
June 19th	Ógra summer BBQ	To be decided	9.00pm
June 26th	Final registration date for Ógra CDCS	(Any CDC's not registered by this date will NOT be entitled to send delegates to the next Youth Conference)	
Nov 19th & 20th	National Youth Conference	Slieve Russell Hotel Cavan	

Senator Marc MacSharry



At 30 years of age, Senator Marc MacSharry is the youngest member of the Fianna Fáil Parliamentary Party. Elected to Seanad Éireann in July 2002, Marc is Chief Executive of the Sligo Chamber of Commerce. Involved with Fianna Fáil and Ógra for many years, Marc served on the National Youth Committee in 1994.

GR: When were you involved with Ógra?

M: Well I was involved with Fianna Fáil all my life because I was born into the party. Once I was old enough I got involved in Sligo to try to get a cumann going there for Ógra. I started going to the conferences around the country which obviously had a huge social dimension which was very, very enjoyable. There was a huge buzz factor in that and through the conferences and other events you'd have access to Ministers and people who were senior in the party. You'd also be able to feed into national policy making which was a tremendous incentive to get involved. I then had the opportunity to run for the National Youth Committee and I was lucky enough to get elected to that and spent one year on it which was good, I certainly enjoyed the meetings.

GR: Did you find being a former Ógra member helped you when you decided to run for the Seanad?

M: Yeah, definitely it did. I mean there were people who were involved with Ógra when we there who are now councillors and indeed TDs and you were able to work together with them. You weren't going in as blind as you could have. There was probably one person in each county at a minimum who I knew personally from my Ógra days who if they weren't a voter themselves had access to one or at a very minimum they would guide you around. So it certainly was a help in terms of that campaign.

GR: What advice would you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in politics?

M: Definitely Ógra is the route to start at and try to get involved in all aspects of it. I think that when I was in Ógra almost everybody that was in it had an aspiration to get to elected office at some stage. I would say stick with it and enjoy it for what it is because anybody can make it, but at the same time not everybody does. But it is hugely enjoyable and I think that if anyone is serious about pursuing it you must go through the Ógra end of it first.

GR: How important do you think Ógra is to Fianna Fáil?

M: I think it is increasingly more important. There is a need to have more young people there, to have them feeding directly into the policy makers and ultimately they must go forward and run for election so that we're properly placed for the future. It certainly is a vitally important part and is increasingly becoming more important. The challenge for the senior end of the party is to realise that and the challenge for Ógra to make them realise that and to ensure the policies they are coming up with are the hot policies of the day and the ones that matter to people to get out and vote on.

GR: How do you think Ógra has changed since you were a member?

M: Well it would appear to me to be a lot more organised than it was. Not that it wasn't organised then but it seems to be a lot

more professionally run organisation now with a full officer board and with a lot of very good activities on an ongoing basis, and the communications structure seems to be better than when I was there. Having said that there is always room for improvement, I don't mean that in a critical form, but Ógra needs to constantly evolve to meet the challenges ahead.

GR: Both you and Senator Timmy Dooley were members of the National Youth Committee at the same time. What was that committee like?

M: That was a very good committee. If I think back some would have run for various forms of elected office. Timmy and I are the only ones in the Oireachtas at the moment but I know that Liam Kelly is running for the council in one of the Dublin constituencies while Shane O'Hanlon is a councillor with Monaghan County Council. But it was a very good committee. There were several meetings with Ministers to try to bring forward certain aspects of legislation but certainly it was an active committee.

GR: Do you think that Fianna Fáil does enough to promote young candidates?

M: You can never do enough in that context, I mean it's important to have the best team out at all times. Possibly we need to do a lot more than we've been doing but we have a large number of young candidates contesting the forthcoming local elections and that can only be a healthy sign for the future of the party.

GR: What do you think are the main points of concern for young people in Ireland today?

