



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together



Budget 2021 Submission

Our Submission in advance of Budget 2021 comes in the wake of the July response to Covid-19, follows the introduction of new restrictions in certain counties, and some reverses on the Roadmap to Reopening the Economy.

The events of August bring home the reality of what living alongside the virus will mean in the months to come. The task for Government is an unenviable one, where they must support both the economic wellbeing of people and the health of the nation. It also comes at the outset of a new coalition government of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party. Entitled “Our Shared Future”, the coalition set out a vision to support the recovery of the economy post Covid-19, while also addressing the challenges of public services, housing, and climate change.

Looking back to the election in February, in many ways it seems like another lifetime. The Coronavirus pandemic had not yet reached Irish shores, and Ireland’s economic prospects looked to be in good health; the Government finances were in surplus, unemployment was at less than 5%, and the general outlook was for continued economic growth. Chambers Ireland’s focus for the 2020 General Election was to ensure that the next Government delivered on the commitments of both the National Planning Framework and Climate Action Plan while ensuring the delivery of the important infrastructure needed to support the competitiveness and sustainability of our economy.

Fast forward to autumn, the outlook is drastically different. When you include those in receipt of “Covid” payments, unemployment is approximately 16.7%, higher than the peak of the financial crisis more than a decade ago. In the European Commission’s summer forecast, it noted that Ireland’s GDP is projected to contract by 8.5% in 2020. The World Bank expects global trade to take an unprecedented decline.

The Irish economy in February was not without its challenges. While job creation was at an all-time high, this prosperity was not being felt in all parts of the country. Under-investment in infrastructure, particularly housing, was felt keenly across society – to the detriment of our quality of life – having become a significant threat to our competitiveness and the sustainability of our economic recovery.

These challenges did not disappear following the outbreak of Covid-19, and in many ways, instead have been exacerbated. If we are to achieve a sustainable recovery, this new government will need to move away from planning policies that encourage sprawl and do more to integrate our strategies on land management, planning, and public transport so that we create urban spaces which benefit everyone. Budget 2021 must also ensure substantial investment in the low-carbon economy. Our collective inaction over the past decade to tackle climate change through decarbonisation means that we not only risk breaching our 2030 climate targets, but we risk seriously undermining our attractiveness as a place to invest and do business.



Past Budgets have not delivered for SMEs and entrepreneurs. Budget 2021 must include credible reforms and investment to support those businesses who are the drivers of economic growth in communities across the country. These measures must include tax reform, and policies that support regional tourism and job creation. Further, increasing the training options available for businesses and SMEs will be important in addressing skills challenges. Investing in training and education for SME exporters who want to upskill in areas such as customs and logistics will be crucial in preparing businesses for Brexit.

More productive, efficient approaches to managing the economy must also be matched with policies that support sustainability and inclusion. State investment in affordable childcare must continue if we are to support greater participation of women in the workplace. Flexible, inclusive workplaces that are family and age friendly will support not only labour activation, but improve health, wellbeing, and productivity.

The Chambers Ireland manifesto, published ahead of the election in February, called on political parties to put “Place” at the heart of its vision for Ireland. Budget 2021, and the new Legislative Programme must be ambitious for the regions and the millions of people who live in the hinterlands of our cities and beyond. The need for regional development and investment cannot be understated. As a first step, we call for the establishment of an inter-department Taskforce on Town Centres to address vacancies, build active transport infrastructure, and support urban living.

Brexit, combined with the continued economic fallout from the pandemic, will make the work of the 33rd Dáil and the new Government even more challenging. As the consequences of these challenges unfold, we will be working closely with our members to ensure that the voices of our members are heard.

Aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, our Budget 2021 Submission makes a series of proposals to address these challenges. These recommendations include measures that will support businesses to survive and continue to trade throughout the Pandemic and enable our town centres and local economies to recover. They also emphasise the importance of investment in infrastructure, the low carbon transition and the delivery of affordable homes.

Finally, it includes recommendations that will help SMEs and Entrepreneurs, support the creation of higher labour force participation and the formation of more inclusive workplaces.

It may be that Budget 2021 will be followed by supplemental budgets as the year continues. So much has occurred over the last six months that predicting the state of the country’s economy, or the State’s finances, out to 2022 is a monumental task. Government must ensure that there is sufficient flexibility within the envelope of this budget to ensure that the risk of supplementary budgets is reduced.

