

YOUNG FINE GAEL

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Striving for Progress

PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION 2021



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Foreword

A Chara,

Over the last number of months, our world and our country has been altered immeasurably as a result of Covid-19.

In Ireland, young people now make up a large share of those who are unemployed as a result of the pandemic. Dynamic, solution-oriented policy that focuses on giving Ireland's young people a break and assures them of high-quality education and exciting career opportunities is now more important than ever. It is also incredibly important that protecting our young people and their wellbeing is addressed as a matter of priority as part of this new government in what is an incredibly difficult and impactful time full of loss and anguish for many.

I have every confidence that Fine Gael are well positioned to tackle these issues head on. Our success in these areas will chart Ireland's path to economic and social recovery and allow our young people to look to the future with hope and optimism.

I am delighted to present Young Fine Gael's Pre-Budget Submission 2021, which has been worked on extensively by the Director of Policy, Garry O'Sullivan, and the Policy and Campaigns Committee, and builds on our Youth Manifesto and 2020 Programme for Government Submission.

Herein, we lay out our path towards getting our country and our young people back to work and building a fairer, more sustainable and a more equal, progressive future across all regions and sectors of society.

As members of YFG, we now have an incredible opportunity to shape the kind of society we envision in the future as we rebuild from the ground up. We were delighted to see several of YFG's policies particularly in the areas of climate action, rural connectivity and mental health included in the Programme for Government. I hope that we can build on this success as we push for further action in the areas we outline in this Submission.

I would like to give a particular thanks to the Vice President and Director of Policy, the Policy and Campaigns Committee and all the members who contributed to this document for their excellent work. I hope that you enjoy reading our Pre-Budget Submission and will support us in striving for progress in Budget 2021.

Is mise le meas,

Daire Lawler
President of Young Fine Gael (2019 – 2021)
August 2020

Environment/Climate

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Publish an inventory of the biggest polluters annually:

Modeled on a Greenhouse Gas Inventory, this would disclose the largest polluters nationally. This would act as an incentive for companies to reduce carbon emissions—due to negative publicity—and orient climate policy towards combatting emissions in these polluting industries.

Reduce VAT for road builders who incorporate cycle lanes:

Ireland requires significant investment in cycle infrastructure. To incentivise the inclusion of cycle lanes in urban and major roads, VAT reductions should be considered for those road constructors who include safe cycle lane infrastructure.

Introduce an agricultural cap and trade scheme: Allow farmers who do not want to reduce their herd or plant forestry on their land to buy carbon credits from other farmers who have not used their full emissions allocation. Additionally, the Department of Agriculture could sell the credits and use the funds they receive to finance green technology grants, particularly for solar energy and bio-digesters for farmers.

Expansion of anaerobic digestion: Increase the expansion of anaerobic digestion technology for the production of indigenous biogas in Ireland using food, animal, and horticultural waste with greater financial supports for this new industry. Increasing the percentage blend of indigenous biogas into our natural gas pipelines up to 2% in 2021, and to 5% by 2025. We believe that the promotion of these technologies would foster indigenous industry and would be an excellent way to support local communities.

Development of offshore wind: Create an offshore wind agency whose sole focus would be to promote and encourage the development of offshore wind farms for the production of renewable energy.

Expand the smoky coal ban: Broaden the current ban on the use of smoky coal to every town with a population of over 1,000, in recognition of the negative impacts of smoky coal.

Introduce legislation for EV charging parking spaces:

To enhance our transition to EV usage, the Government should legislate for the provision of charging parking spaces at all major commercial and public parking sites and all third level institutions, similar to how disability spaces are provided for.

Investing in Ireland's bioeconomy: The Government should incentivise forestry and micro-agriculture for farmers as 'custodians of the land' by making it a more attractive option for farmers. Additionally, incorporating sustainable farming alternatives as part of the Green Cert would educate young farmers on the potential benefits of contributing to Ireland's bioeconomy.

Increase pedestrianisation and disability access on central city streets:

Greater pedestrianisation of our city streets will reduce pollution and congestion in cities and make dining and shopping more enjoyable for consumers and tourists. As a start, Dublin's College Green should be permanently pedestrianised.

Invest in experimental research into methods to reduce methane:

Research into how we can reduce our methane emissions should be a priority. Exploratory research into garlic licks, monitoring cattle feeds, and other methane-reducing feed additives or supplements should be examined.

Energy system upgrades loan rebates: The Government should examine the feasibility of offering rebates on the interest of loans to help homeowners improve the energy efficiency of their properties in areas such as attic insulation, cavity wall insulation, external wall insulation, solar thermal panels for hot water, heating system and controls upgrade and windows upgrades.

Plastic bag levy: The plastic bag levy currently stands at 22c, and we propose that it be increased to 70c to encourage the purchase and use of long-lasting and environmentally conscious alternatives.

Education

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Guidance counseling supports for vocational education:

To enhance and streamline the transition for students who may be interested in pursuing apprenticeships or other forms of vocational education, increased supports for guidance counselors in secondary schools will ingrain the option for students.

National Access to Apprenticeship Programme: To streamline and coordinate apprenticeships at a national level, a National Access to Apprenticeship Programme as proposed by the National Youth Council of Ireland should be considered. They propose that it would be based on the pilot TU Dublin Access to Apprenticeship Programme, and would require a €2.5m investment, based on a cost per participant of €5,000 and an additional 500 places.

Apprenticeships in the CAO: The apprenticeship application process should be integrated into the CAO system to help reduce the stigma and negative impressions around apprenticeships while also making it easier to apply.

Introduce compulsory foreign language in the primary school curriculum: The capacity to learn a language diminishes with age, and therefore the younger one starts, the greater their ability to master the language. In 16 EU Member States, more than three quarters of the adult working-age population reported that they knew at least one foreign language in 2016, whereas in Ireland it was less than two thirds (64.8 %). Increasing children's multilingualism will allow them to greater benefit from all that EU membership has to offer in areas such as education, ERASMUS, and travel.

Examine the feasibility of university income contingent loans: Third level funding is an urgent issue, and the Government needs to commit to a position on the three recommendations of the Cassells Report. YFG has long advocated that an income contingent loans system (ICLS), along the lines of option three, should be considered—along with increased grants for financially challenged students. In examining the feasibility of an ICLS, Mr.

Cassells highlighted three potential issues of: (1) emigration effects, (2) national debt implications, and (3) the impact on participation by certain groups should be borne in mind. Methods can be introduced to combat the first, such as mutual tax agreements and a different legal regime for overseas debtors, and the data indicates that the third issue has not proven problematic in the UK and Australia. The second issue, in light of COVID-19, may be a more pertinent issue for the Government to tackle, however there is potential that the debt rule may be altered in light of the pandemic.

Introduce meditation and mindfulness classes in secondary schools: Studies on students who have taken meditation classes in schools worldwide have shown that they reduce, among other things, stress, anxiety, and depression. A recent report by the National Educational Psychological Service found that Irish students have much higher levels of anxiety over schoolwork and exam-related stress than other developed countries. Additionally, students and younger people face particular mental health challenges during COVID-19. We believe meditation classes could alleviate some of these stresses and mental challenges.

Invest €200 million in the life of a given legislative term into school places: This money would be placed in a fund/trust at the Department of Education and granted to the schools that are currently finding it most difficult to accommodate high levels of students applying for places. More funding would be allocated for applicants with special needs in recognition of the shortage that exists.

Funding for the training of additional teachers in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics: To alleviate the current shortages for teachers in the areas of STEM, greater funding should be allocated for this vital area. As a global tech hub, Ireland will require more graduates in STEM, and we believe that prioritising its teaching at an earlier age is crucial. Additionally, the funding should be particularly focussed at reducing the gender imbalance experienced in STEM.

Commit a further €500 million to the refurbishment of new school buildings: This will allow for schools to

transition out of teaching in prefabs back into classrooms, and enable schools who are finding it difficult to accommodate all students to manage class sizes.

Expand Bystander Intervention in universities: A Bystander Intervention Programme was piloted in UCC in 2017 by Dr. Louise Crowley with law, nursing and midwifery, and applied psychology students which thereafter became a voluntary module for all students in UCC. The Programme's aim is the development of a progressive and effective culture around the issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence at university to enhance knowledge and understanding, and lead to attitude and behavioural change across the university. Expanding the Bystander Intervention Programme amongst other Irish colleges and universities, and eventually secondary schools, we believe will enhance young people's much needed knowledge of sexual harassment and, in particular, educating young people about sexual consent.

