

OCTOBER 2017

Young Fine Gael
**PRE BUDGET
SUBMISSION 2018**

BUILDING A REPUBLIC OF OPPORTUNITY



FOREWORD

Young Ireland is facing a bright future. Recovery is finally taking hold, jobs are being created and we have the opportunity to rebuild our society. Nevertheless, there are still big national and global challenges in front of us. Many young people are still not able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. The decision by our nearest neighbour to leave the European Union presents us with major difficulties and uncertainties in the future. Now more than ever, it is crucial that the voice of young people is heard clearly, as Government actions over the next few years will set the course for decades to come.

Young Fine Gael's budget submission for Budget 2018 seeks to address some of the big challenges facing young people in Ireland today. From employment to education, from mental healthcare to housing, agriculture and the environment, this document proposes workable solutions that we hope will guide the Government in its actions. Equality of opportunity is a core value of the Fine Gael party, and the proposals in this document will ensure that the Government becomes an enabler of opportunity, and not a barrier to it.

Earlier this year, during the Fine Gael party leadership election, both candidates signed a pledge to promote the interests of Young Ireland. As the conscience of the Fine Gael party, it is the job of Young Fine Gael to see that this pledge is upheld. The proposals in this document are based on policy motions from members across the Young Fine Gael organisation. I wish to thank everyone who was involved in presenting, proposing, compiling and drafting the ideas herein. Mol an óige agus tiocfaidh sí.

Marian O'Donnell
President, Young Fine Gael

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PRIORITIES FOR BUDGET 2018

Young Fine Gael...

calls on the Government to abolish the 0.5% rate of Universal Social Charge on income up to €12,000.

calls on the Government to increase the Earned Income Tax Credit for the Self-Employed.

calls on the Government to create and implement policies that give equal paid parental leave to both parents following the birth or adoption of their child.

proposes that the Government approve and subsidise the provision of PrEP in Ireland in order to combat the spread of HIV.

calls for the provision of youth mental health services to in local Primary Healthcare Centres.

calls on Government to avert plans to introduce a sugar tax.

calls for the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) program to be adequately resourced.

calls for the use of the Strategic Investment Fund to finance the increased provision of purpose built student accommodation across all urban centres that have large third level institutions in order to increase the availability of high quality and regulated accommodation.

calls for the European Investment Bank fund for young farmers to be used to create a fund that would provide young farmers with access to credit and interest subsidised loans to facilitate the establishment of new farm business and collaborative arrangements.

calls for the introduction of a refundable levy onto bottles and cans in order to encourage recycling.

calls for an increase of €188 million for the 2018 Defence Budget.

1. TAXATION

An important function of the taxation system should be to encourage employment and investment. The best route out of poverty is a job and Young Fine Gael supports a dynamic taxation system that incentivises jobs for young people and does not discourage work. As negotiations over Brexit and the resulting uncertainty continues internationally, it is more important than ever that Ireland has a competitive economy that provides opportunity for its people. Young people who are looking to enter the jobs market, either part time or full time, as well as young professionals who are hoping for a promotion or a pay rise should not feel punished through a taxation system that overly burdens them with high marginal rates of tax. In many urban area, starting salaries are not sufficient to allow young people to meet the ever-increasing costs of modern life. Young Ireland deserves a pay-rise and the Government should ensure that young people have the opportunity to keep more of the money they earn. Greater spending power for young people will then provide a further stimulus to the economy. In addition, lower tax rates are shown to boost spending and therefore boost government tax revenue, which should recoup much of the initial cost.

- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to abolish the 0.5% rate of Universal Social Charge on income up to €12,000.** The abolition of this, the lowest rate, will benefit everyone but will especially reduce the tax burden on the lowest earners, many of whom are young people starting out in their careers. Cost: €124 million.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to widen the basic income tax band for individuals without dependent children to €35,800** so that a person on the cusp of the current band rate can earn an additional €2,000 and be taxed at the basic rate of 20% rather than the higher rate of 40%. At present, individuals begin paying the higher rate of income tax on earned income over €33,800, which is below the average annual salary¹. This creates a disincentive to take a promotion or a pay rise. Narrow tax bands are a hangover from the economic crisis, and in this era of recovery the Government should raise the basic income tax band in order to benefit workers and improve Ireland's overall competitiveness. Cost: €356 million.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to work with its European Partner to abolish VAT on Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), in order to make it easier for organisations to purchase this life-saving equipment.** The incidence rate of Sudden Cardiac Death (SCD) in Ireland in young people (15-35) is higher than in other similar European countries². The key to survival is the early implementation of the chain of survival, including early defibrillation. For every minute that passes without defibrillation, the chance of survival reduces by up to 10%³. AEDs save lives and monetary costs should be reduced to increase the survival chances for all.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to avert plans to introduce a sugar tax and instead to incentivise healthy eating through a positive campaign.** Research from Denmark where fat taxes were introduced and then abolished, shows that such health taxes demonstrate no major health benefits, do not impact consumption in a major way and also act as a regressive stealth tax which disproportionately impacts low income families by driving up the cost of the annual grocery bill⁴. Instead of increasing the cost of groceries, the Government should promote the benefits of healthy consumption and focus on reducing the absolute cost of healthy alternatives.

1 CSO <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/elca/earningsandlabourcostsannualdata2016/>

2 HSE <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/topics/Heart/sdcyoung.pdf>

3 https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_301646.pdf

4 "Nutrition" taxes: the costs of Denmark's fat tax http://www.institutmolinari.org/IMG/pdf/note0513_en.pdf

2. EMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE REFORM

Youth unemployment levels in Ireland have more than halved in the last five years, from 31.2% in 2012 to 12.3% now⁵. However, the rate of youth unemployment remains almost twice as high as the overall unemployment rate, indicating that more must be done in this area. Although recovery is on-going, we do not yet know the full economic impact that Brexit will have. Therefore, it is important that employment remains a central priority. While governments do not create jobs, it is the role of government to create the conditions and environment for job creation. In turn, it is the role of the welfare system to support these conditions, and it is crucial that the welfare system empowers those who are most in need and does not trap people in a system of welfare dependence. Work should always pay more than welfare. The aim of these proposals is to ensure that welfare remains a hand-up and not a hand-out.