Ian Talbot, Chief Executive, Chambers Ireland



Executive Summary:

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- Supporting Entrepreneurs and SMEs
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- Flexible and Accommodating Workplaces

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- Generating Renewable Energy
- Decarbonising Heat and Transport
- Accelerating the Transition to the Circular and Low Carbon Economy
- Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

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Legislative Priorities

- Accommodating Family Friendly Workplaces
- Access to Affordable Quality Childcare
- Advancing Women in the Workplace





Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth

Budget 2021
Submission

CHAMBERS IRELAND

Goal 8

Decent Work and Economic Growth

Covid-19 has had a devastating impact on business, particularly SMEs. Our own survey data, published in June showed that businesses who re-opened at the start of the summer were typically experiencing less than half of their usual of business activity for this time of year, with most businesses expecting their earnings over the coming twelve months to be half the normal amount.

The impact of revenue decline is being felt more strongly in the regions, notably in the West, Border counties and the South East. While the July Stimulus introduced welcome extensions on wage supports and grants, some of the supports fell short of what is needed. This is particularly true of Commercial Rates, supports for the tourism and hospitality industry, and supports for the self-employed. Further, the new Government, through Budget 2021, must improve the environment for Irish business, through measures that support competitiveness and ensure that the “Think Small First” principle must become embedded in Irish policy making. Ireland’s taxation system should recognise innovators, investors, and entrepreneurs as key contributors to growth, taxing them fairly.

SMEs that trade across borders need additional supports to ensure that they are appropriately diversified to prepare for Brexit, and so that they can capitalise on the trading opportunities offered by the European Union.

While for many people employment is a positive element in their lives, providing purpose and financial independence, for others, the workplace is inaccessible for a variety of reasons. Whether through the inadequate supports for those with disabilities or the fact that 98% of those with caring responsibilities are women, many people find insurmountable barriers between themselves and the workforce. Investment by the State in affordable, quality childcare needs to be sustained and increased over the coming years, partnered with a strategy for flexible workplaces which supports working families in all their varieties.

Finally, additional funding for education and training will be essential to our economic recovery and the creation of new jobs lost to the pandemic. Government must work closely with industry and employers to ensure that the correct investments are being made throughout the education system so that life-long learning is prioritised, skills gaps are addressed, and increased labour force participation is supported.



Priorities for Budget 2021

Covid-19 Stimulus and Supports for Local Economies

- Extend the waiver on commercial rates for impacted business to 12 months, with the shortfall in funding to be refunded to Local Authorities by central Government
- Extend the small benefits exemption to benefit-in-kind to allow employers to give a voucher in 2020 or 2021 up to the value of €1000, which can be drawn down in two parts, on a tax-free basis, and will stimulate retail spend in local economies¹
- Reform the proposed tax credit for the tourism and hospitality sector by replacing it with a Benefit Scheme, which will entitle workers, the self-employed and retired people who have the required number of social insurance (PRSI) contributions to benefit from the equivalent of the existing tax rebate for use in registered tourism and hospitality business. This will reduce the administration involved, making it more attractive to a wider group, and increasing the stimulus to the tourism and hospitality sector
- Support the recommendations of the Expert Taskforce on Aviation and on Tourism and Hospitality Taskforce
- Create a new Wage Subsidy Scheme which can be specifically targeted at the self-employed and sole traders
- Expand grants so that non-Rate payers are eligible to apply
- Fund a new six-month accelerator programme for existing and new tourism companies, where such a programme would support companies and entrepreneurs to improve how they attract quality tourists to Ireland, digital offerings, generate productivity gains and cost savings for tourism businesses, and increase revenue for tourism businesses / visitors' spending

Supporting Entrepreneurs and SMEs

- Improve conditions to enable greater access to Financial, Venture Capital and Private Equity markets to grow
- Conduct further review and reform of the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) to ensure that it continues to be accessible and user-friendly
- Reduce Capital Gains Tax rate of 33% for non-passive investment, a move which will also help the exchequer benefit from taxation dividends that arise from CGT as individuals will have less incentive to engage in regulatory arbitrage through availing of foreign taxation regimes
- Increase the lifetime limit of €1 million in qualifying capital gains under Entrepreneur's Relief to improve the attractiveness for repeat investors and to encourage increased investment in Irish business
- Expand eligibility criteria for the R&D tax credit rate to medium enterprises
- Review and simplify the reliefs which are available, such as Retirement Relief, and integrate it within a more expansive Entrepreneurs' Relief

¹ Currently €500- would support shop local schemes, domestic consumption etc



- Introduce a mechanism where entrepreneurs can apply for a “small business rollover”, which would support serial entrepreneurship

Trade and Investment

- Commit to maintaining Ireland’s 12.5% rate of Corporation Tax
- Provide adequate contingency funding for companies impacted by Brexit
- Increase funding for the expansion of the current customs training programmes targeted at SMEs
- Introduce additional supports for businesses, including retail, who wish to expand their activities in e-commerce with a view to becoming more engaged in the Digital Single Market and with a view to competing with UK businesses selling online, who may have a competitive edge post Brexit, due to exchange rate fluctuations

