

YFG YOUTH  
MANIFESTO 2020



# EMPOWER YOUR FUTURE

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**YFG**  
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YOUNG FINE GAEL

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# Foreword

## A Chara,

As we face into a new decade, Ireland faces many questions and decisions which will shape the future that we live in. Do we want to live in a society where young people have hope, optimism and a future they can look forward to, or one which repeats the mistakes of the past and forces our young people to once again leave our shores in their hundreds of thousands? Do we want to live in a society where our young people's hard work is rewarded in a dynamic social market economy or one which burdens our young people with high taxes on their work and businesses? Do we want to live in a country whose government is serious about investing in our health service, building on the progress of climate action, addressing the problems in our health service, increasing our housing stock or an opposition which criticises from the sidelines without proposing credible alternatives?

In Young Fine Gael, as the autonomous youth wing of Fine Gael, we pride ourselves on developing policies which seek to develop a brighter future for our young people, one which is built on providing opportunity for all, and where every young person has the power to fulfil their potential. The policies contained in this manifesto provide a blueprint to build on the excellent progress of the Fine Gael government in employment and taxation, the environment, health, education, government reform, housing, agricultural and rural affairs, and transport. If implemented, we believe that our ambitious ideas, built on sensible centre-right policy foundations, would set about the journey to an Ireland that is modern, progressive and inclusive, which addresses many of society's problems and delivers Ireland's young people a future they can be proud of. A vote for Fine Gael in 2020's General Election is a vote to empower your future.

As President of Young Fine Gael, I would like to encourage all members to do their utmost to support our senior party in their fight to deliver Ireland a future to look forward to, whether it be through knocking on doors, dropping leaflets or encouraging your friends and families to support Fine Gael candidates. We need your commitment and dedication now more than ever in this fight, and I am incredibly proud to preside over a party of young people who are incredibly passionate about making a difference in our society. I hope you will join me and together, we can deliver Fine Gael a historic third term in government and secure Ireland's future for all of us.

Is mise le meas,

**Daire Lawler**  
*President Young Fine Gael*

# EMPOWER YOUR FUTURE

## Priorities:

1. Uber and Lyft Licences
2. Minimum Wage Equality
3. Bike to College Scheme
4. Digital Age of Consent
5. Building Height Restrictions

## EMPLOYMENT AND TAXATION

### Minimum wage equality

Young Fine Gael calls for the abolition of sub-rates of the minimum wage that apply to those aged under 18 in general, and those over 18 in the first two years of employment who receive a percentage of the minimum wage between 70% to 90%, so as to guarantee the minimum wage for all workers. To ensure that the cost of hiring and training young members of staff does not become too much of a burden on employers so as to disadvantage young people when they apply due to the increase in wage costs, Young Fine Gael advocates for a reduction in employer PRSI for those employees aged under 18.

### Self-employment tax harmonization and reform

Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to reduce 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. Young Fine Gael welcomes the increases in the self-employed tax credit in previous budgets, and calls for it to be fully harmonized between the tax credits available to employees and the self-employed.

### Savings scheme



Young Fine Gael calls on the government to introduce a savings scheme similar to the SSIA scheme. This scheme would pay out in the event of two consecutive negative quarters of economic activity, so as to act as a countercyclical stimulus.

### Apprenticeships

Young Fine Gael calls for a reduction in the employers' PRSI rate for apprentice employees for the duration of their training to incentivise an increase in apprenticeships. Increasing the number of apprentices would, in the construction industry for example, assist in the goal of increasing the amount of house builds and would ensure that there is a gradual increase in the number working in the construction industry after it dramatically collapsed following the recession.

### Widen income tax band

Young Fine Gael calls on the next Government to continue increasing the standard rate cut-off point at which a person begins paying the higher rate of income tax, and call for it to be raised to €50,000 over the next 5 years.

### Stamp duty relief for people building homes on family land

Young Fine Gael proposes the introduction of an exemption on the 7.5% stamp duty rate applied to non-residential property for

the transfer of land for the purposes of building a house. Young Fine Gael proposes that for sites less than 1.5 acres in size, no stamp duty should apply for the first five years where the transfer of land occurs between a parent, brother, sister, niece, nephew, grandparent or grandchild. After five years, the stamp duty rate will rise by 1.5% for each subsequent year until the normal rate of 7.5% is reached after 10 years.

### Inheritance tax reform

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to abolish the current triad system of bands for the tax free thresholds of Capital Acquisitions Tax, and replace it with two bands of (a) €850,000 (where the household is being gifted to an immediate family member) and (b) €450,000.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Bottle and can recycling scheme

Young Fine Gael proposes that a refundable deposit on recyclable cans and bottles be introduced to encourage recycling. The deposit would be applied at the point of purchase and would then be refunded upon recycling of the item in a correct manner.