M: Well I think certainly motor insurance costs would have been one of the biggest over the last number of years. I know the improvements that have been made by the Government lately such as the establishment of the Personal Injury Advisory Board, the Motor Insurance Advisory Board and obviously with the penalty points system, we should see some changes to that situation. For city based people it's the whole cost of housing and even the cost of rental accommodation. If you are going through college now it is extremely expensive to get accommodation. While for younger couples starting out the possibility of owning your own home in any of the big cities is remote and that is a serious challenge.

GR: How are you enjoying life in Seanad Éireann. Is it everything you expected?

M: It's great. It's something that I've always wanted to do and it's great to have been lucky enough to get here. I think the Seanad is a hugely underestimated part of the Oireachtas. I don't think its remotely covered by the media to the extent it could be or should be and as result the broad perception on the street is not what it should be. I think there are some very, very interesting and very, very representative debates that go on in there on all subjects but unless you're David Norris or Joe O'Toole you're not going to even make Oireachtas Report. I think people would be a lot more confident of the workings of the Seanad if they knew more about it.

“Definitely Ógra is the route to start at and try to get involved in all aspects of it.”

“Ógra - It certainly is a vitally important part and is increasingly becoming more important”

EU Presidency: Ireland's chance to show how it's done

On the 1st of January Ireland assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a position we will hold until June 31st. This is the sixth time this country has had this honour and with the rotating system due to end under the terms of the newly proposed EU Constitution it may be the last time we hold the Presidency. With that in mind it is appropriate that a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D., will hold the title of President of the European Union.

Our predecessors, the Italians under Silvio Berlusconi, failed to gain agreement on the EU Constitution and as a result Ireland's agenda will now have to make room for coming up with a solution to this situation. An Taoiseach has outlined three main areas in which Ireland will pursue agreement in the coming months:

1. The welcoming of the ten new EU member states.
2. Helping the EU members to adapt to a more revitalised economic and social environment.
3. Improving relations between the EU and the USA.

The enlargement of the Union puts Ireland front and centre in welcoming the accession countries and we should take this opportunity to establish and maintain a strong alliance within the EU framework between Ireland and these countries. Ireland is an example to these nations of the benefits of EU membership. From our own experiences of EU membership and our development into one of the best



It is appropriate that a Fianna Fáil Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern, holds the title of President of the European Union

economies and democracies in the world we can be act as a beacon to the new states, and in the future this will be vitally important.

Ireland's economic performance makes us one of the top economies in the EU and the world. Our Government's policies of low personal taxation, corporate taxation and social partnership should by now be an example to the other member states. The Irish presidency will try and lead by example and hopefully make the EU as a whole more competitive and efficient.

This will be a tall task with both France and Germany wanting to opt out of the Economic and Budgetary Stability pact, which they themselves forced smaller nations like Ireland to operate under as a preamble to monetary union. No doubt Minister McCreevy will relish this challenge.

Ireland has always had a strong relationship with the US. Our ties go back generations, and are part of our families and culture going right back to famine times. While the war in Iraq damaged the relationship between the EU and the US, for reasons we have no need to get into now, Ireland wants to heal the rift and this is something that must be done. The world is facing many dangers and the EU and the US should be working together. The EU must acknowledge that, and it is important that the Irish presidency help heal the wounds between Germany, France and President Bush, as much as the less personal relations between the EU as a body and the US.

So by June 31st Ireland, I believe, will have succeeded in presiding over the EU in an efficient and sensible way. Already there is praise for the performance of our ministers on the EU stage. By then we will have hosted many important events and welcomed dignitaries from the world over. Robert Emmet will rest assured that we have indeed taken our place with the nations of the world, and in many ways lead them.

Tom Malone.

Gaeilge sna Scoileanna

Cé go bhfuil feabhasú ag teacht ar staid na Gaeilge le roinnt blianta anuas de bharr méadú na Gaelscoileanna tá an teanga fós i ndrochstaid. Foghlaimíonn daoine Gaeilge ar feadh níos mó na deich bhliain sna scoileanna agus nuair a fhágann siad an mheanscoil níl siad in ann aon úsáid a bhaint as an teanga. Tá rud bunúsach mhícheart leis an gcóras oideachas, í mo thuairim.