Flexible and Accommodating Workplaces

- Review and Reform the existing e-working allowance to support workers and employers who are continuing to engage in remote working²
- Increase the individual tax rebate for working from home, which can currently be claimed against 10% of the costs of home working (e.g. electricity, broadband, heating)
- Increase resources, both in staff and funding, to Regional Skills Fora, in line with population, to support their efforts to address skills needs around the country
- Amalgamate all current supports in the Reasonable Accommodation Fund banner into one overall grant and guarantee that funding for specialised equipment is received and controlled by the employee
- Increase investment in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service

Legislative Priorities

Supporting the economic recovery

- Incorporate the ‘Think Small First’ principle across all Government departments through implementation of the SME Test to ensure that new and existing legislation does not have unintended impacts on SMEs
- Develop and publish an annual Action Plan for Trade, where Government departments and agencies are resourced to support indigenous business, particularly SMEs, to benefit from EU Free Trade Agreements, such as CETA, EU-Japan, EU-Mexico and a future EU-UK trade deal

² Currently €3.20 a day in terms of tax relief



- Develop a national policy on “clustering”, and how we can encourage it given how it supports regional economies to innovate and grow
- Publish a national aviation strategy that will target additional funding and supports for regional airports to develop new routes further afield, which will subsequently support growth of tourism and economies in these regions as part of the post-Covid-19 recovery
- Resource State Agencies to increase levels of investment in niche areas that distinguish Ireland as a destination, such as Ireland’s growing potential as a place for unique and high-quality food and active tourism, such as increased walking and cycling routes across the country

Productive and Inclusive Workplaces

- Delivery on nationwide access to high speed broadband, which will support flexible and agile workplaces
- Develop a national strategy to support existing co-working and digital hubs and drive development of new regional digital hubs where they don’t exist
- Publish and implement a National Strategy on Flexible and Remote working
- Establish a working group to develop a strategy to review current workplace conditions so that practical remote and flexible working policies can be adopted by businesses of all shapes and sizes
- Publish a strategy on how to support age-friendly workforces and longer working life
- Publish a national strategy to support labour participation and inclusion in the workplace for people with disabilities
- Progress the strategy to introduce Auto-Enrolment in pensions

Restoring jobs and addressing skills gaps

- Target funding for training of line-managers and employers on how to implement SME-friendly, agile and flexible policies in the workplace
- Continue the rollout of increased apprenticeships and traineeships
- Conduct research into the construction sector’s future skills needs
- Introduce Start-Up Visas for migrant entrepreneurs
- Improve the use of the National Training Fund to support in-work training and education
- Commit to a review of the existing third level funding structures so that a sustainable long-term funding model can be put in place that will address the current and capital funding needs of these institutions





Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Budget 2021
Submission

CHAMBERS IRELAND

Goal 11

Sustainable Cities and Communities

Covid-19 has amplified many of the problems in our society which we have known to exist and revealed others that had been hidden from view.

While we knew that the housing crisis was inhibiting quality of life for many people, the health aspects of overcrowding were less apparent until we were presented with the consequences of a fast-acting contagion.

With the 2km restrictions many people discovered for the first time the challenges that hostile street architecture present for many people and the degree to which private vehicles have come to dominate our public realm. The closure of commercial premises highlighted the dearth of public services such as toilets which people with disabilities and the aged routinely endure.

Similarly, the importance of community has been reinforced throughout these trying times which emphasises the role people friendly planning and architecture, has to play in improving our lives and our wellbeing.

The Programme for Government commits to the implementation of a Town Centre First Initiative that will guide government action in the urban realm. The success of such an initiative is vital to the long-term sustainability of our cities and our towns. Almost 2 million people live in our cities, and a further 1.2 million people live in our old market towns with a further 300,000 people living in villages. Only a million people are living in true rural areas.

Our governmental, and social infrastructure needs to recognise the importance of cities and towns for our quality of life, our economic resilience, and our wellbeing.

The congestion that damages our environment, undermines our collective prosperity, and injures our quality of life needs to be tackled. Working, liveable urban centres are fundamental to the National Planning Framework, essential to the Climate Action Plan, and vital to the domestic economy.

Furthermore, creating attractive urban spaces that are enjoyable to live in will benefit everyone. For the people living there it means reduced commuting and easier access to community and public services, while clustering offers massive economic opportunities for both employers and employees. Meanwhile government services can achieve economies of scale increasing productivity and efficiency.