Funding for EPSEN Act implementation: The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 is a fundamental piece of legislation to allow children with additional special educational needs to reach their full potential and become fully included in school life, in mainstream school in most cases. However, there are certain sections that still remain to be implemented. It is estimated that an additional investment of up to €235m per annum, across the education and health sectors, would be required to fully implement the EPSEN Act.

Investment in youth digital safety: Compulsory cyber safety classes in the first year of secondary school, along with funding for digital literacy classes that span both digital safety and digital use in today's connected world, should be introduced to help young people develop the skills to ensure they are safe online.

Reforming secondary school Relationships and Sexuality Education: In December 2019 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment published a Review of Relationships and Sexuality Education for primary and post primary schools. The NCCA described the lack of change in the RSE curriculum since the 1990's as 'less than ideal', which YFG would wholly agree with. The NCCA is

currently in the process of developing interim guidelines for a new approach to: the effects of the internet and social media on relationships, self-identity and self-esteem, consent and its relevance to all interpersonal relationships, LGBTQ+ matters, healthy positive sexual expression, developments in contraception. We would urge the Department to expedite this process to bring RSE for both primary and post primary schools into the 21st Century and make it more progressive, empirical, and inclusive.

Employment, Finance and Tax

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Abolish sub-rates of national minimum wage: Repeal ss 14(a), 15, and other provisions where applicable, of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) Act 2000 to abolish the sub-rates of NMW entitlement to workers aged 18 or over. Currently, workers aged 18 and 19 are only entitled to 80% and 90% of the NMW respectively. Thus, only an 'Experienced Adult Worker' aged 20 is entitled to the full NMW, which we believe is a grossly inequitable outcome for young workers.

Grant the full minimum wage for young workers: Repeal section 14(b) of the National Minimum Wage Act 2000, and provide for the entitlement of the full NMW for all workers aged 16 or over. Currently, workers aged under the age of 18 are only entitled to 70% of the NMW.

Irish tourism campaign: A campaign to promote Irish tourism for (1) domestic consumers; and (2) foreign consumers when safe to do so, would be a welcome and necessary support for an industry disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Fast track the roll out of rural broadband: In recognition of the changes necessitated by COVID-19, the importance of rural broadband is more vital than ever. Expediting this process will aid the transition to working from home, alleviating housing pressures in urban areas and lowering carbon emissions due to reduced travel.

Employment transition for young people with disabilities: Rather than focusing on the age of majority as the transition from youth to adulthood, the Government should consider focusing on the ages of 15-25 for managing transitions in partnership with individuals and their families. Effective collaboration among various stakeholders—educators, employers, parents, mentors, and colleges and universities—is crucial to enhancing these transitions.

Kickstarter Scheme: Similar to the Scheme announced by the UK Government as part of their stimulus package,

the Government should consider introducing a fund to create hundreds of thousands of high quality 6 month work placements aimed at those aged 16-24 who are on Jobseeker's Benefit. The UK Government's Scheme covers the cost of 25 hours work a week at the National Minimum Wage.

Increase the Defence Budget: Our hardworking public servants in the Defence Forces have dedicated themselves to the defense of our nation and the pursuit of peace abroad. However there are significant issues in the form of high personnel turnover of 10% and low pay. We are, therefore, calling for an increase in the defense budget of €77m to €125m by 2022 in line with the commitments made by Ireland in joining PESCO, with a significant proportion to be spent on pay and working conditions.

Reduce Capital Gains Tax on venture capital: Lowering CGT on venture capital would be a recognition of the Government's commitment to making funding for SME's more affordable, particularly in light of COVID-19. We propose to reduce the 40% rate for gains from foreign life policies and foreign investment products to 32%, the 15% rate for gains from venture capital funds for individuals and partnerships to 12.5%, and reduce the 12.5% rate for gains from venture capital funds for companies to 10%.