Youth Entrepreneurship

The importance of entrepreneurship cannot be understated as economic benefits are accrued from incentivising and encouraging young people to start their own businesses. The government has improved the entrepreneurial climate in the country as regards Foreign Direct Investment. Now is the time to renew the focus on the domestic economy and on youth entrepreneurship in particular.

The government should continue to reform of the PRSI for the self-employed. In the past those who are self-employed paid PRSI at 4% without benefiting from access to the benefits and the low-income exemptions of PAYE workers⁶⁷. This is particularly difficult for those who are self-employed on lower incomes and substantially increases the risk associated with entrepreneurship as it means that should the business venture fail, the entrepreneur will not receive the same supports as his or her employees⁸. In addition, the need to obtain seed funding and investment is a constant challenge for start-ups who wish to scale up⁹. In order to increase the entrepreneurial climate in Ireland and encourage more young people to start their own businesses, this situation needs to be changed.

- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to reform of the PRSI for the self-employed by:**
 1. Increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit for the Self-Employed by €700, at a projected cost of €103 million, in order to support the self-employed.
 2. Lowering the rate of Class S PRSI to 3%.
 3. Giving those in Class S PRSI the option of contributing more in PRSI if they want to assure access to more social protection benefits such as Jobseekers Allowance.
 4. Expansion of the Employment and Investment Incentive, and the Seed Capital Scheme (SCS), along with support for Business Angels and Venture Capital firms in order to create a strong investment environment for Irish start-ups.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to work with Local Authorities of Ireland to put in place a new start-up business agreement on commercial rates being graded 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% each year in the first 4 years of business, to support job creation and entrepreneurship.**

5 <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/ireland/youth-unemployment-rate>

6 <https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/SW14.pdf>

7 <http://www.publicpolicy.ie/low-income-self-employed-are-unfairly-treated-by-the-tax-system/>

8 <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/column-self-employed-people-need-a-safety-net-too-467256-May2012/>

9 <http://www.smallbusinessfinance.ie/grow-your-business/category/equity>

Public Sector Pay

During the economic crisis, public sector pay reductions unfairly impacted upon the lower pay grades, in comparison to more senior staff. Young members of An Garda Síochána, for example, have carried a massive burden implemented through cost reduction within the force. This can be clearly seen in the fact that salary values for the first 8 points on the scale have been reduced by an average of 16.6% while the next 8 have been reduced by just 6.8% from salaries between October 2008 and 2016. Student Nurses have seen salaries cut by 34.5% from September 2008 to 2016, compared to the average cut of 5.6% cut for the 11 paygrades of staff nurses. In addition, the injustice of pay inequality for new entrants to the public sector is still unresolved.

- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Minister to prioritise pay restoration for lower pay grades and frontline public sector staff, with the cost to the exchequer partly or wholly covered through reform of increments for higher public sector pay grades.** The lower pay grades in the public sector have carried the bulk of the burden imposed by government spending reductions. These positions are predominately held by younger members of staff, recent graduates and school leavers.

Reform Paternity and Maternity Entitlements

YFG recognises that increased employment prospects, increased numbers of women in the workforce and changing family structures mean that maternity and paternity entitlements require reform. While the Maternity Protection Act 1994 and the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 state that the mother is entitled to 26 weeks maternity leave together with 16 weeks additional unpaid maternity leave, until recently Irish employers were not obliged to grant male employees special paternity leave, either paid or unpaid, following the birth or adoption of their child¹⁰. In addition, until recently under the Adoptive Leave Act 1995, as amended by the Adoptive Leave Act 2005, only the adoptive mother is entitled to avail of adoptive leave from employment, except in the case where a male is the sole adopter.¹¹ This was a policy that is not in the best interests of the child, the family structure or a society which seeks to value all parents and children.

- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to create and implement policies that give equal paid parental leave to both parents following the birth or adoption of their child.** In order to ensure that the best interests of the child and the family are met, the Government should ensure that parents have the option of splitting parental leave entitlements between them, as they wish.

It is very positive to see that the Government has begun to recognise the importance of paternity leave and has ensured that paternity leave be enshrined into law and not left up to the discretion of the employer. A move towards equal parental leave would recognise the common responsibilities of both parents in the raising of children, as set out in Article 18 on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as help to combat imbalances in pay or promotion prospects between men and women in the workplace¹². Having a child is a large economic constraint on families, particularly in the area of child-care and this burden can be lessened by increased paternity leave and shared leave between the parents. This proposal, combined with increased provision of childcare places and supports for stay-at-home parents, will help to build a society that is supportive of all families.

10 <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/MaternityBenefit.aspx>
http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment_rights_and_conditions/leave_and_holidays/maternity_leave.html

11 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1995/act/2/enacted/en/html>
http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment_rights_and_conditions/leave_and_holidays/adoptive_leave.html

12 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

Broadband connectivity

- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to coordinate with stakeholders to ensure a roll-out of high-speed broadband across Ireland.** Government should commit resources towards the development of high quality, high speed internet networks throughout Ireland targeting 90% connectivity rate by 2025 with average connection speeds of 100Mbps/s. Support should also be given to the development of technology sharing networks in technologies interlinked with the digital economy such as 3D printing.

3. HEALTH

Young Fine Gael takes a special interest in the area of health, particularly mental and sexual health. At the outset of our term the National Executive placed health, both mental and sexual as one of our main policy objectives.

A person's health is of paramount importance and we feel that younger people's concerns are being forgotten in the discussion. We in YFG feel strongly that young people have a contribution to make in forming policy in this area; we welcome the formation of a Mental Health Taskforce in tackling one of the most pressing issues facing younger people in Ireland.

Mental Health

Mental Health is arguably one of the most important issues facing young people in Ireland today. Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people. The rate of youth suicide in Ireland is the fifth highest in the EU at 15.7 per 100,000 for 15-24 year olds. Rates for completed suicide are notably high among young men aged from 16 to 34 years¹³, who accounted for almost 40% of deaths by suicide in 2003. A study of young Irish men aged from 18 to 34 years revealed that 78% knew one person who had died by suicide while 42% knew a number of people, and for 17% it was a close friend¹⁴. As can be seen, young people are disproportionately affected by suicide and mental health illness that any other sector of society.

Young Fine Gael calls for a mandatory SafeTALK module to be funded for senior cycle students in secondary schools.