It is for this reason that we in Chambers Ireland have called on the Taoiseach to lead on the implementation of the Government's "Town Centre First" initiative. Such a programme of activity, if it is to be effective, will need to be co-ordinated across departments while the benefits of it will potentially be reaped by other departments. Consequently, a strong, driving, leadership structure will be essential if the opportunity is to be seized.

The opportunity is vast, a huge amount of work needs to be carried out to unpick the planning and infrastructural errors of the past, meanwhile we are entering a global recession that is unprecedented in peace time.^{3 4 5 6}

If we are to avoid repeating the errors of our last recession Ireland will need to engage in counter-cyclical investment. This has many merits as commercial development is likely to suffer as a result of the economic downturn so state spending will not have the same inflationary effects that would have been otherwise expected. Meanwhile, Government debt is sufficiently cheap meaning that the real interest rate is significantly negative, discounting the net present value of the costs of capital investment.

This crisis presents an opportunity to pause, reassess and double down on our efforts to make our country more liveable.

Priorities for Budget 2021

Funding A Town Centre First Initiative

- Resourcing a Government's Town Centre Initiative for urban spaces across the country which focuses on the development of economically, socially and actively healthy streets in our cities and towns is essential for the wellbeing of our country
- The Living City Initiative (LCI) should be expanded to include long term vacant commercial properties built post-1915 in the cities and towns specified in the NPF and reformed to include acquisition costs of LCI qualifying properties
- Amend the initiative, and encourage new investment in these areas, by incorporating the costs of buying LCI qualifying properties into the relief and reduce the inheritance/CGT tax disincentives to invest in certain properties by allowing the unused capital allowances attached to a property to be transferred with ownership

Remove Regulatory Disincentives

- Introduce a legislative framework that supports shared property ownership models, like the co-operative and co-housing legal structures seen in the Netherlands and Denmark, that will respond positively to the distinct challenges of urban, high-density living and which are not unavailable to those living in Ireland
- Reform the Fair Deal Scheme so that when rental income accrues from a Fair Deal dwelling, the costs associated with renting that dwelling should be discounted from reckonable income. Up to 80% of the income which an individual on the Fair Deal Scheme receives must go to the HSE. But the share that remains is often less than

3 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/06/08/covid-19-to-plunge-global-economy-into-worst-recession-since-world-war-ii>

4 <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/04/14/the-great-lockdown-worst-economic-downturn-since-the-great-depression/>

5 <https://www.oecd.org/newsroom/global-economy-faces-a-tightrope-walk-to-recovery.htm>

6 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1269



would be required to finance the investment, the repair work, the LPT, retrofitting, and maintenance of a rented residential unit. This creates the perverse disincentive that it can be cheaper to let a house lie empty than have a tenant stay there

- Introduce a targeted, time-bound, reduction of Construction VAT for affordable high-density apartment new builds in cities

Legislative Priorities

Reducing Vacancies

- Enact legislation to empower and resource Local Authorities as one-stop shops to streamline the regulatory regime for change-of-use construction projects and above-the-shop conversions which expand the availability of housing
- Renew the Derelict Sites Act 1990 to strengthen its elements to incentivise infill and brownfield construction
- Better resource Local Authorities to initiate street improvement and active travel investments
- Introduce new legislation to expand and strengthen the powers of Local Authorities to compulsory purchase vacant sites
- Modernisation of the land registry to facilitate the creation of a national vacant land registry
- Implement a strengthened and centralised vacant land levy which acts as a charge on the land regardless of the ownership with revenue being returned to the relevant Local Authority
- Having reviewed the vacancy rates, the Department of Housing should set vacancy reduction targets for Local Authorities at the Electoral District level

Support Urbanism

- Investment in the urban built environment to provide social and community spaces and resources, akin to those in rural areas
- Ensure that our Local Area Plans require the people-friendly pedestrian infrastructure, segregated cycleways, and rest spots that are needed to support active transit while linking our residential areas with our civic and economic centres
- Councils that run large budget surpluses should be encouraged to invest the excess in the local economy through Transport Orientated Development
- Direct Local Authorities to integrate decisions on property taxes into the general budget process, rather than the status quo where it is dealt with as a standalone item



- Provide funding to reform the planning system to ensure efficient decision making, in combination with the upskilling of Local Authority planning departments to allow for consistent and integrated decision making across the regions
- Implement training programmes for councillors to help them align Local Economic and Community Plans and Local Area Plans with the “European Green Deal” to ensure access to EU funding
- Strengthen and resource the planning professionals in the Local Authorities and other relevant agencies
- Create guidelines on how Local Authorities apply construction duties and levies to ensure consistency across regions and using rebates of levies and charges to ensure completion of high-density developments
- Introduce targeted reductions in construction duties and levies for developments which are coherent with the National Planning Framework
- Improve information given in the Commercial and Residential Property Price registers to facilitate proper assessment of costs per square metre
- Ensure regulatory certainty around high-density and apartment planning
- Amend EPA waste licensing rules to facilitate on-site reuse