Inheritance tax reform: The current Capital Acquisitions Tax threshold rates are €335,000, €32,500, and €16,250 for Groups A (son or daughter), B (brother, sister, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, lineal ancestor or a lineal descendant), and C (all other relationships) respectively. We believe the current system is grossly inequitable and should be simplified by two threshold Groups of (a) €850,000 (relationships covered by former Groups A and B) and (b) €450,000 (all other relationships).

Reduced VAT rates: Although we welcome the reduction in the 23% rate of VAT to 21% for a two year period, the Government should also consider lowering the VAT rate on hotel, tourism, food and drink services, and alcohol on sales reduced to 5% in recognition of the phenomenal challenges that this sector is facing. The UK has cut VAT on hospitality services from 20% to 5%, and following this would bring Northern Ireland and the Republic into one VAT rate.

Widen income tax band: Although the Government faces unprecedented fiscal challenges, we believe that Fine Gael's commitment to gradually raising the the standard rate cut-off point threshold towards €50,000 should be maintained. In addition to rewarding the squeezed middle, cuts to income tax have the potential to act as a stimulus for the Irish economy.

Self-employment tax harmonization and reform: We welcome the successive increases in the self-employed tax credit over previous Budgets, and call for it to be fully harmonized between the tax credits available to employees and the self-employed. Additionally, we are seeking the reduction in the USC rate for self-employed people earning more than €100,000 from 11% to the 8% applicable for PAYE workers on the basis of equal treatment for all workers. In recognition of the vital role that the self-employed play in our economy we are also asking the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment to conduct a major review into the State's treatment of the self-employed in terms of access to finance and credit and remote learning facilities.

Ireland as a venture capital hub: In order to create a strong investment environment for Irish start-ups the Employment and Investment Incentive, and the Seed Capital Scheme should be expanded, along with support for Business Angels and Venture Capital firms to create a new dynamic market for startups in the Irish economy.

Amend insolvency laws: There have been calls to amend insolvency laws in light of COVID-19 so as to allow firms to trade whilst temporarily insolvent, but avoid the statutory implications that could arise under the Companies Act 2014 regarding reckless trading. Countries such as the UK and Germany have amended their respective laws, and Ireland should follow suit.

Tackling high mortgage interest rates: The weighted average interest rate on new mortgages has persistently been significantly above the euro area average. According to the latest statistics compiled by the Central Bank, the Irish rate is 117% greater than the euro area average, which was the third highest in the euro area. The government should focus on three areas for reform. First is seeking that

the Central Bank examine loosening capital requirement rules given that Irish lenders effectively hold €50 for every €1000 they lend out in mortgages compared to a European average of just €16, according to Goodbody. Second is expanding access to personal restructuring programmes to lower the number of mortgage arrears as 63,437 accounts were in arrears, with 5.6% and 42% in arrears of more than 90 and 720 days respectively. Third is increasing the competition in the Irish banking sector by making it easier for new entrants into the market, particularly in fintech companies.

Backdate capital allowances rate: Up until 2015, a deferral of 80% allowance and related interest expense on intellectual property in a tax year could be used, but in 2015 it increased to 100%. After this, there was a sizable loss to the Exchequer as a result of the allowance increase. Had the 80% cap remained, former Chair of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council Seamus Coffey estimates that up to €722 million of additional Corporation Tax would have been collected in that year. Budget 2018 reinstated the 80% allowance for IP from October 2017, however this would not apply to acquisitions prior to this date, meaning that the tax that would have been collected in the years 2015-2018 will not be collected. YFG would therefore propose that the 2018 reinstatement be retrospectively applied to acquisitions from 2015.

Government Reform

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Garda Cadetship: We believe that college graduates should be incentivised to join the Gardaí in leadership/intelligence roles/higher ranks, instead of going straight into the rank and file. In the Army Cadetship, upon completion, you are commissioned as a Second Lieutenant or Lieutenant. A similar Garda Cadetship could be developed, espousing leadership values, for training in the roles of a similar rank to a Lieutenant/Second Lieutenant in the Gardaí.

