

Ógra Fianna Fáil Budget Submission 2024



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Dublin 2,
D02 NX40

Minister Michael McGrath,
Department of Expenditure and Reform,
Government Buildings,
Upper Merrion Street, Dublin 2,
D02 R583

Dear Minister McGrath,

I am pleased to submit this budget submission for your consideration in the upcoming 2024 Budget.

After close consultation with members across Ireland, I am happy to be in a position to communicate our high level proposals in this centralised document. These proposals are both short and long term in their scope, but act as an expression of the vision that members of Ógra Fianna Fáil have.

Ireland, like most of the world, is still facing unprecedented challenges in addressing the cost of living, while trying to fulfil its Climate Change obligations. While progress has been made to address some of these challenges, we can't afford to be complacent. In addition, Ireland's cities including Dublin are in need of policing and funding is going to be required to facilitate this long term reform.

Despite these challenges, Ireland's economy is in a strong position. Based on this strong economic status, we believe that further investment can be made in Ireland's people, Industry and society in much the same way that previous Fianna Fáil Governments have historically done with major ambition.

We look forward to seeing the outcome of the budget this October and the inclusion of some of our proposals contained herein.

Is mise le meas,

Brian O'Connor,

Policy Director , Ógra Fianna Fáil.

Cost of Living

As of July 2023, the consumer price index is 5.8%. For nearly two years, Ireland's consumer price index has been greater than 5%. It is clear that the cost of living has increased due to inflation. In last year's budget, a very ambitious cost of living package was introduced in addition to the annual budget which was welcomed by many.

Ógra Fianna Fáil proposes that this measure be repeated for Budget 2024 as the Global and European economy continues to remain volatile due to challenges imposed by the war in Ukraine among other macroeconomic shock factors. Within this cost of living package, we are proposing a series of cross cutting measures that we hope will address this issue.

Tax Rates and Tax Bands

We welcome last year's update to tax bands to be €40,000@20% and 40% thereafter. This was the first change to a tax band since at least 2018 and we would welcome further increases to the tax bands for young earners.

One such way to do this would be to introduce an exemption to USC for everyone under the age of 35 inclusive, or everyone earning below the median income. By targeting tax cuts at those 35 and under, we are providing relief to those on the lowest incomes in the earliest stages of their career while helping many of them save for the likes of a mortgage deposit.

Minimum Wage

Ógra wishes to repeat its calls to ask for the Minimum Wage to be for citizens aged 16-19 to be the same as citizens over the age of 20 and over at €11.30 per hour.

Social Welfare

Social Welfare payments are currently set at a lower rate for people under the age of 25. To address the cost of living, we propose that Jobseekers' allowance for those aged 18-24 to be increased to the same rate of those aged 25.

Fuel Reductions

We recognise the recent measures that have been put in place for reducing the excise duty on fuel. With a phased approach being applied to the re-introduction of excise duty, we are of the view that regular reviews are required to ensure that a sudden rise in International fuel prices may require these measures to be re-introduced.

Solidarity Payments for Hospitality

There is currently a shortage of staff in the area of hospitality. Students and young people are at the forefront of the hospitality industry especially in peak times during holiday seasons. With this in mind, we are calling for a standalone solidarity payment to be made to hospitality workers at the peak times of Christmas and St Patrick's Day.

Education

Fee Reduction

Ógra Fianna Fáil was pleased with the reduction in fees in last year's budget. This was welcomed not only by us but by all 3rd level students across Ireland.

As 3rd level students prepare for their return to education, we propose that Minister for Education Norma Foley, Minister Simon Harris and Minister of State Niall Collins facilitate a continued reduction of student contribution fees relative to 2022/2023 fees of €2,000 for eligible students with the aim to reduce these fees further over the coming years.

SUSI Grants

Ógra was pleased to see that SUSI grants were increased in last year's budget with a minimum increase of 10% for all eligible students.