- SafeTALK is a half day training program that prepares participants to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources.
- Participants learn how to provide practical help to persons with thoughts of suicide in only a few hours.
- YFG believes that this initiative will go some way in training students to see if a friend or classmate is struggling and to know how to address it.

Young Fine Gael calls for a dedicated counsellor to be made available to all second level schools.

- While there currently is a Career Guidance teacher in almost all schools, the function they perform is one of 'future prospects' with some emotional support on the periphery.
- YFG believes that this is not only unfair to the student but also to the teacher.
- YFG is calling for funding to be ring-fenced for a dedicated emotional support counsellor to be made available to all willing schools.
- YFG believes that this measure will give students a support structure they may need in schools where they know they have someone to talk to and support them if they are suffering from mental health issues.

13 National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) (2005). Reach out: National strategy for action on suicide prevention 2005-2014. Dublin: Health Service Executive

14 Begley, M., Chambers, D., Corcoran, P., & Gallagher, J. (2004). The male perspective: Young men's outlook on life. Cork: University College Cork Press. <http://www.nsrif.ie/wp-content/uploads/reports/YoungMensStudy.pdf>

Young Fine Gael calls for Youth Mental Health services to be located in local Primary Healthcare Centres.

- Many young people feel the need at times to seek professional medical help in relation to mental health.
- To avail of these services many will have to attend their local hospital which creates a stigma around the patient's mental health issues.
- By having an integrated Primary Clinic in a local setting that includes GP services, counselling and in some cases psychiatric services, this normalises the visit and will go some way to removing the stigma some people feel of having to present themselves in a hospital setting to avail of mental health services.

Young Fine Gael calls for a cross departmental and multi-stakeholder approach to funding health services in third level education.

- As Universities and IT's have expanded their student numbers they have failed to expand their services, particularly their welfare services for students. This has led to a situation where some students could be waiting between 2 and 3 weeks for an appointment to see a counsellor.
- 10,000 students across Ireland are attending a counsellor at any one time, which represents between 6 and 8% of students on every campus¹⁵.
- These delays are unacceptable and there is a need for the Department of Health and the Department of Education to work together with third level institutions to ensure that funding is available to provide more services for students.
- There is also a need to ensure that those using these services have access to mental health services when the college is not in term. Students should be transferred back to local services to ensure that their needs are met during the summer holidays or before they graduate.

Sexual Health

STIs pose serious threats to the health of those affected and while prevention is always the best cure, this is not always possible and it is essential the stigma surrounding STI testing is eradicated. According to the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020, the number of STI notifications since 1995 has trended upwards generally meaning the number of STI notifications has significantly increased. Between 1995 and 2013, STI notifications increased from 3,361 to 12,753, which equates a rise from 92.7 per 100,000 per population in 1995 to 277.9 per 100,000 now¹⁶.

As the above statistics show the importance that must be attached to the area of sexual health in Ireland. Many people leave fulltime education without any awareness of prevention or best practice around safe sex.

15 Thompson, S. (2017). 'There is a tsunami of their-level students with mental health problems', The Irish Times, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/there-is-a-tsunami-of-third-level-students-with-mental-health-problems-1.2924516>.

16 National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020 <http://www.crisispregnancy.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/National-Sexual-Health-Strategy.pdf>

Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to fund a dedicated module in second level education, and in the senior cycle more specifically, that addresses the issue of sexual health.

- This module would be introduced for senior cycle students only and would contain topics such as awareness of the dangers of unprotected sex. This would include both education on Sexually Transmitted Diseases and pregnancy.
- While recognising the existence of the Relationships and Sexuality Module of the SPHE course we in YFG believe that this should be a stand-alone module in its own right
- This module would encourage a mature discussion on relationship development and sexual responsibility.
- A requirement of this module would be a visit to the school by a Public Health Nurse to explain in medical terms the realities of sexual relationships and the supports available for STI treatment.
- This module would also focus on the need for and availability of contraception as a means to prevent STIs and not just to prevent pregnancy.

Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to remove Value Added Tax from the sale of condoms.

- Condoms are proven to reduce the risk of sexual transmitted infections.
- Currently there is a VAT levy on condoms in Ireland of 13.5% which is one of the highest rates in Europe.
- It can cost up to €20 for a box of 12 condoms and this price range puts them out of reach of many young people who would only have part time jobs but who would also be sexually active.
- This measure has been called for by many groups such as the Irish Pharmaceutical Union.
- YFG believes that this measure will make contraceptives more affordable thus reducing the level of infection and crisis pregnancies in young people

Young Fine Gael calls for the Government to approve and subsidise the provision of PrEP in Ireland in order to combat the spread of HIV.

- PrEP means Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. This is the use of anti-HIV medication that prevents HIV-negative people from becoming infected with the virus. One such PrEP medication is Truvada. When taken once a day, Truvada is highly successful (between 92% and 99% successful) at preventing HIV from being contracted¹⁷.
- The Irish government has yet to assess the safety and efficacy of Truvada when used for PrEP, so it is not currently widely available in Ireland for that purpose. Although a doctor can write a prescription for PrEP in Ireland, it is not currently legal to buy PrEP directly in Ireland.
- In 2014 the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended offering PrEP to men who have sex with men¹⁸. Late last year, on the basis of further evidence of the effectiveness and acceptability of PrEP, the WHO broadened its recommendation to include all population groups at substantial risk of HIV infection¹⁹.
- YFG is now calling on the Minister for Health along with the Health Products Regulatory Authority to approve PrEP to be made available on prescription in Ireland.

17 www.prepfacts.org

18 World Health Organisation <http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/guidelines/qa-prep-msm/en/>

19 World Health Organisation http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/journal_articles/article-beyond-90-90-90/en/

4. EDUCATION

YFG believes that education is the fundamental catalyst that allows people to overcome poverty and gives people of any background the tools to pursue their goals and dreams in the world of work. As members of YFG, we know the effect education has on young people, it allows us to think critically, to be innovators and entrepreneurs- the drivers of Ireland's future economy. We are fortunate in Ireland that we have one of the best education systems in the world. However, there remain areas that are sorely in need of change and investment.