Access to Justice Commission: The ability of citizens to access our judicial system is essential to the rule of law. However, as noted by Eilis Barry of FLAC, 'Ireland only provides reasonable access to justice to individuals and bodies with very significant resources, the small minority of people who are able to get legal aid and the lucky people who are able to access "no foal no fee" arrangements with their lawyers.' In addition, spending as a percentage of GDP across the EU shows that Ireland is among the lowest on the law courts system, which means that a far higher percentage of GDP should be spent on the courts and legal aid. To examine the obstacles to accessing justice in Ireland, we propose a Commission that would consider issues around access to legal aid, access to the courts, provision for lay litigants, costs, and the legalization of champerty, and propose reforms to the Government.

Prenuptial agreements: Specific legislation should be introduced to recognise prenuptial agreements in law. Unlike the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, Ireland currently has no legislation which expressly recognises such agreements in law, and the Law Society of Ireland recommended in May 2019 that the law should be reviewed to allow for the development of prenuptial agreements that are valid and enforceable.

Security review of Ireland's 5G network providers: In recent months, countries such as the UK, the US, and Australia have banned their mobile-network operators from buying Huawei equipment for their 5G networks, citing security and privacy concerns from its links to

the Communist Party of China. In recognition of those concerns, and other countries similarly conducting reviews, the Government should examine whether permitting Huawei to supply parts of Ireland's 5G connectivity poses a material security and privacy risk to citizens.

Spearheading euro area reform: As the Irish Minister for Finance, Paschal Donohoe, is now the President of the Eurogroup, we believe that there is a golden opportunity for Ireland to show leadership and spearhead a number of much needed reforms to the euro area's financial system. First, is the completion of a Capital Markets Union to provide a genuine private capital market base in the euro area. Immediate initiatives that would be welcome include: (1) harmonising insolvency laws, (2) supervisory convergence in the form of a single capital markets supervisor, and (3) broadening and deepening the funding mix of euro area firms and households. Second, is progressing the European Banking Union to secure euro area banks and financial firms. Two areas where Ireland's support would drive progress would be: (1) a European deposit insurance scheme applicable to deposits below €100 000, ensuring depositor confidence in a bank would not depend on the bank's location; and (2) establishment of sovereign bond backed securities guaranteed by a diversified portfolio of euro area central government bonds, which would reduce the so-called "doom loop" problem from the euro area debt crisis.

Prioritise reform of Direct Provision: In light of social distancing, and the health risks posed by COVID-19, the current system of DP is not fit for purpose and a complete overhaul is more urgent than it has ever been. Whilst we welcome the commitment to 'ending the Direct Provision system and replace[ment] with a new International Protection accommodation policy' contained within the Programme for Government, there are a number of immediate reforms that the Government should implement from the recommendations of the Expert Group on Direct Provision. These include: the extension of the right to work for asylum seekers, alternative housing models to house those seeking protection, and compulsory training for those who run Direct Provision. In addition, we would urge the Government to implement any of the outstanding recommendations of the McMahon Report.

Housing

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Eliminate tax for the buyer or builder for new build apartments:

This is an expansion of the Help to Buy Scheme and would come under the same body. Ireland's goal is to build more apartments and achieve affordability, and this should tackle both. This is backed up in a paper by Bill Nowlan estimating that 20% of the cost would be reduced through this method, whilst it would create no overall financial loss to the government.

Introduce a land value tax: Currently, one of the many contributors to the housing crisis is that those who own unused land are delaying any productive activity because it is likely that the price of their asset will go up in the future. To counteract such an incentive, we propose a land-value tax, which would replace local property tax. This would not only motivate landowners to start putting their land to use but it also does not affect homeowners, farmers, and others whose land serves a purpose.

Establish a standalone Housing Regulatory Authority:

A Housing Regulatory Authority would be tasked with preventing building defects in both residential dwellings and retail outlets. Following inspections of any potential defects, this Authority would be equipped with enforcement powers to ensure the safety and adequacy of these buildings.

Reform building height restrictions: Current height restrictions causes urban sprawl, which can increase the demand for land around cities and raise property prices. We believe height restrictions in cities should be expanded to at least 10 storeys all over the city and 15 between the two canals in Dublin, with the possibility for higher buildings where it is deemed appropriate.

Increasing funding for young people leaving care who are at risk of homelessness:

This increase would be funded through the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for the Capital Assistance Scheme until at least the expiration of the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan. This helps provide homes for vulnerable young people leaving care and

this funding can make a long-term impact and leave a long-lasting legacy.