Housing Policy

- Use the economic pause to create a Housing Commission that will conduct an independent review of all existing housing policies without discontinuing the supports that are currently in place
- The Government must commit to the principles and objectives of the National Planning Framework and integrate it with the Climate Action Plan, applying the revised EU Commission definitions of Green investment
- Ensure that Transport Orientated Development principles form the core of all new developments, the MetroLink Project offers a great opportunity develop expertise in this area
- Prioritise traffic reduction measures in all our towns and cities while expanding local active travel and public transport options
- Develop a National Active Land Management Policy
- Finalise and enact the legislative framework for the Land Development Agency (LDA) which allows it compulsory purchase and active land management powers in line with the Kenny report, supporting this with a referendum if necessary
- Building upon the National Planning Framework and the Climate Action Plan, there needs to be co-ordinated efforts at the regional level to integrate development, land management and investment in public transport





Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Budget 2021
Submission

CHAMBERS IRELAND

Goal 9

Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

The implementation of the National Planning Framework continues to present itself as an opportunity to apply a long-term perspective that allows us to prepare for the opportunities and to develop our country in response to these threats that are to come.

To be successful in this we must:

- Optimise our investment in infrastructure
- Make better use of our land through improving planning
- Strengthen our cities and towns through improved housing delivery, and
- Boost productivity by modernising our housing sector

Infrastructure remains a priority issue for our network of chambers. While our country is entering what is likely to be an extended economic downturn, it is critical that we invest in infrastructure to ensure that we overcome the existing deficit and minimise long-run cost of a collapse in domestic demand. The projects which are critical to the implementation of the National Planning Framework need to be delivered, and in these straitened times it is ever more critical that programme budgets are adhered to. Therefore, continual financial oversight of these projects is critical, but given the low cost of debt and the reduced demand, this is the time when the state can achieve the greatest value for money on its investments.

Our research agenda must align with the EU priorities to benefit from the next round of EU funding. Energy and the digital transition will be fundamental to the coming decade.

Ireland has become a world leader in the digital economy and should now cement this by becoming a world leader in appropriate, effective, and common-sense regulation of the digital sector. This could offer us exceptional opportunities on the world stage if we are responsible guardians of the sensitive data of other nations. If we are not responsible, we risk other nations erecting digital borders so that they can protect their national and citizens' interests.



In contrast, on the environment, Ireland is a laggard. Our infrastructure holds us back and has launched the country down an unproductive pathway that damages our competitiveness and make it harder to attract Foreign Direct Investment, to find skills, and to retain employees.

Government must tackle our enormous infrastructure deficit and simultaneously manage our transition to a sustainable economy. Our national infrastructure is at or beyond capacity, but fortunately the European Green Deal, and sustainable financing, offer us a path back towards an efficient and sustainable economy.

Ireland is uniquely placed to benefit from this transition. We have ample renewable energy resources, we are not economically depending on high CO₂ emission industries, and we have a young highly-skilled, English-speaking population that can adapt – a population that also wants to adapt.

The projects we need, around public transport, water treatment, and renewable energies are all aligned with the EU Commission's agenda, making finance cheap and accessible.

Our transport, energy, and waste networks need investment to facilitate high-density housing, and our local authorities must take their role in making our cities and towns attractive and healthy places to live.

The delivery of investment in infrastructure is essential if we are to be able to complete the body of work that the National Planning Framework, and the transition to a low-carbon economy, requires.

Our communities and our economy face enormous challenges in the years ahead. Globally we are seeing massive demographic shifts, new technologies are transforming economies, and our environment is struggling with climate change.

Priorities for Budget 2021

Finance Infrastructure Sustainably

- With increased pressure on the public finances it is important that we maintain the “Rainy Day Fund” with the transfer of above profile corporate tax receipts and other sources of windfall returns to the exchequer to ensure that they can be used for funding capital infrastructure rather than current expenditure
- Optimise investment in capital projects and infrastructure by ensuring transparency, and an open approach to infrastructure funding models such as PPP, to ensure progress is maintained
- Improve reporting requirements for all large projects and programmes
- Prioritise infrastructure which aligns with the National Planning Framework, multi-modal, and Transport Orientated Development principles
- Ensure that all critical infrastructure investment is aligned with the EU Commission's ‘Sustainable Finance’ definitions