Tosnaíonn an fhadhb sa bhunscoil. Ní cothaíonn siad aon ghrá don teanga ann. Muineann siad an teanga mar is gá dóibh agus uaireanta is fuath leosan an teanga chomh maith. Caitheann múinteoirí an iomarca ama ag díriú isteach ar litrithe agus gramadach. Nuair a fhágann daltaí an bunscoil de ghnáth ní bhíonn comhrá ar bith acu i nGaeilge riamh. Is rud amadach é seo mar sna scoileanna teangachacha tosnaíonn siad ag caint ar dtús agus ansin oibríonn siad ar an ngramadach. Ansin bíonn muinín ag na daltaí agus is féidir leo bheith ag caint agus gan a bheith ró-bhuartha faoin ngramadach. Baineann múinteoirí teangachacha úsáid as "communicative approach."

I mo thuairim bheadh sé níos fearr gan an Ghaeilge a mhuineadh sna scoileanna muna athríonn an Roinn Oideachas an síollabhás. Creidim é seo má tá sé beagnach dodhéanta na daltaí a spreagadh sna meanscoileanna. Bíonn dearcadh diúltacha acu óna mbunscoileanna. B'fhéidir go mbeadh sé níos fearr í a cuir i bhfeidhim cosúil leis an bhfrancis sa chéad bhliain mar de ghnáth bíonn Francis nó Gearmánis iontach ag daoine tar éis an mheanscoil a fhágáil.

grassroots

Buiochas!

Sincere thanks to all contributors and those who helped put the first issue of Grassroots, the Ógra Newsletter together: Anthony Kelly, Deirdre Moran, Brian Jordan, Tom Malone, Lorraine Clifford, John Paul Feeley, Michael Shovelin, Cathal Lee, Denis Ryan, Emmett O'Halloran (who also suggested the new title), Michael Moynihan T.D, Senator Marc MacSharry, Senator Timmy Dooley, Pdraig Slyne, Claire Stewart, Rachel Morrogh, Colman Byrne, the members of the National Youth Committee and especially Aidan O'Gorman.

We will publish the next issue in May. If you would like to contribute or make a comment about the new publication please send an email to the Communications Coordinator at communications@ogra.ie

We also welcome articles and photos for the Ógra webpage www.Ógra.ie at any time.

Jimmy Healy
grassroots Editor

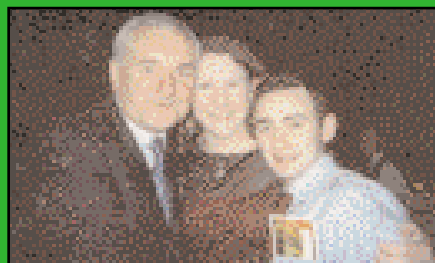
spring break

A great weekend was had by all that attended the recent Ógra Spring Break in Cork. U.C.C. proved to be a fantastic location and as always the Cork nightlife lived up to its reputation.

Friday night saw groups arriving in the real capital from North Kildare, Dublin, Galway and Waterford. The night was spent in Bar Rumba and Fast Eddies. Leas Cathaoirleach Ógra himself, Cathal Lee, even enjoyed a little sojourn dancing – well it was flares night after all! In fact everyone made it out for a quick tango at one stage or another.

A National Youth Committee meeting took place in Béarra in Aras na Mac Léinn, U.C.C. the next day and Brian Crowley M.E.P. addressed the meeting. In a rousing talk, the former Donogh O'Malley Cumann member told the Youth Committee to be radical and make their voices heard. Following Brian's departure a lively and extremely progressive meeting took place. Some members had to leave after the meeting, but most stayed for the highlight of the weekend – the 35th Anniversary Dinner of the Donogh O'Malley Cumann, U.C.C.

The dinner was held in Jury's Hotel and proved to be a huge success. Donogh O'Malley, the man and the Cumann, was truly celebrated in fine fashion. When one speaks of Donogh O'Malley one thinks of a man full of energy and enthusiasm, a man of vision and knowledge and of course a man of joviality and



The Taoiseach, Mr Ahern meets the delegates

humour: A story has been told that one night Donogh walked into a bar after hours and was spotted by a local sergeant. Being the man of humour that he was Donogh asked him: "Will you have a pint or a transfer?"!