Student accommodation: To increase the supply of student accommodation, universities should be statutorily required to provide accommodation for at least 15% of their student population. In addition, the Government should prioritise increased purpose-built student accommodation in urban areas with large third level institutions, which could be partly funded by local government and third level institutions.

Reduced planning board restrictions for modular houses:

This should make it easier to introduce modular quick builds to back gardens to cater for new work from home arrangements. Specific attention needs to be made to height and sizes of what can be installed without permission.

Citizens Assembly on planning laws: Given the success of successive Citizens Assemblies on recommending a path forward on controversial issues, consideration should be given to whether one should be established on the issue of reforming our planning laws, in particular issues relating to NIMBYism, the equity of individuals obstructing major developments, and fast track planning for certain projects.

Health and Mental Health

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Antibiotic overuse awareness campaign: According to the Irish Pharmacy Union, overuse of antibiotics is becoming a major threat to long term public health. In recognition of the risks posed by antibiotic misuse, YFG believes that there should be investment into a nation-wide campaign bringing awareness to the dangers of the overuse/misuse of antibiotics, which would focus on how to properly use antibiotics, the personal damage misuse causes, and the negative impacts it has on the environment.

Reforming drugs policy: YFG has consistently called for the introduction of a drugs policy similar to the model used in Portugal. The Portuguese model decriminalises drug possession if the supply is for less than ten days, changing possession from a criminal matter subject to possible imprisonment to an administrative or civil offence. This approach has resulted in an increased uptake of treatment for drug abuse, a reduction in HIV diagnoses plus reduced costs to the exchequer especially in the costs associated with court and police time, criminal investigations and legal aid. Whilst welcoming the recent reform on drugs policy announced in August 2019, we are calling for the further decriminalisation of short-term possession in order to replicate the success of the Portuguese model.

Ending life with dignity: YFG calls on the Government to legislate for euthanasia in the cases of fully consenting individuals with terminal illnesses. Such people in extreme suffering should be afforded the opportunity to end their life with dignity if that is their wish.

Restrictions on gay blood donations: Currently, men who have sex with men (MSM) face a restriction of a 12 months wait before they can donate blood. We propose that the Government ease the restrictions from 12 months to 3, which would bring us in line with other countries such as United Kingdom, Canada, France, the Netherlands, and the United States of America.

Employment for people with disabilities: Currently, Ireland has one of the lowest employment rates of people with disabilities with Ireland on 26% compared to the European average of 48%. To increase employment for people with disabilities, we are calling for the introduction of tax incentives for employers in the form of a tax rebate on the purchase and installation of equipment and facilities. In addition, YFG are calling on the Government to introduce start-up funding/capital for people with a disability who wish to be self-employed and start up their own business, as per the Pathways to Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities in Ireland report.

Drugs Payment Scheme: The current Drugs Payment Scheme allows an individual or family to pay no more than €124 each calendar month. Whilst this has gradually been reduced in recent Budget's, we would echo the Irish Cancer Society's call for the Government to continue reducing the Scheme each year until it reaches the pre-recession price of €85 a month.

Invest in eMental Health: eMental Health technology is an important, and cost-effective element of treating people with mental health issues, by giving people flexibility and options for how they wish to receive treatment. We believe the Government should prioritise eMental Health technology, allowing 24/7 access to consistent and high-quality mental health supports.

Counseling services in second level education: In most secondary schools there exists a guidance counselor to discuss, among other things, future career options. However, more and more young people are struggling with their mental health, therefore YFG is calling for funding to be ring-fenced for a dedicated emotional support counsellor to be made available to all schools.

Invest in youth work services and organisations: Ireland has an ever increasing youth population with ages 10-24 projected to grow by 13.2% between 2015 and 2025. The NYCI has noted that funding for youth work has been dramatically impacted by cuts, being 20% less than a decade ago. Recognising the important community and active citizenship work that voluntary youth organisations perform, we would support the NYCI's call for increased

investment towards supporting the volunteers in this area and establishing a Compliance Fund.

Reducing Ireland's medical brain drain: Ireland has one of the lowest numbers of consultants, doctors and GPs per head of population in Europe, which has been exacerbated by young Irish doctors emigrating from Ireland in search of better pay and working conditions abroad. Therefore, YFG are calling on the government to ensure college places in medicine are increased in line with the ageing trends, restore entry level pay in public contracts, and ensure new graduates are placed in employment with safe staffing levels and appropriate working conditions.