- Move away from the Public Works' standard form contract towards international best practice alternatives

Improve Transport Services

- Develop inter-urban and intra-urban public transport networks, and invest in the urban built environment to promote local active transport networks that extend the utility of public transport
- Invest in shared cycling schemes and cycling infrastructure
- Urgently commence work on advancing the MetroLink
- Prioritise intercity rail transport infrastructure
- Progress the Dublin rail interconnector
- Fast-track the Cork Suburban Rail project
- Implement BusConnects projects in all the NDP growth cities
- On existing rail routes, progress the research into introducing high speed sections to reduce the conflict between intercity and commuter services
- Initiate feasibility studies, and cost benefit analyses – including carbon accounting – on upgrading the links between the National Development Plan growth cities through the rail network
- Accelerate the Dart extension projects and establish a timeline towards developing an all-electric rail network
- Extend train lines, where suitable, to integrate freight to our trading seaports

Securing National Grid Infrastructure

- Upgrade our electricity network to provide for long-term energy security by increasing investment in the electricity grid
- Provide additional resources to connect renewable supplies to the network
- Rapid rollout of the legislation that will facilitate offshore windfarms
- Invest in the accelerated roll-out of a national fast-charging network for the EVs with a focus on regional areas, while providing for public transport in urban settings
- Future proof the National Gas Grid by investing in biomethane technologies and systems to provide renewable methane and hydrogen supply
- Ensure there is additional investment for water infrastructure, providing powers to State bodies to finance such investment through land value capture



Legislative Priorities

Strengthen the Regions

- Conduct an independent review into the Regional Assemblies' Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy Process with a view towards supporting the regional planning process
- Develop guidelines on transport infrastructure for the Regional Assemblies, while simultaneously reforming transport bodies so that they prioritise the regional impact of transport infrastructure and connection to their cities
- Resource the Regional Assemblies so that they can develop territorial impact assessments on central government policies, and proposed legislation, which can feed into the pre-legislative scrutiny process
- Streamline the planning regime to reduce uncertainty for key infrastructure investment
- Make greater use of Regional Assemblies and their ability to create strategic master plans by increasing their internal resources to allow them to offer high-skilled expert planning services to local authorities, and to guide the integration of Local Area Plans with regional and national infrastructure

The Digital Economy

- The speedy implementation of a high-speed broadband throughout the country has to be prioritised as a key national economic concern
- We need to see common sense, risk-reducing, and reliable regulation in the area of digital economy that will both protect innovation over the long run and withstand the scrutiny that is arising from the data of other nations' citizens that is processed in Ireland
- Fund a civilian cybersecurity agency with a multiple mandate. Firstly, to identify threats to ordinary residents in Ireland, state bodies, and businesses. Secondly, to have a remit for penetration testing state bodies. Thirdly, a mandate for informing the public, and training the business community, on how to minimise the risk to them and their property that arise from cybersecurity threats





Goal 13: Climate Action

Budget 2021
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CHAMBERS IRELAND

Goal 13

Climate Action

The sustainable transition to a low carbon economy remains critical to Ireland's competitiveness and our quality of life. Regardless of the constraints that this crisis may place on Government finances it remains the case that the next decade will be critical in mitigating irreversible damage to the environment.

To accelerate decarbonisation efforts, Government must capitalise on the behavioural change that has occurred during this crisis. A national Climate Action framework, with appropriate funding, which commits to bold changes that support businesses through the transition will be needed if we are to achieve our decarbonisation aims.

Not only does Ireland have the potential to run on renewable energy, but there is also a clear possibility that Ireland could become a net exporter to the European grid. However, regulatory and financial barriers, such as the delay of the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill, have thus far hindered this progress. It is imperative that we increase investment in renewable energy resources and the electricity grid and remove obstacles that hinder their future development.

Similarly, targeted funding into the research of dual-effect technologies like anaerobic digestion and biomethane production which reduce greenhouse gas emissions from one industry, while offsetting CO₂ emissions in another, will be vital to managing this transition and meeting our 2030 climate targets. Additionally, the opportunities that hydrogen and biomethane offer to fuel heavy goods vehicles and some forms of public transport must be probed.

Ahead of further increases to carbon tax taking effect, a schedule of increases for the tax over the next decade needs to be published and adhered to. All increases in the carbon tax, in addition to all current Exchequer returns from it, must be immediately ringfenced and strategically invested in green infrastructure, climate change mitigation efforts, and funds which support communities to transition to green transport and heating alternatives. There is an urgent need to advance the decarbonisation of heat and transport because without successful action in these areas we will continue to create more emissions rather than reduce them.