Second Level Education Reform

Our secondary school education prepares students for the rest of their lives and is the foundation on which they build their careers. But the secondary school system has major flaws that need to be addressed. We are lagging behind our European neighbours in teaching foreign languages with fewer Irish people being able to speak a foreign language when compared with other European countries and while our latest PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results are strong for literacy, more work needs to be done in STEM subjects²⁰. Structural flaws are also an issue, with alternative options to the Leaving Certificate such as LCA treated as a second-tier option and carrying negative stereotypes. In order to have a world class education system that prioritises the student and their needs, we need to address these areas.

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) program to be adequately resourced** and work done in schools to ensure that it is not treated as an 'easy option' or as the second tier Leaving Cert. The negative association with the LCA is discouraging students, including those who are more inclined towards vocational education. Vocational education is underappreciated in our education system and offers many students greater benefit than a traditional Leaving Cert.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for increased funding of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects and Information Communications Technology courses in school.** There is also a significant gender imbalance in STEM. This begins at second level, particularly in all-girls school where subjects such as physics may not be taught in the school. All students should be able to avail of STEM subjects and there should be incentives for schools to introduce these subjects.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for an increased emphasis on the study of modern European languages.** Languages give our students the ability to travel and work abroad right across the world and a greater emphasis on EU languages in particular will be to the benefit of the Irish workforce, following Brexit.
- **Iarann Young Fine Gael ar an Rialtas, i gcomhpháirt le tuismitheoirí agus le pobail áitiúla, líon na nGaelscoileanna a mhéadú sa stáit,** go háirihe ag léibhéal na bunscoile. Sa bhliain 2015/2016, bhí 268 bunscoil lán-Ghaeilge agus 64 iar-bhunscoil lán-Ghaeilge sa stáit, agus 144 agus 42 faoi seach lonnaithe lasmuigh de na ceantair Ghaeltachta²¹. Tugann tumoideachas Gaeilge bunchloch den scot sa Ghaeilge do na scoláirí mar aon le mealladh dearfach leis an nGaeilge a chur chun cinn idir na scoláirí agus a dteaghlach.

Third level Education Reform

The Irish Third Level sector is a hugely important resource, not only for young people in Ireland, but for the whole country. The OECD shows that third level graduates on average have better career prospects, earn more

20 Educational Research Centre http://www.erc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/PISA2015_FutureReady.pdf

21 <http://www.gaelscoileanna.ie/en/about/statistics/>

money and have a higher standard of living²². However, the recent economic crisis exposed the deficiencies in the Irish third level funding model. Our system of “free fees” has been exposed by continuous increases in the registration fee, and our third level institutions have been starved of funding, reducing their ability to attract top global talent and conduct ground-breaking research. We have also seen a trend of almost continuous decline for our third level institutions in all major third level rankings with varying methodological approaches, as a result of this funding crisis.

The Irish Third Level sector is currently facing two major challenges: how to ensure equality of opportunity for all those who wish to, and are entitled to, attend, and how to ensure that our third level institutions compete on a global level. Finding a resolution to these twin challenges must be a priority. The current funding model is not working.

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the Government to adopt pragmatic approach to the issue of third level funding, in order to ensure that our policy is realistic and evidence-based.** The 2016 report “Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education” (Peter Cassells Report) proposed three options for funding arrangements²³. 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 Universities and Institutes of Technology 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. Income contingent student loans also offer a potential solution to third level funding challenges, while giving students breathing space to avoid the upfront, financial burden of going to third level. This principle is reflected in our current third level funding policy, namely an income contingent graduate tax system, similar to the Australian model.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for greater clarity for students who wish to transfer to another third level institution.** Many students might wish to change college due to a variety of reasons such as location, personal needs, greater subject choice etc. This process is hidden from students and is often not presented as an option.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for Government clarification in relation to the new emphasis on common entry courses and the impact this will have on third level students.** It is important to ensure that common entry courses do not lead to a ‘second Leaving Cert’ and provide a further, more expensive barrier to students repeating and getting the course they want.

Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Apprenticeships and traineeships are important routes to employment in a number of areas, particularly in sectors requiring high skilled and / or manual labour. Apprenticeships are also important avenues to employment for those who are not suited to the traditional academic environment. In Ireland, there is a culture of third level which has devalued apprenticeships as a part of employment training. The role of apprenticeships must be re-established and the opportunity to undertake an apprenticeship must be expanded in order to ensure that there is a wider range of job prospects open to young people of all backgrounds. We commend the recent moves to invest and expand this area, but there are further issues that need to be addressed.

22 OECD [https://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20\(eng\)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/edu/eag2013%20(eng)--FINAL%2020%20June%202013.pdf)

23 Cassells Report <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Investing-in-National-Ambition-A-Strategy-for-Funding-Higher-Education.pdf>

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- **Young Fine Gael calls for the Government to integrate the apprenticeship application process into the CAO system to help reduce the stigma and negative impressions around apprenticeships while also making it easier to apply.**
 - **Young Fine Gael calls for the creation of a day similar to 'Higher Options' that focuses on apprenticeships. This will enable students to find information about the apprenticeships that they might like to do and reduce the stigma.**
 - **Young Fine Gael calls for the Government to fund additional training for career guidance teachers in schools in the area of apprenticeships to ensure that information is given to all students, not just the students thought to be most suited.**
 - **Young Fine Gael calls for the introduction of new interim certificates to apprentices, which would help them to progress to other qualifications and further training, especially in those cases where apprentices have been made redundant.** It is important to expand options for employment and to break the dependence on the academic route alone in order to train young people for the workforce.

5. HOUSING

One of the most pressing issues facing young people today is the need for affordable, safe and habitable accommodation. Be it for students living away from home for third level education or in the private rental market that caters predominantly to young professionals starting out in their careers, it is becoming more and more difficult to afford places to live.

It is important to find pragmatic solutions to the current housing problems that have a tangible effect on young people who find themselves in difficult and stressful situations in the housing sector. We have split these policy priorities into two separate but not unrelated sections; namely Student Accommodation and the Private Rental Sector. We recognise that the challenges in both areas cannot be resolved without the increase in housing supply that comes with an effective and competitive market.

Student Accommodation

The student accommodation crisis that has developed over the last few years has no end in sight, until the supply issue is resolved. As a subset of a larger housing crisis, the lack of student accommodation negatively affects students in a variety of ways. It impacts them financially due to soaring rent costs. It causes stress and strain and can negatively affect their mental health. It can also act as a very real barrier to further education. Policies must aim to alleviate the pressure caused by the accommodation crisis in the short term, and also aim to eradicate the accommodation crisis in the long-term.

