Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2020

Council Recommendations

The Competitiveness Challenge identifies a range of recommendations that address both immediate competitiveness issues, and more medium-term challenges aimed at enhancing Ireland's competitiveness and productivity performance. The National Competitiveness Council has a primary focus on competitiveness and productivity, and through this lens it has identified four broad challenges that will be critical to economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19 and has made recommendations to Government that will lay solid foundations today for a speedy and balanced recovery in order to secure an improvement in the standard of living for all of society.

It is imperative that progress is made on these recommendations by the relevant Government Departments and State bodies over the coming year in order to ensure that Ireland remains competitive and so that living standards and our quality of life can continue to improve. In recognition of the fact that some recommendations require the co-ordinated action of a number of bodies, the Council list all of the responsible actors. In these cases, the first mentioned actor has the overall responsibility of the recommendation.

Chapter 2: Support Ireland's Workers and Leverage Opportunities for Upskilling

Recommendation 2.1: Strengthen supports for Jobseekers

    (i)   Publish the evaluation of the JobPlus programme and ensure that the programme provides an effective response in the context of the COVID-19 labour market conditions.

    (ii)   Increase the capacity of the Intreo Public Employment Service to provide additional case officers for job search and employment supports to jobseekers.

Responsibility: Department of Social Protection

Recommendation 2.2: Intensify efforts to boost high-level ICT graduate output from the education and training system, in line with the target (70% of annual expected demand) set out in Technology Skills 2022. Publish a Technology Skills 2022 interim progress report.

Responsibility: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Higher Education Authority; SOLAS; Skillnet Ireland

Recommendation 2.3: Deliver on the Future Jobs Ireland target of bringing the proportion of workers with basic digital skills in Ireland at least in line with or above the EU average by 2025 (EU 2025 target: 70%).

Responsibility: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; SOLAS

Recommendation 2.4: Address the lack of awareness among SME managers of the range of management development opportunities and supports currently available.

Responsibility: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Skillnet Ireland; Enterprise Ireland; Local Enterprise Offices; SOLAS; Higher Education Authority; Business representative bodies

Recommendation 2.5: Increase active cooperation at an operational level between management training providers, with a focus on sharing data, knowledge and good practice, to ensure the coherence and effectiveness of the overall training offer from the perspective of training participants.

Responsibility: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Skillnet Ireland; SOLAS; Education and Training Boards; Higher Education Authority; Enterprise Ireland; Local Enterprise Offices; Private providers

Recommendation 2.6: Address the demand for skills arising from the COVID-19 pandemic

  (i) Publish the findings from the COVID-19 Industry Insights Series outlining the skills needs of enterprises in the context of COVID-19 labour market conditions.

  (ii) Examine the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on SMEs and engage with other enterprise agencies and industry bodies to design targeted industry-led responses to meet business needs in sectors severely impacted by the enterprise and labour market challenges posed by COVID-19.

Responsibility: Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Skillnet Ireland

Chapter 3: Address Climate Action in a Competitiveness Context

Recommendation 3.1: Undertake research with close engagement with businesses and key stakeholders, to identify a range of CO_2 abatement opportunities and technologies, by company size and sector, that would enable businesses to decarbonise in line with Ireland's national targets.

Responsibility: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Enterprise Ireland; IDA Ireland; Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

Recommendation 3.2: Assess the carbon mitigation incentives and supports available to enterprises to determine whether they are fit for purpose in achieving Ireland's climate targets and identify areas where further intervention is needed to support companies to decarbonise.

Responsibility: Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland; Enterprise Ireland; IDA Ireland

Recommendation 3.3: Establish a one-stop-shop environmental hub and website that would allow businesses to assess their carbon footprint and access information on the supports available to help them to decarbonise.

Responsibility: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; Enterprise Ireland; IDA Ireland; Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland; Irish Water; Environmental Protection Agency

Recommendation 3.4: Decarbonise the gas network

(i) Provide a clear policy signal, as part of Ireland's Long-Term Strategy, that the gas network will be carbon neutral by 2050.

(ii) Develop a pathway of the steps that need to be taken to 2050 to decarbonise the gas network. This should include an early and detailed assessment of future policy options and cost-efficient renewable energy sources that can be used, with prioritisation for 'no regrets' investments in Ireland's energy infrastructure.

Responsibility: Department of Environment, Climate and Communications

Chapter 4: Invest Strategically in Ireland's Physical Infrastructure

Recommendation 4.1: Provide supports such as resource packs and templates to complement the updated Public Spending Code and support public bodies in meeting their requirements in evaluating, planning and managing public investments.

Responsibility: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Recommendation 4.2: Challenge regions and cities to learn from best practice across the country on ways to maximise efficiency in order to improve the business environment for local enterprises.

Responsibility: Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government; Regional Assemblies; Local Authorities

Recommendation 4.3: Complete a comprehensive mapping exercise of the types and capacity of remote working facilities currently available in order to identify where gaps exist to meet local and regional business needs. Create a single classification, website and central directory to inform individuals and enterprises of the facilities available in their locality.

Responsibility: Western Development Commission; Department of Rural and Community Development; Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Department of Environment, Climate and Communications; Local Authorities

Recommendation 4.4: Prioritise the roll-out of better and greener transport links so that traffic gridlock is avoided when the economic recovery gathers pace and more people return to work.

Responsibility: Department of Transport; Department of Environment, Climate and Communications

Recommendation 4.5: Establish the proposed Commission on Housing without delay and ensure it has sufficient resources to deliver on its work.

Responsibility: Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government

Chapter 5: Resolve Long-Standing Issues

Recommendation 5.1: Ensure that SMEs are aware of the financing options available to them by progressing the launch of the Business Finance Advisory Hub that should signpost learning options for SMEs to improve financial knowledge.

Responsibility: Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Recommendation 5.2: Personal Injuries Guidelines

> (i) Adopt Guidelines on Personal Injuries.

Responsibility: Judicial Council (PIGC)

> (ii) Monitor the use of these Guidelines and their impact on award levels, and ultimately on the cost of insurance.

Responsibility: Department of Justice

Recommendation 5.3: Take action to bring legal costs for businesses into line with other common law jurisdictions and improve access to justice, primarily by implementing the recommendations of the Review of the Administration of Civil Justice Group.

Responsibility: Department of Justice

Recommendation 5.4: Prioritise the implementation of the proposed actions designed to make housing and renting more affordable as outlined in the Programme for Government, and periodically review the effectiveness of these measures to determine whether they are sufficient or need modification.

Responsibility: Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government

Recommendation 5.5: Make childcare costs more affordable by adopting the recommendations from the Expert Group currently examining the funding model that will allow for the delivery of accessible, affordable, high-quality childcare. Prioritise the implementation of other actions set out in the PfG designed to make high-quality early learning and care and school-age childcare more accessible and affordable.

Responsibility: Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration