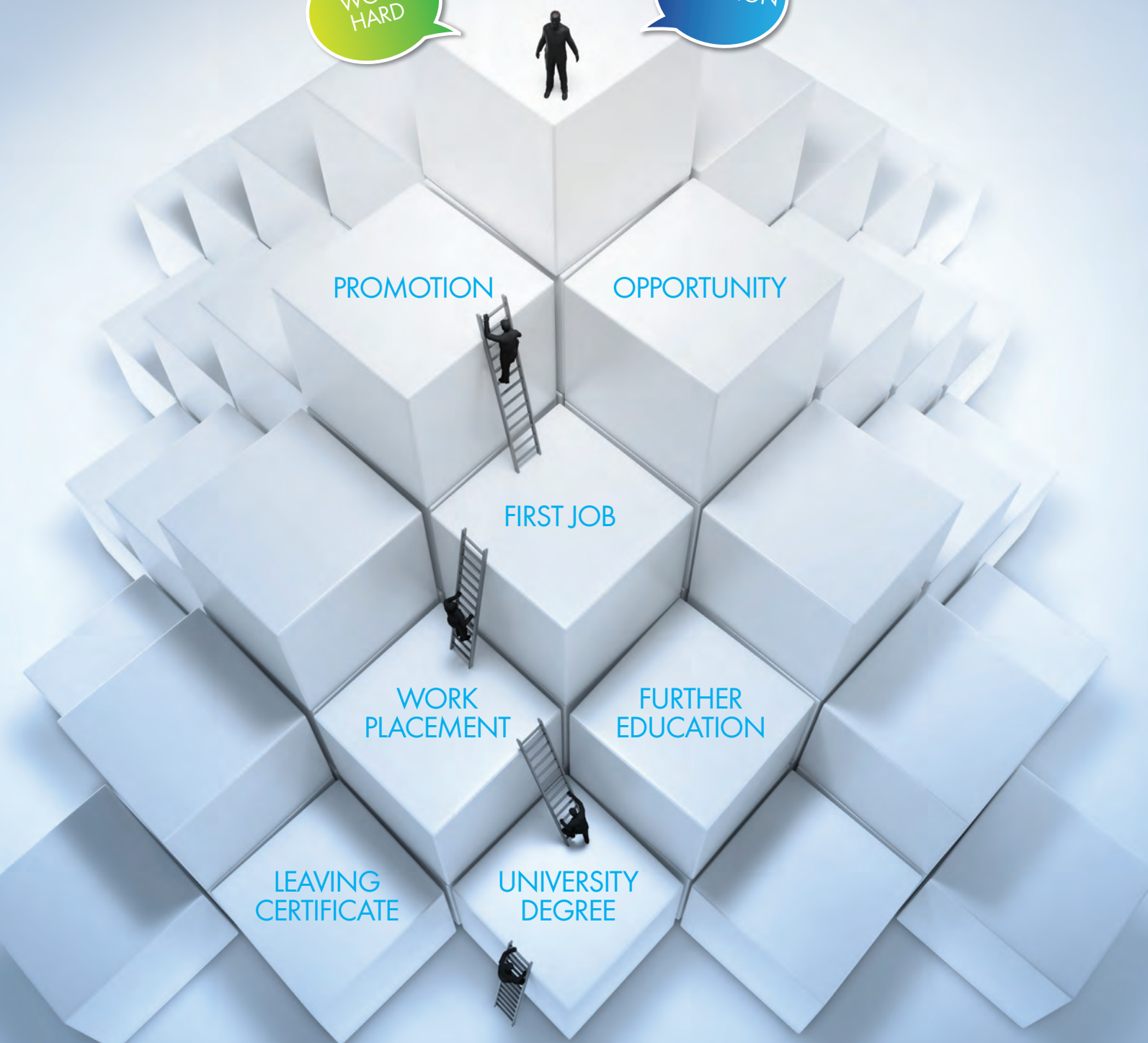


## A YOUNG FINE GAEL POLICY ON YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT ★



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## FOREWORD FROM THE PRESIDENT OF YFG

Dear Friend,

Youth Unemployment has been a blight that our generation has suffered from. For far too long, our brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, partners and friends have had to pack their backs and leave this country in order to get that one thing that the vast majority of us strive for – a job.