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the increased provision of purpose built student accommodation across all urban centres that have large third level institutions in order to increase the availability of high quality and regulated accommodation, as per the Student Accommodation Scheme.** In addition, the private rental market will have greater access to the accommodation that is currently being occupied by students.
 - The initial financing of these investments would come from Government and Local Authorities, and where appropriate with contributions from the third level sector.
 - In particular, finance from the Strategic Investment Fund could be used. The long run revenues earned from these investments could then be used to finance the third level sector.
 - Universities should have statutory obligations to provide accommodation for a minimum of 15% of their student populations. Third level institutions in general must be important stakeholders in ensuring the availability of student accommodation. This can be achieved through effective strategic planning for student population growth. Major Institutes of Technology should be given the opportunity to raise private funding for this purpose.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for a Government campaign to the promote the importance of establishing a written residential tenancy agreement (RTA) in order to ensure that students have greater security.**
- **Young Fine Gael calls for the Government to engage with NAMA in order to provide unused available properties for development of student accommodation.** According to a May 2016 discussion paper by the Housing Agency, there are 230,056 unoccupied residential properties across the state, with a substantial number in major urban areas, eg. 7,995 vacant houses and 16,321 vacant apartments in Dublin city centre, a vacancy rate of greater than 25% of total housing stock in parts of Cork and Galway cities and over 50,000 vacant homes in Cork, Dublin and Galway cities and suburbs combined²⁴.

24 Housing Agency <https://www.housingagency.ie/getattachment/Our-Publications/Latest-Publications/16-05-17-Vacant-Homes-Paper-Housing-Agency.pdf>

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the Government to provide grants or tax relief to owners of vacant properties in need of refurbishment, in order to develop student accommodation.**
- **Young Fine Gael calls for more visible Government support for the university-led campaign to promote the tax incentives for homeowners who let spare rooms as digs to students.** The current policy of outsourcing this campaign to other groups such as the Union of Students in Ireland is not acceptable. As part of this effort, the annual cap of €14,000 on rental income that is tax free should be increased. This will incentivise the provision of more rooms.

Private Rental Sector

While homeownership is an important social value and rightly an ambition for many, the number of renters in Ireland is increasing, particularly among young professionals, with many viewing it as a stepping stone to becoming a first-time buyer. The issue of increasing prices in the rental market is largely due to a lack of supply in the market. While there are many contributing factors to this lack of supply, one issue that does need to be addressed is the hoarding of properties and/or sites which are in upmarket locations. In general, these properties are held for speculative purposes.

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the replacement of the local property tax system with a Site Valuation Tax in order to combat the hoarding of property for speculative purposes.** The rationale for this such measure is that it is levied on the value of the land on which the property is situated, and not the property itself.
 - For instance, where a site is located in a prime location and the Local Authority is investing in the area, this will increase the value of the property. However, under the current system the level of tax paid would be very low, or indeed zero. In essence, the site owner is benefiting from public expenditure without making any contribution in return. Where a site valuation tax is levied, the owner of the site would have to either develop the site in order to generate revenue to pay the tax, or indeed sell the site on to a new owner who would. In this way, the cost of public investment in an area is offset with increased tax revenue. The introduction of a site value tax has been supported by the National Competitiveness Council and also by the PublicPolicy.ie think tank, who called it “simpler, fairer, more transparent and significantly more efficient in economic terms”²⁵.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for the reintroduction of the Rental Tax Credit, with an eligibility cut-off rate of €25,000 per year.** Due to financial constraints during the recession the Rental Tax Credit was gradually phased out over a seven-year period. This tax credit would have a significant impact on alleviating the financial pressure on young people. YFG also recognises the financial pressure that such a proposal would have on the Exchequer if it was introduced on a wide basis. For this reason, YFG is calling for a cut-off point of €25,000 per year for people eligible to claim this relief. The rationale for this cut-off is that this is the average wage earned by young graduates²⁶. This proposal would help alleviate many financial pressures on young graduates and professionals who may already be paying back substantial post graduate loans.

25 A Site Value Tax for Commercial Property <http://www.publicpolicy.ie/a-site-value-tax-for-commercial-property/>

26 GradIreland <https://gradireland.com/careers-advice/working-in-ireland-and-northern-ireland/salaries-and-benefits-for-new-graduates>

6. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Young Fine Gael recognises the enormous cost of entry into farming for young farmers and through these policies we hope to address this for young farmers in Ireland. We believe that young farmers require every support possible for them to succeed in this career. YFG wants to tackle youth unemployment in the young farming community and we believe this can be achieved with the proper supports.

- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine to continue the Department's promotion of knowledge transfer programs through Teagasc and to a greater extent encourage business skills to be actively taught and discussed through STAP and BTAP programs.** With the ever-increasing requirement for additional investment in farm infrastructure to facilitate expansion and technical efficiency, business skills must be taught to young farmers to aid in their ability to adapt to uncertain markets and to make their farms more profitable.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for increased capital investment for young farmers.** The application procedure for TAMS II is extremely complicated and technical. The detail required by the Department is input through a software program, for which no technical support is provided. The program has had many glitches from its introduction with advisers having no access to technical support from the Department. The applicant must submit overlays and planning permission approval documents to the Department before they receive any confirmation of attainment of the grant. Young Fine Gael proposes that the Department issue an offer of the grant before planning costs are incurred by the applicant, or offer a consultancy, without prejudice provided to the applicant by the Department.
- **Young Fine Gael supports proposals from Macra na Feirme that 'A fund of €2 million be made available to young trained farmers to purchase grass measuring equipment' and to incentivize farmers to spread lime as required²⁷.** Currently, under the departments Technology Adoption Programmes in Beef and Sheep, it has been established from a high volume of soil testing that much of the land in Ireland does not have adequate Ph values for optimum grass growth. Therefore, when an adequate amount of lime is applied to the soil, it will return a higher yield of grass growth. Many farmers are not aware of the high value that lime application applies to land and therefore young farmers should be incentivised to improve grass growth in an environmentally sound manner.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for a National Reserve for 2018 in order to incentivise young farmers into the industry.** Budget provision for the National Reserve is essential on a yearly basis to fill the stopgap, which currently exists in the current program. Under the current program, new and upcoming young farmers are not able to avail of the same financial supports as other young farmers were in 2015.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to reduce fuel taxes.** High fuel costs are a heavy burden on job creation in rural Ireland, with many people having to travel long distances to get to work. Donegal is considered as one of the most disadvantaged counties when it comes to this scenario with fuel costs often outweighing the high insurance, road tax and car maintenance costs on an annual basis.
- **Young Fine Gael opposes any proposal to abolish the agricultural diesel subsidy.** It is accepted globally that agricultural diesel should be subsidized due to the large volumes of diesel that is consumed by machinery; which is essential to run a farm. Any such proposal will directly impact on farmers and will result in a weakening of an already volatile sector.
- **Young Fine Gael proposes that the Minister considers extending the tax relief for leasing farmland by young, trained farmers to family members.** Currently, tax relief is only available to non-related parties. Such relief should be granted under a fixed term lease.