Budget 2021 must include accelerated and ambitious funding for policy measures that promote sustainability and resilience as we move through this crisis, remove any regulatory and financial barriers which inhibit the green economy transition, and embrace the opportunities that new technologies and innovations can make to the transition to a low carbon economy.



Priorities for Budget 2021

Generating Renewable Energy

- Commit increased investment in the electricity grid to ensure that it is future-proofed and has the capacity to meet decarbonisation targets, including the progression of the North-South Interconnector and the Celtic Interconnector to ensure energy security
- Allocate funding to support research into how the gas-networks can be future proofed to transition from the delivery of natural gas, to hydrogen
- Strategic investment must be directed into one or more Irish ports for the construction of offshore wind farms to take maximum advantage of the Programme for Government's commitment to delivering 5GW of offshore wind by 2030
- Fund research into future-proofing the gas-networks to transition from the delivery of natural gas to renewable gas and the potential of hydrogen as a means of storing excess electricity

Decarbonising Heat and Transport

- Ringfence all Exchequer returns from Carbon Tax and strategically invest in green infrastructure, public transport, and funds that will support communities to transition to green transport and heating alternatives
- Publish a schedule of increase in Carbon Tax between 2021 and 2030, so businesses have more certainty on expected costs
- Following any phased increases to the Carbon Tax, Government must commit to carrying out impact assessments on the consequences for SMEs, commuters and Border communities
- Increase investment in the decarbonisation of public transport, particularly in cities, such as investment in bio-methane vehicles and the electrification of trains and buses. Road usage plans must also prioritise public transport
- Invest in appropriate infrastructure to support the transition of Heavy Goods Vehicles to low-carbon fuel options like Compressed Natural Gas
- Invest in an accelerated roll-out of a national fast-charging network for the Electric Vehicles (EVs), particularly in rural parts of the country where there are limited options for public transport
- Use ring-fenced environmental fund revenues to broaden the coverage and density of shared use schemes (such as City Bikes) in the cities where they are available and expand them to other towns where they are not yet provided, enabling social distancing requirements to be more easily met



Accelerating the Transition to the Circular and Low Carbon Economy

- Commit funding to expand the network of local authority energy agencies to act as a local one-stop-shop structure providing practical advice to households and businesses on significantly reducing carbon emissions, retrofitting homes and availing of Government supports and advice from agencies like the SEAI or the Climate Action Regional Office
- Classify SEAI supported retrofitting projects as zero VAT rated products
- Introduce circular economy supports like the recent €600,000 DCCAE Circular Economy Innovators fund to promote the circular economy, maximise resource efficiency and reduce waste
- Invest in re-training programmes to support the transition from jobs reliant on fossil fuels to low carbon jobs in areas such as energy retrofitting for buildings, sustainable forestry, renewable energy and peatland restoration to name a few
- Ensure that funding and resources are allocated to research innovative technologies such as Carbon Capture Storage, Hydrogen, Biogas and Anaerobic Digestion
- Continue to invest in measures that will support communities to meet afforestation and bog restoration targets
- Ongoing investment in water infrastructure to ensure the sustainability of supplies into the future and ensuring we safeguard our environment through the elimination of the discharge of untreated water into our rivers and seas

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

- Prioritise appropriate budget allocation to facilitate necessary flood defence infrastructure, technology investments and support for flood resistance and resilience measures

Legislative Priorities

Generating Renewable Energy

- Publish and enact the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill so as to provide the legal framework for delivering offshore wind
- Remove the planning permission solar limits which have been placed on residential and commercial properties
- Create a community scheme which allows households to spill-over their excess generated electricity onto the local low-voltage network where that electricity can be consumed within the community, and any revenue generated from it can be used to invest in further local renewable energy infrastructure



Decarbonising Heat and Transport

- Adoption of the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill 2019, enshrining a national transition objective, climate action plan, sectoral climate reporting and carbon budgets in law
- Commitment to an “Electric Vehicle First” procurement requirement for all State transport unless there is a service-related justification
- Extend the Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) for Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) from 2021 to 2025
- Enact legislation for the legalisation of eScooters and e-bikes

Accelerating the Transition to the Circular and Low Carbon Economy

- Develop a national strategy for sustainable Anaerobic Digestion (AD) and research the possibility of providing AD low-interest loans or grants relative to the installation costs, to support reducing agriculture emissions
- Develop and implement a strategy to modernise waste management systems, so that the loop on circular waste management is closed. Measures would include strengthened waste prevention and waste management measures for marine litter, reinforced rules and new obligations on separate collections such as bio-waste, textiles and new ambitious yet realistic recycling rates
- Address the skills shortage in circular economy industries to maximise local employment opportunities by reforming curriculums in schools, universities, existing training bodies, and skills development programmes
- Expand the services offered by Local Enterprise Offices to collaborate with the business community to support actions to increase biodiversity supports such as wildflower and bee-friendly spaces in towns and cities

Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

- The 2019 fifth assessment report of the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change highlighted the extent of risk to Irish coastal properties from flooding in the coming decades and the predicted billions of euro cost of the clean-up. Government should work with the insurance industries to provide clarification for property owners by publishing a strategy on improving the insurability of homes and businesses, including properties where demountable defences have been applied
- Incentivise proactive individual flood resistance measures and flood resilience measures such as those applied via the Individual Property Protection in the UK should be considered
- Develop a National Mitigation Plan to tackle the impacts of coastal erosion





Goal 5: Gender Equality

Budget 2021
Submission

CHAMBERS IRELAND

Goal 5

Gender Equality

Ireland must aspire to become one of the best places to work and raise families. This can only be achieved if Government takes steps to ensure equal opportunities for the genders.

Family friendly workplaces, a fairer division of caring responsibilities, affordable and accessible childcare, together with reduced occupational segregation will narrow the gender pay gap and make the goal of gender equality in the workforce achievable.

Significant progress had been made in addressing the affordability of childcare through the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme. However, the pandemic has laid bare the core failings in our Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) structures. Therefore, sustained and increased investment in the ELC sector will be essential over the next several years to reduce costs for parents.

This must be partnered with a flexible workforce strategy that supports working families and alleviates the heightened negative impacts of Covid-19 on women's capacity to work from home, deepening existing economic gender inequalities. Greater flexibility in working from home arrangements will become key to enable people to better structure their work around caring responsibilities while still enabling them to avail of economic and employment opportunities.

There is already a considerable gender pay gap between women and men in employment in Ireland. Irrespective of their level of education, women over the age of thirty-five have lower participation rates in the workforce than their EU counterparts, women earn less than men for the same jobs, and women are significantly under-represented in leadership positions. Future employment prospects for women could be set to further diminish resulting from the economic impacts of Covid-19 as sectors such as hospitality, retail and childcare, which predominately employ women, have been found to have been hardest hit.

As such, the gender pay gap is likely to increase post-pandemic unless ambitious national strategies are implemented to address this. The barriers that women face in starting and growing businesses must be addressed through skills and training initiatives which address the needs of female employees and entrepreneurs. The promotion of women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship post-pandemic will be a central driver of innovation, growth, and jobs in the coming years.



Priorities for Budget 2021

Accommodating Family Friendly Workplaces

- The CSO reported that almost half (45%) of fathers entitled to paternity benefit did not take it in 2018. Budget 2021 must set aside funding to enable a review of Paternity Benefit to better understand any obstacles for take-up to support parenting equality
- A review of the amount of parental leave that the State provides over the course of an individual childhood, should occur in consideration of the extra burden that Covid-19 has placed on families

Access to Affordable Quality Childcare

- Increase investment in childcare services, early education infrastructure and schools that are reopening to facilitate breakfast clubs and after school childcare in all parts of the country to help working parents and mitigate against the reduction in supply of childcare places that has arisen from Covid-19
- Expand mentoring programmes like “Better Start” that aim to improve the quality of childcare and early childhood education
- Continued investment in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)
- Increased investment in services and infrastructure that enable childcare providers to expand places for children under the age of three

Legislative Priorities

Accommodating Family Friendly Workplaces

- Implement a review of Paternity Benefit to better understand any obstacles for take-up so as to support parenting equality
- Conduct a consultation and communications initiative on the transition/phasing-in period ahead of the introduction of increasing entitlements to breastfeeding breaks in the workplace from 26 weeks to 2 years across all sectors
- Legislate to provide for adoptive leave and benefit for male same-sex adoptive couples

Access to Affordable Quality Childcare

- Ensure that data on the exact cost of delivery of childcare provision is published as soon as possible to ensure that further investment contributes to making childcare more affordable for parents



Advancing Women in the Workplace

- Introduce and implement gender proofing of the budget to ensure that the decisions that form it do not result in further barriers to prosperity being erected in the path of women (such as occurred with the TWSS for those on maternity leave)
- Publish a strategy to assist employers on how they can implement practical tools and resources to narrow the gender pay gap within their organisations
- Introduce a strategy to reduce occupational segregation and advance women in the workplace by developing specific initiatives that support greater engagement with STEM, increase the provision of management and leadership training to help female-led companies in scaling their business, and expand the services offered by LEOs to offer starter office space and longer periods of mentoring to increase tailored support for female entrepreneurs





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