It is an issue that has not received the attention that it fully deserves until recently. We, as a country, very much run the risk of suffering

from another “brain drain” when we educate our young and force them to leave, taking their education and skills far and wide allowing other countries to benefit from what we have created.

Young Fine Gael recognises that this needs to stop and we want to change this now.

I am tired of seeing my friends wasting their time in a dole queue when they could be the next leaders in society. It is crucially important that we get this situation solved as soon as possible because without the next generation - who will build our homes, teach our kids, protect our neighbourhoods and treat our sick.

This policy document is the first of three detailed policy proposals that Young Fine Gael will be proposing over the coming months. It contains radical, new and different proposals that we believe can and will give young Ireland hope again.

We want people to seize their potential. We want people to reach their aspirations.

We want young Ireland to have a career, not just a job.

*Dale McDermott*

**President  
Young Fine Gael**



## FOREWORD FROM THE DIRECTOR OF POLICY

Youth Unemployment is currently one of the major issues facing young people in Ireland. Most of us know friends and family that have gone abroad for work, some by choice others by necessity. It is therefore incumbent on those of us still here to help improve the situation for young people in term of employment.

This is one of the reasons that the National Executive has prioritised youth unemployment alongside mental health and third level funding for the Policy Sub-Committee. This is the second policy

to come from the Policy Sub-Committee since its establishment in January and I am very proud of all the members of the committee for the hard work and dedication they have put into developing this document.

There is no easy answer to youth unemployment and some of the policies laid out here will need some sacrifice from both those on the live register and those in employment. Reform is needed in many areas from our tax system to education to social welfare.

This is now our opportunity to help reform Ireland so that opportunities will exist for those who have remained and those who will return to live and work. We need to support those who wish to work, whether it is starting out in farming or setting up their own business. We should develop comprehensive policies to support young people in whichever sector of the economy they wish to start out in.

I hope that you find this document insightful and informative and will spark debate on how we can tackle the scourge of youth unemployment.

*Stephen Spillane*

**Director of Policy  
Young Fine Gael**



# EXITING THE CRISIS, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

## YFG's Policy for Youth Unemployment in Ireland

### Introduction

Youth unemployment is one the European Union's greatest challenges. 24%<sup>1</sup> of young Europeans don't have a job therefore we must act here and now. Ireland is currently exiting from the financial crisis, but the area of youth unemployment is still an area where more focus is needed.. While the Youth Guarantee does attempt to keep young people in the system until the Crisis passes, we believe that we should take this opportunity to radically overhaul how we deal with youth unemployment.

Currently, youth unemployment in the EU is twice as high as adult unemployment. In Greece and Spain, 58.3%<sup>2</sup> and 54.6%<sup>3</sup> of young people respectively are facing unemployment. In Ireland the youth unemployment rate stands at 26%<sup>4</sup> in comparison to overall unemployment rate of 11.8%<sup>5</sup>. While the situation is not as bad here in comparison to Greece and Spain, the current rates cannot be sustained. To help reduce youth unemployment we have suggested reforms in the following areas:

- Government
- The Education System
- Young Farmers
- Youth Entrepreneurships
- Social Welfare
- Tax System
- Childcare

We believe that by implementing reforms in these areas we can help tackle the structural problems that are the root cause of Youth Unemployment and ensure that should there be an economic downturn of this magnitude in the future that the state and the social welfare and education systems are prepared.