These grants are an essential support for students who struggle to sustain themselves financially during an essential time of their lives as they start to build their careers and lives.

As the cost of living crisis continues, and students continue to experience a higher cost of living than previous years, Ógra Fianna Fáil is calling for the SUSI maintenance grant to continue to be raised by a further 10-15% to reflect inflationary increases.

In addition, we are calling for income thresholds at all Band Levels and Special Rates to continue to be increased.

Extension of Erasmus+ support for NI students post Brexit

The Erasmus+ programme is designed to offer work and study opportunities in another participating country to expand skills and cultural knowledge. The most commonly known and utilised is the study abroad opportunities during third level studies.

Only participating countries may apply, and due to the withdrawal of the UK from EU activities on 31 December 2020, NI institutions cannot apply for new projects. Existing projects wrapped in May 2023 in previously participative organisations in NI, due to non possibility of further extension post Brexit. The Irish Government committed to supporting students in NI in accessing the programme for the 2023/24 through shared island opportunities.

Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for an extension of this programme for the 2024/2025 academic year which will fall under this budget as applicants for that period will be in spring 2024 to apply).

Springboard

In addressing a shortage of skilled tradespeople in Ireland, we also need to acknowledge our shortage of services oriented skills. The Springboard initiative is a great opportunity for young people, both employed and unemployed to reskill, join the workforce and/or increase their income in the process. We call for more funding for the Springboard programme's promotion and volume of courses to be made available.



Multi-Disciplinary Programme

The Multidisciplinary team approach in Primary School is designed to offer a range of HSE services, therefore it will be a joint approach by both the Department of Health and Department of Education.

Each team will consist of the following services Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Clinical Psychology, NEPs Psychology and a medical practitioner where needed. This umbrella approach will be provided to all mainstream Primary schools throughout the country irrespective of DEIS status.

In an ever evolving Education system, while we are making great progress in the areas of mental health and wellbeing, free school books and transport for children, and a decrease in class sizes, it is paramount that the needs of all children are met with an early intervention of a team approach as in most cases, children with additional needs see an overlap in services needed.

As it stands, these services are available as stand alone services and unfortunately proving inefficient and ineffective. When all of these services are amalgamated into one disciplinary team they will be more widely available, creating opportunity for collaborative early intervention and support plans being created by the professionals to meet all the needs of the children.

Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the funding to be made available for this new approach to childhood services to be rolled out to all Primary Schools in the 2024 budget.

Language Supports

In addition to the above, Ógra Fianna Fáil is advocating the development of a package which will support Ukrainian children who have been displaced and need specific aid in language and learning supports such as trauma and grief counselling.



Transport

Ireland Project 2040

Ógra wishes to welcome the ambition that has been expressed within the National Development Plan 2023-2030 and Ireland Project 2040 Programme. Ógra wishes to express its support for the continued delivery of the projects and programmes committed to by the Government under this programme with long term capital expenditure required from a variety of sources including the European Investment Bank.

Free Public Transport

There is a very ambitious programme of work committed within Ireland project 2040. However, while we can be optimistic for the future ambition of these programmes of work, Ógra Fianna Fáil believes that a similar level of ambition can be applied within the next 12-18 months by granting free public transport for all.

Agriculture

Ogra Fianna Fáil recently published its Agriculture Policy. To enable the delivery of this Programme, Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for both current and capital expenditure to enable the promotion of the policies within the Programme. Examples of these include

