Overview

This short, fast-paced film tells the story of Ireland and the European Union. Over the course of five chapters, Irish teenagers ask key questions about the EU. We follow them on their journey to discover more about the history of the EU and how Ireland's EU membership impacts their daily lives. We find out about key EU policies, how the different institutions work, and how the EU is responding to current challenges. We hear from Ireland's EU Commissioner, Mairead McGuinness, and Irish MEPs, and learn about traineeships and career opportunities for young people in the EU institutions.

Chapter Summaries & Questions

Chapter 1: The History of the European Union (00:13)

The story of the European Union begins with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), a post-war peace project proposed by French foreign minister Robert Schuman in 1950. In 1951, six countries came together to form the ECSC; Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy and France. In 1957, the Treaty of Rome was ratified, establishing the European Economic Community. The common market for goods and services made trade easier and cheaper between countries and soon many more countries joined the EEC, including Ireland in 1973. In 1993, the Treaty of Maastricht established the European Union. Today there are 27 EU Member States with a population of 450 million citizens.

Q   What exactly is a political and economic union? (00:45)
Q   Who came up with the idea of the EU and why? (01:08)
Q   So, how then did the European Coal and Steel Community become the EU? (02:36)
Q   What is the common market for goods and services and why was this such a big step forward? (03:09)
Q   When did Ireland and all the current members join? And when exactly did the EEC become the EU? (03:35)
Q   Has there been any wars between Member States of the EU? (04:40)

Chapter 2: The Impact of the EU in Ireland (05:01)

EU membership has been positive for Ireland. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Irish economy was focused on agriculture with a heavy reliance on Britain for trade. Irish politicians at the time understood the potential benefits of joining the EEC and following a referendum, Ireland became a member in 1973. EU membership has brought many benefits including freedom of movement, a common currency and access to the single market. The ability to live and work anywhere in the EU through programmes such as Erasmus+ has opened up many opportunities for Irish citizens. EU law protects equality in the workplace, the rights of breastfeeding mothers and the right to maternity and paternity leave. The EU also protects cultural rights including the status of the Irish language, while EU funding has helped transform and modernise Irish society, infrastructure and industry.

Q   So, why was it so important for Ireland to become a member? And why did we fight so hard to gain membership? (05:32)

Q   So, it's been really good for the Irish export industry and that is good news for our economy. However, how has EU membership helped ordinary Irish people? (06:12)

Q   So, if I want to travel to other Member States, can I use the same Euro that I use here in Ireland to buy things? (07:00)

Q   How does the EU help Irish consumers when they want to buy goods and services from another EU country? (07:45)

Q   I believe in equal rights for all. What has the EU done to improve the rights of Irish women? (08:17)

Q   Is breá liom Gaeilge. How has the European Union helped the Irish language? (08:51)

Q   And what about day to day life? Has being in the EU made it easier to live in Ireland? (09:17)

Chapter 3: EU Policies and Future Challenges (10:05)

Covid-19 has had a huge impact across the globe but the EU has worked hard to help its Member States and support citizens. It has accelerated the research and development of vaccines and set up a Covid Recovery Fund to help Member States deal with the challenges of the pandemic. The EU has also committed to limiting the impact of Brexit on the Irish economy, setting up the Brexit Adjustment Reserve. The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) supports Irish farmers, while the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) protects the interests of Irish fishing communities and consumers. The European Green Deal seeks to make the EU the first carbon neutral continent by 2050 and the Digital European Programme is dedicated to helping EU citizens and businesses into the digital age.

Q   Joining the EU has done a lot for Ireland in the past. But Ireland faces future challenges due to Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, how will the EU help? (10:10)

Q   I live in the countryside and farming is very important to my community. What will the EU do to help Irish farmers? (11:04)

Q   I care very much about nature and the effects of global warming on the world and Ireland. What is the EU doing about the climate emergency? (11:49)

Q   Growing up, all I've ever known is a digital world, but a lot of people older than me are still getting used to a tech world. What is the EU doing to speed up that change? (12:53)

Q   How does the EU impact on the rest of the world? (13:37)

Chapter 4: How the Institutions Work Together (14:12)

There are three key institutions involved in decision-making at EU level; the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. The European Commission is responsible for the day-to-day running of the EU. Each Commissioner is responsible for a portfolio or policy area, and represents the entire EU and its citizens. The European Parliament is made up of 705 MEPs from the 27 Member States. MEPs are directly elected by EU voters in elections which take place every 5 years. The Council of the EU is made up of government ministers from each of the Member States. The European Commission drafts legislation. The Parliament and the Council debate policy and legislative proposals from the Commission, which are then passed into law (or not) and implemented by the Commission and the Member States. The European Council is where the leaders of the Member States convene at summit meetings to discuss the overall political direction of the EU. Other institutions are the European Central Bank, the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Auditors.

Q   So, how exactly does the EU work? (14:16)

Q   So, if EU Member States make important decisions about certain things, how do they do it? And where do they do it from? (14:36)

Q   What responsibilities do individual Commissioners have and whose views do they represent? (15:20)

Q   How does a Commissioner decide which new laws to propose? (15:58)

Q   How can ordinary people have a say into proposed or existing EU laws? (16:17)

Q   And how does a policy proposal become an actual EU law? (16:37)

Q   How often are members of the European Parliament elected? (17:10)

Q   Does the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union always agree on new laws? (17:51)

Q   What role does our Taoiseach have in the European Union? (18:27)

Q   Okay, I'm beginning to understand how it all works but are there any more EU institutions? (18:48)

Chapter 5: How to Get Involved/Career Opportunities (19:25)

Every year, 1,900 graduates take part in EU trainee programmes across a wide range of EU institutions and policy areas. They gain a practical insight into how the EU works and the many career opportunities open to them. These range from lawyers and communication specialists to interpreters and translators. To work for the EU it is important to have good language skills; applicants must have two EU languages to begin a career with the EU. From January 2022, the Irish language will become a full official working language of the EU, meaning young Irish speakers are in a particularly advantageous position.

Q   What about working for the EU? Are there many opportunities for young people? (19:29)

Q   Aside from traineeships, what other long-term career prospects does the European Union offer? (20:46)

Q   As a young person who wants to find out even more about the EU and get involved, what can I do? (23:49)

More information is available at the following links:

EU Learning Corner Learning Corner | Learning Corner (europa.eu)

EU Institutions Institutions and bodies | European Union (europa.eu)

Erasmus+ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/node_en

EPSO / Traineeships Traineeships | Careers with the European Union (europa.eu)

Europe Direct Contact | European Union (europa.eu)

Blue Star Programme https://www.bluestarprogramme.ie/

European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland Home | European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland (europa.eu)

Ambassador School Programme European Parliament Ambassador School Programme | European Parliament (europa.eu)

European Parliament Euroscola Home | home | European Parliament euroscola (europa.eu)

European Parliament Charlemagne Youth Prize About the Prize | European Parliament European Charlemagne Youth Prize (europa.eu)

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