*Back Row L-R: Ian Hutchinson, Stephen Spillane, Padraig O'Sullivan, Michael Ward  
Front Row: L-R: Emily Murphy, Aoibhinn Tormey, Aaron Sweeney*

## The Policy Sub-Committee

This policy was developed by the Young Fine Gael Policy Sub-Committee with the support of the Young Fine Gael National Executive. The membership of the committee is:

- Stephen Spillane, Director of Policy
- Padraig O'Sullivan, National Secretary
- Aaron Sweeney
- Aoibhinn Tormey
- Emily Murphy
- Ian Hutchinson
- Michael Ward

The committee was set up in January of 2014 following the decision of the National Executive. The Committee's brief is to develop policy for YFG on youth unemployment, mental health and third level funding.

The Policy Sub-Committee is grateful to the support it has received from the National Executive, the National Youth Officer, Kate Acheson, and the membership of Young Fine Gael.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### GOVERNMENT

1. That An Taoiseach should appoint a Minister of State for Youth Employment and Enterprise Affairs.

### EDUCATION

1. Mandatory work placement for all third level students to ensure that third level students have more practical experience leaving education.
2. More emphasis on multilingualism to help our students compete in a more globalised world.
3. Mandatory Leaving Cert or Leaving Cert Applied before leaving post-primary education to level the field and make sure that all students get the best start.
4. Develop a comprehensive system for young people out of work based on best practice to help tailor plans that best suit the young person.

### YOUNG FARMERS

1. Incentivised funding for young farmers with a Green Cert to guarantee the highest standard of farming.
2. All funding should be accompanied by mentoring to ensure that young farmers get the most out of funding.

### YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

1. Promote entrepreneurship alongside volunteering and multilingualism within the education system.
2. Ensure that those who are self-employed have equal access to the Social Welfare scheme.
3. Develop a fair business society where failure is allowed so that businesses and individuals are able to grow and learn.

### WELFARE

1. Introduce a system of mutual obligation into the social welfare system.
2. Offer tax incentives to companies who hire long-term unemployed young people.

### TAX SYSTEM

1. Lower businesses costs by introducing an Earned Income Tax Credit for low paid workers.

### CHILDCARE

1. Expansion and full investment in the Teen Parents Support Programme
2. Extension of the UCD Childcare scheme across the third level sector

## GOVERNMENT

### Policy 1:

#### Appoint a Minister of State with Responsibility for Youth Employment and Enterprise Affairs

##### BACKGROUND:

Young Fine Gael believes that due to the nature of Youth Unemployment and the fact that it will take a co-ordinated approach from Government to tackle the issue. Ireland should follow the example of the Scottish Government who in 2011 set up a Minister of Youth Employment to tackle youth unemployment and the delivery of the Scottish governments' pledge to guarantee a training or learning place for all 16-19 year-olds in Scotland. This is now a full Cabinet position in Scotland as the Cabinet Secretary for Training, Youth and Women's Employment<sup>6</sup>.

##### YFG POLICY:

The Minister of state should be based between the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Social Protection. The Minister would be responsible for the Youth Guarantee, but would also be responsible for the implementation and monitoring of Youth Employment and Enterprise Schemes across Government.

YFG believes that the appointment of a Minister of State is of the utmost importance to tackle the scourge of Youth Unemployment in Ireland and would aid in the implementation of policies across the many departments that need to work together to tackle youth unemployment.

##### RECOMMENDATION:

Young Fine Gael calls on An Taoiseach to appoint a Minister of State with Responsibility for Youth Employment and Enterprise Affairs in the upcoming reshuffle.

## EDUCATION STRATEGIES TO TACKLE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Ireland's attractiveness for foreign direct investment, its innovation and continued growth are dependent on the next generation of educated workers. In order to ensure a prosperous future we need to tackle the gaps in our current education system, we believe this can be achieved through the following policies: 1. A work placement scheme for all third level students, 2. Increased attention paid to the area of multilingualism 3. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme as a mandatory subject, 4. A minimum requirement of the Leaving Certificate or Leaving Certificate Applied for school leavers, 5. Reform in the area of upskilling.