VAT on condoms and menstrual cups: Currently, there is a 13.5% and 23% VAT rate on condoms and menstrual cups respectively. Condoms are proven to reduce the risk of sexual transmitted infections, and the high VAT rate has been described by Irish Health as a 'tax on safe health'. We welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to provide free contraception for women aged 17-25, however YFG believes that extending this to condoms will make contraceptives more affordable thus reducing the level of infection and crisis pregnancies in young people.

Reducing ophthalmology surgery waiting lists:

Currently, Ireland has incredibly long waiting lists when it comes to ophthalmology surgery. YFG believes that there should be an increase in surgeons of this specialty, as the majority of eye surgeries are routine and day cases. It is especially important that there is investment in this area of health as the population in Ireland begins to age and become more reliant on services such as these which would lead to better health and quality of life.

Youth Mental Health services: Many young people sometimes feel the need to seek professional medical help in relation to mental health, however to avail of these services many will have to attend their local hospital which creates a stigma around the patient's mental health issues. To combat this, we believe Primary Clinic in a local setting that includes GP services, counseling and in some cases psychiatric services, should serve as the service point for mental health services where appropriate.

Increased funding for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service:

As of August 2019, the CAMHS waiting list stood at 'around 2,000', according to then Minister Jim Daly. Mental Health Reform has recommended additional funding of €100m in 2020 for mental health services and a faster movement towards a target of 10% of the total health budget being allocated to mental health by 2023, both of which YFG supports as part of a broader strategy of significant investment in youth mental health.

Transport

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Prioritise the Cork Limerick Motorway: Comments by now Minister Ossian Smyth during the negotiations for the current Government put into question whether this vital motorway would proceed for another five years. We are urging the Government to steadfastly commit to the agreed timeline in the previous Government for the motorway's completion.

Accessible Footpath Fund: This fund would be designated specifically to widen and flatten footpaths for compliance with EU Accessibility Strategy, make footpaths more accessible to buggies, wheelchairs, walking aids and those carrying bikes, providing separate parking stations for bikes to prevent bikes obstructing footpaths.

Ride sharing services: Although we welcome the commitment in the Programme for Government to launch a pilot scheme for ride sharing services, we would call for this to be expedited and licenses to be granted to ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft to diversify the availability of transportation methods within our cities and towns. In addition, these services could be used as part of a broader strategy to encourage safe drinking in rural and isolated areas.

Bike to College Scheme: YFG proposes the introduction of a Bike to College Scheme for third level students. The scheme will be based on the current Cycle to Work Scheme with this scheme's aim to provide discounts to students who decide to purchase bicycles for their daily commutes to and from college. This discount will be a VAT refund on the purchase price of the bike plus any necessary equipment, which will be processed by the student's third level registration office once a receipt and valid student card are presented.

Introduction of congestion charges: To encourage the use of public transport and cycling facilities in Dublin City and the surrounding suburbs, YFG proposes the introduction of a congestion charge on private transportation vehicles operating in Dublin (with provision

for Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford thereafter) between 7am and 6pm, with varying exemptions for corporate vehicles, disability vehicles, taxi drivers, and charge discounts for residents.

Protection for cyclists: To increase the safety for Irish cyclists, YFG proposes compulsory helmets for all cyclists, along with a mandatory fine of €80 for all cyclists who use public roads without adequate safety gear. This would help to reduce the scale of, and risk, cyclist injuries in the case of a traffic accident, and the money from this fine will be repatriated into bicycle safety education schemes ongoing by the RSA.

Bus Rapid Transportation hubs in Irish regional cities: YFG proposes that BRT hubs be developed in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, following on from the BRT used in Dublin. BRTs have dedicated lanes, extensive access, and most importantly frequent departures, which would alleviate the lack of public transportation available in regional cities.

Investing in better public transport: As YFG have been campaigning for, we believe that the Government needs to significantly invest in urban and regional transport infrastructure throughout the country. Particular consideration should be given to expediting light rail and tram services in major cities, and reexamining Ireland's entire rail connectivity.