27 Macra na Feirme <https://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/media/committees/agriculture/Macra-na-Feirme-Opening-statement-for-JC-meeting-of-13-09-16.pdf>

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the European Investment Bank fund for young farmers to be used to create a fund that would provide young farmers with access to credit and interest subsidised loans to facilitate the establishment of new farm business and collaborative arrangements.**
- **Young Fine Gael calls for the provision of incentivised funding for young farmers who hold a green cert.** YFG believes that targeted incentives and supports that facilitate and encourage more young farmers into the industry are vital. Particular focus is needed on resources for young farmers entering the industry as the first few years of starting up in agriculture are the most critical regarding income, viability and long term sustainability from farming activity²⁸.
- **Young Fine Gael calls for the early retirement scheme to be reopened in order to let young farmers progress in their career.** The scheme aims to provide income for older farmers who stop farming²⁹. When the Early Retirement Scheme was available a typical approved transferor would be paid a flat rate of €9,300 per annum for the first 5 hectares or 5 production units plus €300 per hectare of agricultural land or production unit transferred/leased up to a maximum of €15,000. The grant would be paid for a maximum of ten years, or until the farmer reached 66 – whichever is sooner. This provided a good income for older farmers who stopped farming. This also encouraged the replacement of these older farmers by young farmers which would provide them with their future in the agriculture industry. But now as it is currently closed, it is difficult to encourage older people to exit farming. Farmers usually live where they work and they are encouraged to stay because EU incentives are generous. Now farmers are eligible for the old age pension too, regardless of means or income. These issues form a block on new entrants, or people getting into farming later upon inheritance.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to deliver on its budget commitments for the Rural Development Schemes.** Young farmers are an essential component of the future for rural communities in many ways including providing employment, raw materials for exports and environmental and countryside management. The funding priorities under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 have a significant impact for the future of farming by assisting the growth and expansion of sustainable farm business. All Rural Development schemes should prioritise young farmers; eligibility criteria should be focused on attracting new young farmers, retaining young people in agriculture and other rural industries, and supporting all existing young farmers in reaching their potential.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to organize and deliver a new and innovative farm safety training programme for young farmers.** The level of farm deaths and accidents in Ireland in recent years is unacceptable. Much has been done to improve the awareness among farming communities however there needs to be further significant changes in practice on farm to improve farm safety, particularly with modern technological advances in farm equipment and management.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to deliver resourcing of positive mental health initiatives through the implementation of the 'Connecting For Life, Ireland's National Strategy to reduce suicide 2015-2020.** Young Fine Gael supports measures to further target Knowledge Transfer and the Continued Professional Development of farmers, particularly in relation to risk management and business advice. There is a need to address the health, safety and wellbeing of farmers through training, education and innovation.
- **Young Fine Gael calls on the Government to urgently prioritise the rolling out of high-speed broadband, particularly in rural communities.** Smart farming refers to the increased use of technology in agriculture. Smart farming has the potential to deliver a more productive and sustainable agriculture production, based on a precise and resource-efficient approach. Technology has the potential to assist with productivity and efficiency on all farms, not just large commercial operations. It is crucial therefore for rural communities to have access to stable high-speed broadband to facilitate these technological advances.

28 <http://www.macra.ie/news/1536-department-needs-to-prioritise-all-young-trained-farmers-in-cap>

29 Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine <https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmerschemespayments/earlyretirementscheme/>

7. MIGRATION AND ENVIRONMENT

An asylum seeker is a person who is seeking to be recognised as a refugee. In Ireland while they are seeking refugee status they are placed in direct provision accommodation centres. This accommodation is often unsuitable, with families often housed in one room and there are no facilities for preparing meals. Asylum seekers receive a weekly allowance of €19.10 per adult and €15.60 per child to cover all their expenses. This is particularly difficult on young people in education as this must cover the cost of books, of their uniform and other such expenses.

We commend the efforts and intention of the new system introduced in January to streamline the application process and reduce the time spent in direct provision centres.

Asylum Seekers, who are in danger of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion represents particularly vulnerable group in society and the direct provision system does not meet their needs.

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the Government to commit to maintaining indefinitely the Pilot Student Support Scheme for those in the protection scheme.** Young people in direct provision need access to more facilities and funding in order to facilitate their education. While there are no barriers to their access to education, their lack of access to vital funds to spend on books, school supplies, uniforms and other essentials is its own barrier. At third level, we commend that there now is access to SUSI grants for people in the care system but this also needs to be maintained and extended to PLC courses.

YFG is committed to the protection of the environment. Therefore, it is important to take steps to encourage recycling and to keep our streets and public areas clean. Schemes such as refundable levies on recyclable items offer monetary incentives for good behaviour, and also generate funds for other recycling projects or community projects. They have been shown to be very effective in parts of Germany and Canada.

- **Young Fine Gael calls for the introduction of a refundable levy onto bottles and cans in order to encourage recycling.** The specified levy would be applied to various items upon purchase, however this would be redeemable upon the correct disposal of the item. The items purchased can be returned to the outlet where they were purchased or to special recycling centres in exchange for the redeemable levy. These centres would initially be set up from the profits and would also create employment.

RATES

- Large glass bottles: €0.50
- Small glass bottle, jam-jar or large plastic bottle: €0.20
- Cans and small plastic bottles: €0.10

8. DEFENCE

In the area of defence, we aim to offer budgetary solutions to what we see as the central problems confronting the Irish Defence Forces today. We do not attempt to recommend specific equipment which should be purchased, but rather the category of equipment which we believe is necessary. Where we have included specific equipment, it is intended only as an example, as we acknowledge the excellent work carried out by experts from the Defence Forces and the Department of Defence in procuring equipment.