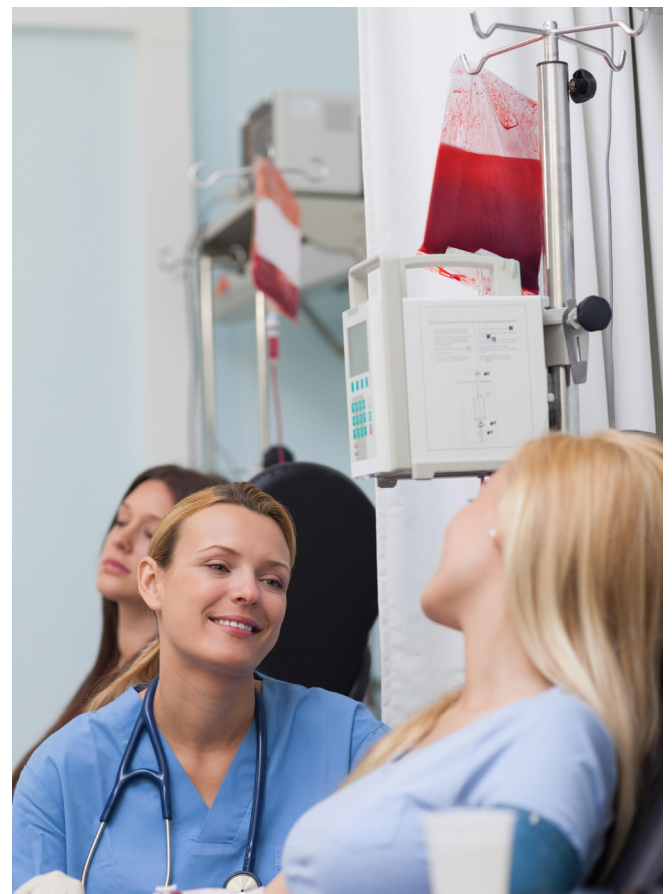
- Funding for Anaerobic Digesters and a respective grant scheme to enable its rollout among farmer communities.
- Funding for Multi-Species swards beyond the current rate of €50 per 12kg bag of multi-species seed purchased.
- Funding for a dedicated team of Agricultural Liaison Officers employed by DAFM to facilitate a greater understanding of the many schemes that farmers can and can't apply for.

Health

Vaccinations for students and young people

Ireland can be proud of its vaccination programme for COVID-19 in Irish society in 2022 which resulted in a full re-opening that year. That said, there continues to be a risk of the spread of disease within Irish society.

Education settings such as schools and universities can be critical hubs for the spread of disease ranging from COVID-19 to Varicella (Chickenpox) and Mumps orthorubulavirus. With this in mind, we are calling for greater funding to be offered to the Department of Education to facilitate more routine childhood vaccinations in schools, with an option to offer it to be distributed to both 2nd and 3rd level schools and campuses also.



Housing

Student -Capital Universities Accommodation supports for

Student accommodation in Ireland is a regular item for discussion and as students start their 2023/2024 academic year, this is no exception. As a party which holds accessibility to education as a core principle, we must ensure students can reasonably afford on-campus housing if offered such accommodation. Given housing costs are at times multiple times more expensive than the much-discussed tuition fees for students, we must consider the impacts our lack of action in this area will have on areas such as educational attainment and social mobility.

Accommodation for students is provided by both the private rental market and on-site accommodation which is owned and operated by universities. Housing for All is one of the Irish Government's most impressive and ambitious programmes of work. However, its remit doesn't apply for student accommodation. We are therefore asking the Irish Government to provide 3rd level institutions with short, medium and long term grants and funding to be in a position to build further accommodation for 3rd level students.

In addition, these grants should be conditional on 3rd level institutions addressing short term accommodation costs for students by taking immediate actions to prevent further increases to the current cost of rent of accommodation.

Housing for all - Labour Force Enablers

The Housing for All Programme is an ambitious multi-year programme of work. However, it still requires enablers to drive its delivery. One key part of this is the people who work in the construction sector.

Ireland's construction sector labour force is seeing major losses to other markets such as the UK, Australia and the Middle East. This is especially the case for skilled vocational workers. To address this shortfall, there is a requirement to increase the incentive for construction workers to return to Ireland. There are a variety of options to do this including tax incentives and grants to ensure that these workers can be incentivized to return to Ireland and enable the delivery of the Housing for all Programme.