Everyone is in agreement that the weekend in U.C.C. was fantastic, especially anyone who made it for the session in Geraldine's house late Saturday night! As Chair of the Donogh O'Malley Cumann I would like to thank all those that attended. Unfortunately interest wasn't as great as had been originally hoped. A special thank you to my friends and colleagues in the Cumann for their support and help in organising Spring Break 2004.

Hope to meet all those who couldn't make it to Cork at the Ard Fheis,

Go dtí sin – slán agus beannacht. **Anthony Kelly**

Donogh O'Malley the Man & the Cumann. "Ní hualach do dhuine an fhoghlaim"

There were dramatic changes in the political landscape as Lemass gave way to Jack Lynch, and the old legion of Fianna Fáil made way for the younger men and a new style of politics. Men like Charles Haughey, Brian Lenihan and Donogh O' Malley, who set about running the New Ireland of the 1960s. At various essential stages in our party's history, younger generations came to the fore to lead the party into different areas of growth. As the decades evolved, Fianna Fáil, while dominated by the great political giants from the state's foundation, was driven by the visionary input of the young. This vision can be best seen in the story of Donogh O' Malley the man and Donogh O' Malley the Cumann.

Donogh Brendan O'Malley was born in 1921 in Limerick. He was elected to Dáil Éireann in 1954 and topped the poll at each of his elections. It was under the guidance of Sean Lemass that his talents were catered for because Lemass in power had a keen interest in economic development and so took education seriously. This was indicated by the fact that he appointed some of his most dynamic young TDs as ministers in education, men like P.J. Hillery, George Colley and Donogh O'Malley. In 1966 he became Minister for Education. O' Malley saw that government initiative was needed to help the less well off into second level education.



Minister Michael Martin: a famous former member

This came unexpectedly in September 1967, when he called the press to his local school in Limerick and announced without prior cabinet approval free second level education for all. His scheme was to provide special grants for secondary schools, which abolished fees, free transport to and from school for

children greater than 3 miles away and abolished the primary certificate exam. The results were astounding with 90% of second level schools taking part and a dramatic increase in the numbers going to secondary school. It is very important to note that many of the leading personalities in Ógra Fianna Fáil from 1977 were products of the O'Malley Education Innovation. Sadly Donogh O'Malley died suddenly in Limerick on 10 March 1968 before the completion of his controversial proposal to merge UCD and TCD.

The Donogh O'Malley Cumann UCC was founded in 1968 by students who wished to continue to kindle the kind of courage shown by O'Malley in office. The Cumann has always strived to foster an environment in which the ideas of the young people of Ireland can be voiced. It was not until 1974/75, seven years after the young Fianna Fáilers of UCC set up the Cumann, that a youth wing in the party was established by the then General Secretary of Fianna Fáil, Seamus Brennan, under the leadership of Jack Lynch.

In 2003 the Cumann was 35 years in existence, since then it has been central in the continued success of Ógra at all levels, having put its stamp on most Conferences, Árd Fheiseanna, Training Seminars and the party as a whole. It has been involved in the National Youth Committee almost every year and through outstanding work in recruitment, policy making and morale boosting ventures, the Donogh O'Malley Cumann UCC was very proud to be awarded with the coveted Gobnait O'Connell Award at the Youth Conference in Kinsale in 2001 for being the best Ógra Unit. Past members include Joe Walsh, Michael Smith, Mícheál Martin, John O Donoghue and Brian Crowley. Just as it was people like Donogh O' Malley that took Ireland from the 19th Century into the 20th Century, it will be the people in Ógra today that will take Ireland from the 20th into the 21st Century. Donogh did his best for his time and so in this cumann shall live his spirit for all times.

How often have you heard one of the more apathetic young people of this country defend their disdain for politics by saying that it isn't relevant to them? It doesn't affect them they argue, and the public representatives do not represent them. Well this summer's local elections promises to remove part of that argument at the very least. On June 11th a large number of young candidates will be hoping to gain election to city, county and town councils throughout the country.