Funding and Incomes

We recognise and welcome the modest increases in funding that the government has provided in the last budget, especially the €437 million capital investment project, which aims to meet the new equipment priorities outlined in the 2015 White Paper on Defence³⁰. However, the Defence Forces still requires significantly more funding if it is to address the problems that exist in the force today.

Our submission focuses on the upgrade of existing equipment and the procurement of new equipment, in order to maintain and further the Defence Forces' core capabilities. We believe additional funding is needed for the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service, but we believe that the Air Corps requires the most significant additional investment. We agree with all the equipment priorities outlined in the White Paper but we advocate additional spending on top of what has already been agreed.

For the Army, we see upgrading and enhancement of the armoured fleet and increasing the size of the Army Rangers Wing (ARW) as priorities. Upgrade and enhancement of the armoured fleet and furthering the range of artillery, would, we believe, increase force protection which we see as crucial particularly in light of the current difficult and dangerous UNDOF mission. It would also allow the Defence Forces to better adapt to what the White Paper acknowledges as the current pattern of overseas crisis management operations, which are that they are faster and more versatile.

Increasing the size of the ARW would significantly enhance Ireland's counter-terrorism capabilities, at home and abroad, which we see as crucial in light of the major security threat Europe currently faces from extremist Islamic terrorism. The recent increase of Ireland's terror threat level from "light" to "moderate" gives further urgency to this.

For the Naval Service, we see the continuation of the upgrade of the fleet as most important. However, we also advocate that new and current ships are equipped better to combat specifications, in order to allow the Naval Service to participate in a wider range of overseas operations, such as the EU's Operation Atalanta.

For the Air Corps, we see increasing the force's airlift, maritime patrol and medium-long ISTAR capabilities as the top priority. We also see the upgrade of facilities at Baldonnel Aerodrome as highly important. Crucially, we advocate that any future replacement of aircraft should not decrease the size of the fleet, but rather should increase it. Especially in light of the recent search operations for Rescue 116 which exposed significant operational failings in the Air Corps, we see this as a top priority.

Retention of experienced personnel continues to be a major problem in the Defence Forces. While the recent recruitment drive in the Defence Forces is very much welcome, recruitment alone cannot address the loss of experience which is occurring in the force.

30 White Paper on Defence, 2015 <http://www.defence.ie/WebSite.nsf/WP2015E>

Currently, 20% of Defence Forces personnel receive family income supplement³¹. We view this as an entirely unacceptable situation for the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the state. We therefore advocate a 12% increase in pay for all personnel to respond to this problem. This increase would restore pay in the Defence Forces to pre-crash levels and could be phased in gradually over time to reduce costs.

- **Young Fine Gael calls for an increase of roughly €188 million for the 2018 Defence Budget.** We advocate roughly €170 million of this should be in spending and roughly €18 million in pay and allowances. An increase of this size and proportion would be in line with recent Defence spending increases in other EU member states, who are responding to increased security threats.

While our recommendations will not solve all the key problems in the Defence Forces, we believe they are the most realistically achievable in the current economic situation.

Equipment and Resourcing

Young Fine Gael calls for the following resources for the Army:

- The formation of a Tier 2 special forces unit. Cost: €15 million.

Ireland should form another Special Forces unit, a Tier 2 unit which would be on hand to assist the Army Ranger Wing, and to carry out operations of its own if needed. This would be similar to the SAS Reserve. Countries such as the US and the UK have heavily invested in Tier 2 units, and we believe that Ireland needs such a unit in order to effectively respond to the threats posed by international terrorism, as well as to assist our units participating in operations overseas.

- The RBS 70 air-defence system either be replaced, or substantially upgraded.

The RBS 70 air-defence system has been in service since 1981, and we no longer feel that it is fit for purpose. We agree with the White Paper's recommendation that it either be substantially upgraded or replaced, and we advocate that this take place as soon as possible.

- The formation of a Guard Service.

Guard duty, while an integral part of military duty, is also wasting valuable personnel that would be far better utilised elsewhere. We propose that a new Guard Service be set up, composed of RDF and recently retired PDF personnel, thereby freeing up PDF personnel for training and operational purposes. Other countries such as the UK currently successfully operate a guard service.

- The purchase of more MRV and CRV MOWAGs. Cost €14 million.

The Medium Reconnaissance Variant of the MOWAG APC is currently the heaviest armour available to the Defence Forces. With the retirement of the Scorpion fleet, it is imperative that the PDF have sufficient firepower to be able carry out their overseas duties effectively. As well as this, more Close Reconnaissance Vehicles should be purchased to enlarge the armoured fleet, enabling more CRV MOWAGs be deployed overseas and used at home for training purposes. We also advocate that some of the Army's existing CRVs be fitted with the TOW missile system as they have the potential to do.

- Enhancement of DF's electronic warfare capabilities. Cost: €12 million.

As recent political events in America have proven, the growing threat of cyber warfare cannot be ignored. In order to combat this, the DF needs to expand its electronic warfare capabilities. This should be done through the Irish ISTAR task force embedded with the EU Battlegroups, as the integration with our European allies will enhance our capabilities significantly. The investment in cyber capability as outlined in the White Paper through the Computer Emergency Response Team must be continued.

³¹ Newstalk <http://www.newstalk.com/20-of-Irish-Defence-Forces-personnel-claiming-Family-Income-Support>

Young Fine Gael calls for the following resources for the Air Corps:

- Purchase and operation of military standard primary radars as per the 2015 White Paper on Defence. Cost: €10 million.

The recent Russian bomber activity in Irish controlled airspace has brought the need for this capability into sharp relief, both from the perspectives of sovereignty and air safety. We should be able to keep track, as practically every other European country does, of who exactly is using both our territorial airspace and that further out to sea for which we provide air traffic control services. The latter is of particular importance as aircraft with their transponders (devices that broadcast an aircraft's location, altitude and heading) turned off, as the Russian Air Force craft did, are invisible on civilian radar screens. Primary radars, as used by the military, do not rely on transponders and so can detect uncooperative aircraft that may otherwise pose a collision hazard or worse.