Reduction in public transport fares for those under 26: Currently, Ireland's public transport system is ranked as the second most expensive in the world, according to research by Deutsche Bank. Consideration should therefore be given to significant discounts on public transport for under 26s as an alleviation of transportation costs at a period of great economic uncertainty for these age-groups, and an environmentally friendly habit forming initiative.

Ensuring access for passengers with special needs: Transport accessibility depends on the awareness and positive attitude of the whole community, in particular, staff. Progress has been made in this area with certain transport operators; for example, Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann have provided training for many staff, and

appointed Equality Officers, however YFG believes that equality and disability training should be mandatory for all staff who work in transport services.

Priority seating for invisible disabilities: People with invisible disabilities using public transport often need extra support and assistance but due to the nature of their condition it is harder for them to seek this. Although there have been welcome introductions such as the JAM card for better support for people with disabilities, YFG are calling for the introduction of a card where they can be offered a seat in the priority seating area of public transport. When the card is produced it explains that the person needs a seat due to the fact their disability or condition is invisible. This scheme has been piloted in the City of London, and would be hugely beneficial to the people of Ireland.

Agriculture and Rural Affairs

Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

Stamp duty on farms: In Budget 2018, stamp duty for commercial property was raised from 2% to 6%, and subsequently to 7.5% in Budget 2019, due to the recovery in the prices for property. However, whilst exemptions apply for young trained farmers, agricultural land is not fully exempt. Young Fine Gael proposes that agricultural land be removed from the definition of commercial property and instead be re-designated into the residential stamp duty rate of 1% up to €1 million and 2% thereafter.

Capital allowances for smart farming: The potential for smart farming technology to improve farming efficiency and productivity, in areas such as sensors and mobile-phone applications to monitor crop growth, is immense. To accelerate the transition to smart farms, the Government should consider expanding the current Accelerated Capital Allowances categories to include smart farming IoT investments.

Extend Green Cert Courses to Institutes of Technology:

To encourage more participation in agricultural education in colleges, the Green Cert should be expanded to IT's. The Green Cert could also provide automatic entrance to a level 7 or 8 agriculture degree in the same manner that some colleges of further education allow entrance to level 7 courses upon completion and attainment of a certain grade.

Solar panels for dairy farmers: The Government should consider either grants or low-interest loans for dairy farmers to purchase solar panels, which can be used to power milking parlours. This would not only reduce electricity bills for farmers but also be environmentally efficient.

Incentivising farm safety: The fatality rate in Irish agriculture is higher than in any other economic sector despite a small proportion of the workforce overall is employed in farming. To try and reduce this incidence of

fatal accidents, Young Fine Gael proposes that farm safety equipment should be exempt from VAT.

Farming apprenticeships: To alleviate labour shortages in the agricultural industry, the Government should consider introducing a formal apprenticeship programme for farming, which could be aided by tax incentives to farm owners who offer apprenticeships.

Equalise the cost of the Green Cert: Currently, in person full time and part time Green Cert courses cost €1,700, whilst the remote learning option comes at a cost of €2,990 despite not offering any additional benefits. Additionally, to enroll in a part time course, the applicant must be over 23 years old, and this should be equalised to the same age entry of 17 as the full time course.

Fishing equipment upgrades: The Government should consider enhanced grants for fishermen to allow them to upgrade their nets, vessels, and equipment. This will allow them to thrive in the new era and avail of the many new fishing practices currently being deployed elsewhere, they will also be in a position to create employment. This will also help the fishing communities on the coast that depend on the economic success of fishing for their economic survival.

Implementation of an A B pricing system for milk produced:

This would implement a system whereby a producer would get 100% of the market price per liter up to the quantity of 400,000 liters per annum. Above this threshold there should be a 2c reduction for the price of milk per litre to stabilize milk prices and prevent the decline of the family farm. If implemented, this threshold would award the family farm and allow them to compete in an ever-growing market of factory farming.

Incentivise the return of sugar-beet production in Ireland:

Increasing the return of the sugar-beet industry in Ireland would help diversify our tillage industry and help in maintaining quality in Irish soil. This industry, if returned, would also lessen the need to import large quantities of sugar from sugar-cane, whilst also providing export opportunities for surplus production.

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