Fianna Fáil are at the forefront of this promotion of youth with 51 candidates under the age of 30 at the time of going to print going forward for election to one of the local authorities. Many of those candidates are members of Ógra and according to Ógra Cathaoirleach, Mr. Michael Moynihan, T.D. this is a positive development. "We have 51 people under the age of 30 going forward for the local elections. It's a good spread right across the country. There's nothing as powerful an image, in my political experience anyway, as seeing young people canvassing for young candidates. It awakens an entire community and an entire party because young people often bring a sense of enthusiasm to something that makes the impossible, possible."

Appropriately Deputy Moynihan also points to the history of Fianna Fáil and the vital part young people have played in the development of this state. "If you look back at the foundation of our party back in 1926 it was a group of very, very young people that founded the party and went on to be governors of the state for a generation. Over the years quite a few young people have been brought forward through Ógra and onto greater things. Fianna Fáil has always encouraged young people into the ranks and has a history of getting young people involved in the party. I think the Government are very strong on doing all they can to get young people involved in politics and to get young people elected to positions of public responsibility."



Cathal Crowe

One of Fianna Fáil's young candidates is Mr. Cathal Crowe, 21, who is running for the county council in the Killaloe electoral area in Co. Clare. Cathal agrees that the Government is committed to promoting young candidates.

"The Taoiseach Bertie Ahern always points out that he is a young leader himself and he has always been interested in promoting young candidates at national level and at local level. These local elections, more than ever, are going to be crucial because Fianna Fáil will fight a general election in two years time and the success of this campaign is what will launch the general election campaign. We've had a tremendous General Election in 2002 but as a party we need to use June's Local and European elections to build on that."

Cathal continues, "I am happy with the number of young people going forward, in fact at meetings throughout the country I think it's fair to say that some are top heavy with young candidates." Of course young candidates have faced difficulties in the past trying to secure nominations, especially with members of the Oireachtas also occupying local authority seats. However, the Government has helped remove this obstacle by abolishing the dual mandate last year. This step has had a very positive effect on encouraging young candidates, according to Ms. Marguerite Fitzpatrick.



Marguerite Fitzpatrick

"I think it was a fantastic decision by the Government to abolish the dual mandate. I can understand why some members of the Oireachtas were reluctant to give up their local authority seats, but by doing so they are creating spaces for more young candidates to get involved as public representatives. As a party it is important that we put forward young, energetic candidates so that we will continue to grow and thrive. The Government has helped to further this and to encourage more people to get involved in politics, which can only be a good thing."

With Marguerite running for Dublin City Council in the Taoiseach's own area of the North Inner City it would seem that young candidates really are getting an opportunity right around the country. However, while the prospect of having plenty of new, young Fianna Fáil councillors come June is something to look forward to, Deputy Moynihan warns that there is still a lot of work to be done to make this come through.

National Youth Committee Changes

Ógra Communications Co-ordinator, Tom Malone has stepped down from his role due to work commitments and the demands of his local election campaign. The National Youth Committee would like to thank Tom for his hard work and to wish him every success in June. Jimmy Healy has been co-opted to fill the position.

The National Youth Committee also has a new Policy Co-Ordinator. Denis Ryan was co-opted to the position before Christmas. If Ógra members are interested in getting involved in policy development they can e-mail Denis at policy@ogra.ie

"There's a concentrated effort needed by young supporters of each individual candidate to get people out there canvassing, get on the door steps. Back in 1997 when I started out first it was the young people that gathered round me that ensured we got the second seat in Cork North West. I would encourage young people in as much as possible to get out there."

"If you don't get out there and get active within a political movement, or within your community, or whatever, you don't get something done and you don't get a sense of ownership of a project, or a sense of achieving something in a project. If we are to get our young candidates elected it is important that other young people are out there supporting them, knocking on doors and handing out leaflets. Once we manage to achieve that I've no doubt we'll be seeing a lot of new, young faces on the local authorities after the election."