- Increase from three to five the number of replacements purchased for Air Corps' five current Cessna 172 light aircraft. Purchase of requisite surveillance and reconnaissance equipment to ensure that the new type can play a useful role on overseas missions. Cost: €10 million.

The Air Corps' 45-year-old Cessna fleet is currently up for replacement by three more capable aircraft. However, whilst this is a welcome move, and the new fleet is likely to have higher availability than the Cessnas, reducing the number purchased to three limits the potential applications of the new platform. An extra two aircraft will finally allow for the Air Corps to follow the two other services on deployments overseas by ensuring that two aircraft can be based abroad for long periods without compromising domestic duties and scheduled maintenance. Aircraft of this class have proved themselves to be very useful surveillance assets in such environments as the Middle East and Sub Saharan Africa where Irish troops have recently been or are currently deployed. They offer increased endurance, and lower acquisition and running costs than helicopters. In order to ensure that the surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities of the new type are a worthwhile addition to UN, EU or NATO missions, they must be equipped to a high standard with a variety of sensors (radar, infrared etc).

- Provision for a retention scheme for experienced air crews and ground personnel. Cost: €5 million.

This measure is imperative to avoid repeat of the situation on the night of the Rescue 116 tragedy where there were neither sufficient pilots nor air traffic controllers on hand to allow for the Air Corps to mount a top cover operation. Aircrew and ground personnel are the Air Corps' most important asset. However, many have left within the last number of years due in large part to salary cuts. The increased number of new cadets entering flight training is a very welcome development. Nevertheless, they cannot immediately replace the large numbers of experienced personnel who have taken their experience to the private sector. Training a pilot costs approximately 1.5 million euros, whilst it may take ten years before a pilot is qualified to captain a large aircraft. It is thus especially important that it is a worth pilots' while to stay on once they complete their minimum 12 years in the service. Financial incentives for experienced personnel are a necessary part of the solution to this problem. This is imperative to maintaining a viable Air Corps into the future.

- Become a member of the NATO Heavy Airlift Wing (negotiable depending on share taken).

Based in Hungary, the wing operates three C-17 heavy transport aircraft on behalf of a consortium of 11 European nations and the US. New member states are welcome. Members comparable to Ireland such as Slovenia, Bulgaria and Finland have shares in the region of two to three percent. Membership would provide a cost effective heavy and outsized strategic airlift capability beyond the remit of the CASA replacements to Irish peacekeeping and peace support missions when necessary. Membership is politically viable, two of the participating nations, Sweden and Finland, are not NATO members, but rather, like Ireland, are members of the broader NATO Partnership for Peace group.

- Purchase of an additional replacement for the current pair of CASA 235 maritime patrol aircraft. Cost: €30-50 million.

The current CASA aircraft, which entered service in 1994, have given sterling service to the point where one is the heaviest used airframe of its design anywhere in the world. The White Paper envisages their replacement by the end of the current decade with two larger aircraft capable of providing a more useful transport capability. A third aircraft would allow for improved maritime surveillance over Ireland's vast (doubled in size in 2007 to 480,000 square kilometres) exclusive economic zone. It would ensure that overseas transport and patrol missions placed less of a strain on domestic taskings. To save costs, the third aircraft need not be bought with an additional set of mission systems (search radar etc.) These systems may make up to 40% of unit cost. On modern types, modular systems installed on an aircraft scheduled for maintenance or transport duties can easily be removed and fitted to another airframe.

Young Fine Gael calls for the following resources for the Naval Service:

- Equipment of the forthcoming Multi Role Vessel with an enhanced defensive capability. Cost: €40 million.

The Multi Role Vessel, which will replace the current Naval Service flagship LE Eithne and is intended to be used extensively on overseas mission, should be equipped to operate in increased threat areas. Recent fatal attacks using anti shipping missiles and suicide attack boats by Houthi rebels off Yemen have highlighted the dangers that may be posed at sea even by non- state actors. This vessel will be in service for at least thirty years. Investment in such systems as an air search radar, decoy system and a missile and/ or gun based weapons system able to intercept incoming missiles would safeguard the crew. Such systems are commonplace on similar foreign vessels. It would future proof the design, ensuring that large sums of money will not be spent on a vessel that is severely limited in its availability to deploy to the regions where it is needed most. It would also allow the Naval Service to once more provide a radar equipped air defence capability during such events as important state visits, which has not been the case since the decommissioning of the LE Eithne's air search radar in 2006. Installing missiles capable of attacking ground based and naval targets would also increase the DF's overall artillery capabilities and enable the Multi Role Vessel to respond to attacks.

- Increase the number of ships operated by the Naval Service from eight to nine as soon as possible. Cost: €5 million.

Whilst the Naval Service has seen significant investment in recent years, the goal of a nine ship Naval Service set out in the 2015 White Paper should be achieved and maintained following the entry into service of the fourth Samuel Beckett class patrol vessel next year. The extra expenditure proposed would ensure that it is not necessary to prematurely retire one of the current pair of Coastal Patrol Vessels to ensure that the new ship is fully crewed. A nine ship service will ensure that frequent overseas deployments will not lead to capability gaps in Irish waters, which are under policed as it stands.

- Development of a long endurance naval Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) capability. Cost: €10 million.

The new Samuel Beckett class of patrol vessels is capable of operating remotely piloted aircraft (sometimes referred to as drones). The purchase of long endurance RPA systems would greatly increase the reach of the ships by enabling persistent surveillance of objects of interest, for example vessels suspected of smuggling, at stand-off ranges. The deployment of a long-range RPA capability would be an important yet cost effective step towards fully realising the potential of the new ships.

If additional funding becomes available, Young Fine Gael calls for the following:

- Enhancement of helicopter and airlift capabilities should be prioritised.
- Additional helicopters with close air support capabilities, such as H135Ms, should be purchased.
- Larger, military transport helicopters, suitable for deployment and transport of troops overseas, should be obtained.
- An artillery missile system (MLRS), such as the M270 operated in the UK should be purchased.
- An extra, larger fixed-wing transport aircraft should be purchased. The primary role of this aircraft would be airlift of troops, supplies and equipment.



YOUNG FINE GAEL



Fine Gael National Headquarters, 51 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2
Phone: 01 619 8444 Fax: 01 662 5046
Email: yfg@yfg.ie Web: www.yfg.ie