

Give Us The Night

Night-time Culture & Economy

The Next Steps

In response to the current crisis faced by the events sector and night-time industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we propose a number of measures for government to implement when the industry restarts.

While August 10th (Phase 5) is the projected date of return for the industry, there are currently too many ifs and buts about how this will work under social distancing rules, and how businesses will survive with so many restrictions in place.

Rescue packages will of course be necessary to save many businesses. In addition to the adjustments needed on VAT, excise duty and commercial rates, there are other actions that will need to be taken to not only save the industry, but to stimulate and revolutionise its economy in the long-term.

In response to **Give Us The Night's** call for reform and modernisation within the night-time industry and events sector, all of the main political parties made pre-election pledges to help address long-running obstacles faced by our industry, including:

- › Appointment of night mayors to oversee nightlife in each city
- › Development of multipurpose event spaces
- › Establishment of local nightlife committees
- › Expansion of 24-hour transport services
- › Introduction of a night venue licence
- › Legislating for later opening hours for venues and bars
- › Local authorities to organise more events in public spaces
- › Review and updating of licensing laws

Given the unprecedented situation that the industry is now in, there is no time to waste in carrying out all of the above, to improve conditions for night-time businesses, venues, event promoters, performers and workers, whose future is now uncertain.

Our **9-point plan** outlines our vision for a vibrant and sustainable night-time economy in Ireland.

- › Establish National Task Force
- › Stakeholder Workshops
- › Amend Trading Hours
- › Codification and Modernisation of Venue Licensing
- › Abolish Special Exemption Orders
- › Filling The Festival Void
- › Supporting Youth Culture
- › Planning: Pop-Up Events, Zoning and Multi-Use Spaces
- › Effective State Support for Night Culture

1. Establish National Task Force

Culture, tourism, transport, policing, public safety, licensing, local government and planning, are all important areas to focus on in the discussion around the night-time industry. To lead this discussion, a government task force should be established straight away.

The task force needs to take direction from stakeholders within all sectors of the night-time industry, devising a plan that will aid a short-term economic recovery and strengthen the industry as it steps forward into a new era. This task force should be ready to think 'outside of the box' and to trial as many reasonable ideas as possible put forward by industry stakeholders.

2. Stakeholder Workshops

City and county councils to host online workshops with local stakeholders and relevant officials to properly evaluate the issues ahead for the night-time industry. Each workshop should produce a report specific to their area and also help to outline the needs of stakeholders in a large city, versus those in more remote or less populated areas. Each report should be considered by the national task force, who will draft a framework for reopening the night-time economy in Phase 5.

This framework should identify short-term actions, and propose reform that will place Ireland on an even level with our neighbouring European countries (and remove any competitive disadvantage) as we attempt to reignite tourism in Ireland, increase domestic tourism, and attract locals into their nearest town or city. The stakeholder workshops could also facilitate permanent advisory groups to oversee nightlife in each city or large district.

3. Amend Trading Hours

We welcome the Government's suggestion that staggered hours could be operated to increase the potential for workers to work within a 24-hour period, due to the limitation of numbers allowed in the workplace at one time. This principle could also be applied to consumers entering spaces for hospitality and entertainment.

In the short-term, to encourage these businesses to reopen with greater confidence, more flexible trading hours should be given to any on-trade licensed business if it may increase its turnover. This will not aid every business but it will be welcomed by many. In the medium to long-term we propose two options for trading hours.

Option 1: Introduce an entirely flexible model as in the UK. From 2005, this allowed establishments to set their own specific times, which they then strictly adhered to. Management of licensing decisions was also handed over to local authorities, who can now fix/restrict trading hours on a case by case basis. This is a far more progressive and pro-business approach than the current 'one-size-fits-all' system in Ireland.

Option 2: A staggered closing time system between pubs, restaurants, late bars and night venues. e.g. 12.30am/3am/6am.

4. Codification and Modernisation of Venue Licensing

There are approximately 450 venues used for entertainment in Ireland (not including gambling or sport). Many are not being utilised to their full potential, due to costly and over-restrictive licensing conditions. The creation of at least one new licence type, to meet modern requirements, must now happen. A specific licence should be obtainable for all venues that host a regular schedule of entertainment and cultural events. This could include music, comedy, theatre, dance, performance art etc.

Consideration should also be given to casual dining/restaurants, and the extent of entertainment that they can provide. The 1935 Public Dance Halls Act should also be overwritten and replaced, to reflect modern times beyond the dancehall era (which ended 40 years ago).

Given the current COVID-19 crisis and the strain these conditions already put on businesses, it is now time to remove old disused legislation and to codify all venue licensing laws under one new bill. This should coincide with the introduction of a more straightforward online application system for all event and venue licences, which currently falls far short of international standards.

5. Abolish Special Exemption Orders

The special exemption order (SEO) fee system has been a contentious issue within the night-time industry for years, particularly since the price hike of SEOs in 2008. For any venue to open beyond normal pub hours, they must currently pay €410 per night (plus legal fees) regardless of size.

Charging venues additional fees to operate during the standard trading hours of their business, has always been a dubious practice, and will be unmanageable in these difficult times ahead, particularly for small and mid-sized venues. SEO costs should be removed to encourage more night-time trading and employment.