In addition, following our previous point regarding Springboard, we see Springboard as a fantastic opportunity to further support the rollout of apprenticeships across Ireland to train skilled workers.



Defence

Pay and Benefit Promotion and Transparency

The Defence Force Commission's recommendations on pay are yet to be enacted. While the commission's remit did not formally relate to pay, its findings have credibility which need to be respected. Ógra Fianna Fáil supports the Commissions' recommendations as detailed in section 8.4.6, highlights of which include ; that greater transparency of the wider benefits of membership of the Defence Forces should become a central feature of future recruitment campaigns, which should be supported by external expertise.

Pay Review and Bargaining

In addition, we note the role that the Commission's reference to a pay review and pay bargaining in section 8.4.4. The Report notes the role that the Department of Defence and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has in setting up a permanent pay review body. Ógra believes that this should be committed under Budget 2024. This would add certainty and enable the retention of key personnel.



Justice & Home Affairs

An Garda Síochána

The recent attacks in Dublin that are prominently covered in Irish media have provoked major debate on the strength of Irish Policing. Structural reforms to an Garda Síochána have reduced Garda presence in both rural and urban Ireland. This anecdotal evidence of greater crime in both rural and urban Ireland has been confirmed by statistics published by the Central Statistics Officer.

Ógra Fianna Fáil believes that short term reform of an Garda Síochána can be implemented within the duration of the 33rd Dáil, enabled by Budget 2024.

Key initiatives to initiate acute reform of an Garda Síochána may include

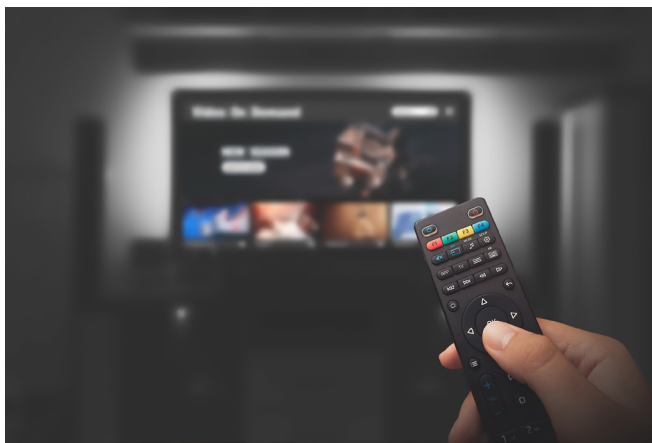
- Increased pay and allowances for members of an Garda Síochána. One such example of this would be to increase the pay for Garda Trainees from €184 per week to €350 per week for their 33-week training period
- Increase the allowances to An Garda Síochána to enable it to review the levels of protection, equipment and training provided to members of An Garda Síochána. Including the calls for the introduction of tasers.

Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht

TV Licence

Ógra Fianna Fáil calls for the phasing out of the TV License Fee beginning with a reduction in Budget 2024 & complete abolition in Budget 2025.

The TV License Fee is a regressive charge, those on lower incomes and many young people feel the negative impact of it more than those on higher incomes. We propose a move towards funding the national broadcaster via general taxation, therefore ensuring a fairer distribution of the burden across income and age groups.



Gaeltacht Trips

Arising from our recently published Gaeilge Policy, Ógra Fianna Fáil recognises the difficulty experienced by students at both 2nd and 3rd level education in maintaining their Irish language fluency during the summer months. We recommend that a place on an Irish language summer course in the Gaeltacht be made available to all students, funded entirely by the government. Students would be required to apply to the Department of Education to avail of this funding.

State and Public Services

One further position that Ógra has from its Gaeilge Policy is that all state and public services should be available in Irish and English. Ensuring that both Irish and English speakers have access to the highest quality without compromise, Ógra Fianna Fáil calls on state and public body employers to create jobs for Irish-speaking services. We believe that investment is required in this.