### Plastic bag levy

Young Fine Gael calls for the next government to increase the plastic bag levy to 70c from 22c, to encourage the purchase and use of long-lasting and environmentally conscious alternatives.

### Electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles grants and reliefs

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to provide a standard grant of €5,000 for all electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in hybrid vehicles, regardless of the purchase price of the vehicle. Young Fine Gael further calls for the current VRT relief of up to €5,000 on EVs to be extended to hybrid-electric vehicles, which is currently at a level of €2,500.

### Expansion of anaerobic digestion

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to promote the expansion of anaerobic digestion technology for the production of indigenous biogas in Ireland using food, animal and horticultural waste. Increasing the percentage blend of indigenous biogas into our natural gas pipelines up to 2% in 2021, and to 5% by 2025. Young Fine Gael believes that the promotion of these technologies would foster indigenous industry, and would be an excellent way to support local communities.



### **Offshore wind**

Young Fine Gael calls on the government to 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.

### **Smoky coal**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to extend the ban on the use of smoky coal in every town with a population of over 1,000.

### **Charge points**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to introduce electric car charge points in at least one area of every college and university in Ireland.

### **Parking spaces for electric vehicles**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to consider introducing free parking spaces for electric vehicles on a pilot of 12 months.

## **HEALTH**

### **Drugs policy**

Young Fine Gael calls 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. It changes this type of 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. Young Fine Gael, whilst welcoming the recent reform on drugs policy announced in August 2019, calls on the government to further decriminalise short-term possession in order to replicate the success of the Portuguese model.

### **Mandatory vaccinations**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to implement the recommendations of the Health Research Board's report into mandatory vaccinations.

### **Euthanasia**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next 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.

### **ANP Pilot Scheme**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to commit to the pilot scheme of Advanced Nursing and Midwifery Practice (ANP) from the Policy on the Development of Graduate to ANP under Sláintecare to meet European and international standards to reduce waiting times, ensure quicker discharges and access to diagnostics, and ensure better progression and career advancement opportunities for nurses.

### **Employment for the people with disabilities**

Young Fine Gael calls for the introduction of tax incentives for employers in the form of a tax rebate on the purchase and installation of equipment and facilities for people with disabilities in an effort to increase employment for people with disabilities.

### **Restrictions on gay blood donations**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to ease the restrictions on men who have sex with men (MSM) from donating blood from the current 12 months period to 3 months, as in the United Kingdom.

### **Vision for Change in mental health services**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to establish an implementation strategy plan for the new Vision for Change policy framework to be launched this year, in light of the fact no such implementation strategy was created for the previous policy. Young Fine Gael further calls on the next government to implement services not fully established in the previous plan, such as in services for homeless people and people with disabilities.

### **Drugs Payment Scheme**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to continue the decreases in the Drugs Payment Scheme each year until it reaches the pre recession price of €85 a month.

### **Transition services from paediatrics to adult services**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to have a national transition plan from paediatric to adult services when the National Children's Hospital is complete to ensure better transitional services at a national level, and to treat young adults with better continuity of care within adult services.

### **Invest in eMental Health**

Young Fine Gael proposes investment in eMental Health. A recent report by the Mental Health Reform Alliance has suggested that eMental Health 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.

### **Counseling services in third level education**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to establish free counseling services in all colleges and universities throughout Ireland.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Bystander Intervention**

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. Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to expand the Bystander Intervention Programme amongst other Irish colleges and universities, and eventually second level.

### **Third level funding**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to consider the introduction of income contingent student loans as a potential solution to third level funding challenges while giving students breathing space to avoid the upfront financial burden of going to third level. The 2016 Cassells Report proposed three options for funding arrangements. The first and second options however, retain many of the problems of the existing system; namely that the third level sector would remain dependent on the ever-varying limits of the public purse and without sufficient autonomy to compete, innovate and attract global talent. This situation reduces educational outcomes for students. We believe it is important that our colleges are autonomous and well-funded, as well as supporting disadvantaged students into third level. As a result, it is important to target supports and grants at the most disadvantaged, while ensuring that those who can afford to contribute to a third level education do so.

### **EPSEN Act**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to provide funding to implement the remaining sections of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004. The EPSEN Act 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, and we urge the next government to make provision for the implementation of the remaining sections.

### **Digital age of consent**

Young Fine Gael proposes that the age of digital consent be reduced from 16 to 13. The current age of digital consent does not adequately reflect the way that young people use the internet today and inadvertently causes greater dangers for young people navigating the internet. Young Fine Gael further calls for the allocation of the necessary resources for the provision of a Digital Safety Commissioner in order to identify and drive key digital safety concerns for children and young people, including issues such as the digital age of consent and cyber safety lessons.

### **More internships as part of college degrees**

Young Fine Gael calls for colleges to offer more internships as part of degrees. Internships offer students the chance to experience the real working world in an industry relating to their course, providing them with valuable skills that can be extremely beneficial to their future.

### **Digital development in schools**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to introduce compulsory cyber safety classes in the first year of secondary school to help young people develop the skills to ensure they are safe online. Young Fine Gael further calls for the provision of funding for digital literacy classes that span both digital safety and digital use in today's connected world.

## **GOVERNMENT REFORM**

### **SAVI Survey**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to prioritise the process of completing a second Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) survey.

### **Prenuptial agreements**

Young Fine Gael calls for the next government to introduce specific legislation 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.



### **Women in the home**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to hold a referendum on the removal of Article 41.2 from the Irish Constitution regarding a woman's place in the home.

### **Citizens' Assembly on United Ireland**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to establish a Citizens' Assembly to consider the question of Irish unification.

## **HOUSING**

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

Young Fine Gael calls for increased funding in 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 specific accommodation**

Young Fine Gael proposes that Universities should be statutorily required to provide accommodation for at least 15% of their student population allowing for effective planning for the growth in student numbers. Young Fine Gael further calls for the increased provision of purpose-built student accommodation across all towns and cities that have large third level institutions in order to increase the availability of quality and regulated accommodation, as per the Student Accommodation Scheme. We propose that the initial financing of this should come from government and local authorities along with contributions from the third level sector where appropriate.

### **Re-introduction of rental tax credit**

Young Fine Gael supports the re-introduction of a rental tax credit to assist working people earning less than €30,000 a year. The rental tax credit was gradually phased out during the recession and its re-introduction would greatly relieve some of the financial pressures facing young people today.

### **Building height restrictions**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to reform height restrictions in cities 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. Oppressive height restrictions encourage urban sprawl, can discourage

international investment due to a lack of centrally located office space and accommodation for employees and restrict our cities' ability to become truly global cities on a 21st century scale.

## **AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS**

### **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.

### **Incentivising farm safety**

The fatality rate in Irish agriculture is higher than in any other economic sector despite the fact that 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.

### **Capital allowance for green farming**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to introduce a targeted Annual Investment Allowance, modelled on a similar system in the United Kingdom, to incentivise renewable energy equipment, smart farming and climate change mitigation infrastructure. This measure would allow €30,000 to be written off on capital expenditure in the above categories in the first year and the subsequent balance written off over the normal period.

## **TRANSPORT**

### **Uber and Lyft services**

Young Fine Gael calls on the next government to grant licences to ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft in Ireland 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**

Young Fine Gael 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. The refund will be processed by the student's third level registration office once a receipt and valid student card are presented.

### **Increased investment on public transport**

Young Fine Gael believes that the number of bus lanes, cycle lanes and park and ride facilities should be greatly increased in the next five years and a greater priority should be given to these modes over private car use. Public Transport Projects such as a light rail system in Cork and Metro North in Dublin should also be prioritised.

### **Provision of bike lanes**

In order to support continued efforts towards safer roads, Young Fine Gael calls on the next Government to commit to continue the expansion and upgrade of bicycle lanes nationwide. Designated bicycle routes will also support tourism and play a role in the Healthy Ireland initiative.

### **Protection for cyclists**

Young Fine Gael proposes compulsory helmets for all cyclists. Given the number of road deaths that involve cyclists each year, Young Fine Gael believes that a mandatory fine of €80 for all cyclists who use public roads without adequate safety gear would help to reduce the scale of cyclist injuries in the case of a traffic accident. Money from this fine will be repatriated into bicycle safety education schemes ongoing by the RSA.

### **Introduction of congestion charges in Dublin**

To encourage the use of local Luas, DART, Dublin Bus and cycling facilities in Dublin City and the surrounding suburbs, Young Fine Gael encourages the next government to introduce a congestion charge on private transportation vehicles operating in Dublin. Exemptions for corporate vehicles accessing their operations in Dublin, disability vehicles and taxi drivers would apply.

[www.yfg.ie](http://www.yfg.ie)

Fine Gael National Headquarters, 51 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2

☎ 01 619 8444 ✉ [yfg@yfg.ie](mailto:yfg@yfg.ie) 🌐 [www.yfg.ie](http://www.yfg.ie)

🐦 @yfg 📘 /young.finegael 📷 young\_fine\_gael 🌐 Young Fine Gael

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