SEO figures have been in steady decline for over a decade (applications decreased by 55% since 2008). In total they take in just €14.5m per year (including excise duty) for the entire country, while creating a barrier for new or existing businesses to open late. The monthly applications are a waste of court time, Garda time, and puts unnecessary financial strain on venues.

6. Filling The Festival Void

The Government need to develop a strategy that will help the events and entertainment industry both during and after the current COVID-19 crisis. Large-scale festivals will be the last type of event permitted to take place, as restrictions are removed.

For artists/musicians/DJs, freelancers, small businesses, traders and general workers, a significant part of their earnings come from festivals, a market that is likely to shrink considerably. Most festivals are postponed until 2021 and others may not return at all.

It is an opportune time to bring more events back into our main urban centres, as well as in suburban areas and rural villages. Ireland will be missing a considerable amount of tourist numbers, and the offering of regular local entertainment and events must improve to appeal more to those residing in the country.

With small outdoor events being more amenable to social distancing in the short-term, these events can benefit from the expertise of festival production and security teams. Pop-up food traders could provide a service to pubs or community spaces without kitchen facilities. Production equipment like fencing, sound rigs, generators, portable toilets, and water systems, could all be used in venues and public spaces, helping festival service providers to recoup lost earnings.

Many artists and performers will have a long wait until they can return to regular employment, both domestically and abroad. For touring artists this problem will be compounded by the potential shutdown of flights leaving Ireland for the rest of the year. A vibrant domestic night-time economy can go some way to supporting all of these artists' careers, and recreating a healthy venue circuit within the island of Ireland. We believe the only option now is for the Government, councils and industry at large to come together and adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

7. Supporting Youth Culture

Many social issues faced by young people are caused by a lack of local facilities and spaces to socialise. Ireland has failed its young population in this regard, by having no specific strategy for youth culture at night. Despite Ireland's long history of dancing, many areas don't have a place to dance anymore, with dance licence applications dropping 45% since licensing amendments in 2008.

Some people are not suited to working in the retail and service industries or an office environment, however working in the creative night-time industry is where their talent truly shines. Whether they're working, performing, promoting or just attending events, being part of a community within the night-time sector, provides the same sense of belonging as being in a sports club, political party, or any group brought together by a shared interest.

Nightlife has always attracted marginalised groups and communities, those who feel like they don't fit in anywhere else, who channel their creativity in a unique way. Ireland's network of young event organisers is larger and more extensive than it has ever been, yet the obstacles and red-tape laid in front of them to even run a local event, are mean-spirited and oppressive.

Decision makers need to start trusting and believing more in the young population, and allow them to put their positive stamp on Ireland. The state should also recognise the rapid growth of urban music and electronic music, which have dominated festival line-ups in the last few years, yet have few suitable venues to operate in on a weekly basis. The standard offering of live music and traditional music forms can still be relevant, but in order to move with the times and give young people more of a reason to go out, modern music forms need to be accommodated more.

8. Planning: Pop-Up Events, Zoning and Multi-Use Spaces

Allow for more temporary use of buildings and public spaces for pop-up events. These spaces could include pubs with sufficient space, community halls, car parks, public spaces, unused warehouse spaces etc. This could happen in conjunction with the creation of a personal temporary event licence.

In England and Wales, an equivalent Temporary Events Notice (TEN) allows an organiser to host a limited amount of pop-up events per year. Government should direct councils to apply a swift and flexible system for temporary change of use, subject to fire and safety approval.

Councils should also designate districts specifically for cultural and entertainment use, in their forthcoming development plans. Furthermore, they could be pro-active in a night-time strategy that takes into account the needs of venues and residents alike. For instance, zoning for nightlife on the outskirts of city centres, away from residential properties, could become a feature of city development.

Establish 'multi-use' buildings in planning classification. Facilitate the fast-tracking of industrial/commercial buildings to become multi-use spaces. Whether it is for a market, cafe, pop-up shops, co-working space, studios, events etc., many organisations can operate within the same space. This could be particularly helpful to those who cannot still afford to rent a standalone premises or who want to start their own new enterprise after recently losing their employment. By grouping more of these businesses together, the multi-use space model will help to attract investment into the night-time economy and cultural sector.

Unused spaces were put to quick and positive use by creative communities during the last financial downturn. e.g. Block T, Mabos, Basic Space (Dublin). However, too many spaces still lay idle. More co-operatives need to be formed in local areas, and access to space is vital for this.

9. Effective State Support for Night Culture

'Fixing' the night-time economy will take a number of actions, the effects of which will not all be felt immediately. Changing the public's perception of what a night out can be in their local area, needs state support. To start, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht should continue its work on night culture, and also allow the cultural institutions to be used on a more regular basis for many types of events. The Arts Council should also ensure that funded arts centres and theatres are accessible to a greater range of events and local collectives.

The concept of Culture Night should also be revised, to build on the work already being done but to aim for a more regular programme of events spread throughout the year. A defining feature of Culture Night is the mix of age groups socialising together, which sadly is not a regular occurrence on a normal weekend night. The key to a diverse and vibrant night-time economy, is a diverse range of things to do, that will attract people of all ages into their local area at night. The sooner Ireland can be proactive with this, the sooner we can reconfigure and improve the experience of nightlife for everybody.