Young Fine Gael believes that we must gradually integrate these aspects into our education system in order to stay competitive. These policies have proven successful on both a small scale in Ireland and on a national scale in Nordic countries demonstrating their efficiency and viability in a modern knowledge economy.

### Policy 1:

#### Mandatory work placement for third level students

*Similar to the ideas of the "Co-operative work placement" in University of Limerick*

##### BACKGROUND

In today's competitive job market it is imperative that students gain practical experience in order to compete with experienced workers and gain employment relative to their degree. Work placement is the first experience



many students have of working full-time within an organisation. This experience is vital in gaining employment after finishing third level education. The scheme has proved successful in the University of Limerick with a 15% higher employment rate than the national average at undergraduate level<sup>7</sup>.

**YFG POLICY:**

YFG believes that a mandatory work placement should be introduced into third level education as part of students' degrees. Work placements would last between 6 - 9 months, and would effectively be considered a semester at third level. As this is an essential part of the students' course, payment would be at the discretion of the employer. A dedicated work placement office would exist in third level institutes with the sole purpose of assisting and securing work placements for students, both in Ireland and abroad. Students would also have the option to find their own placement if they so choose. It would be the onus of the institute to send out an individual to assess the student in their place of work. The work placement should be a mandatory requirement in the completion of a degree and should be marked on a pass/fail basis.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

YFG believes that making a work placement scheme mandatory at third level will greatly help students enter employment following their degree.

## Policy 2:

**Tackling multilingualism**

*Similar to the system within Danish Folkeskole Education*

**BACKGROUND:**

Ireland ranks 46th out of 47 countries in Europe at second language acquisition. In order to promote ourselves as a desirable place in which to do business we must not restrict ourselves to English and address the issue of language learning promptly.

**YFG POLICY:**

In order to successfully teach European languages students must start learning these languages at an earlier age. In Norway, Malta and Luxembourg students start learning English as early as the age of six and in German-speaking parts of Belgium and Spain, students start at the age of three<sup>8</sup>. It is not until the age of 13 that Irish students formally have this opportunity in the current education curriculum. Secondly, the language teaching currently in place emphasizes the theoretical side of languages, focusing more on the practical side would prove more valuable in practice<sup>9</sup>.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

By introducing languages to children at an earlier age focusing primarily on the practical side we could achieve a workforce with the ability to communicate effectively in many languages, enabling business transactions to happen with ease and aid in the development of rapport with other nations.

## Policy 3:

**Mandatory Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme****BACKGROUND:**

The current Leaving Certificate Established Programme is overly theoretical and written exam focused lacking the option for students to develop vocational skills. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme provides practical experience and relates subjects on their practical use.

**YFG POLICY:**

YFG believes that the Leaving Cert Vocational Programme should be mandatory for all students regardless of their subject choice.

## RECOMMENDATION

Making the Leaving Cert Vocational Programme mandatory will ensure students will leave school with developed interpersonal, vocational and technological skills fully preparing them for the transition into further education, employment or starting their own business.

## Policy 4:

### Mandatory Leaving Certificate for school leavers

#### BACKGROUND:

The highly educated workforce that Ireland is producing today has heightened the minimum education requirements for all areas of employment.

#### YFG POLICY:

YFG believes that students should not be able to leave school until they achieve a minimum of the Leaving Certificate or Leaving Certificate Applied. More emphasis should be placed upon the Leaving Certificate Applied in order to make it more accessible and this option an achievable goal for all Irish students.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

This minimum requirement of education will ensure that Ireland has a highly educated and employable workforce.

## Policy 5:

### Upskilling

#### BACKGROUND:

Up skilling allows the unemployed to gain work in their preferred industry; a dynamic and capable workforce is key in ensuring all industries have a sufficient workforce driving them.

#### YFG POLICY:

In order to gain a competitive up skilling environment the following areas must be tackled:

- Increased range of courses
- Career Guidance
- Job prep: compulsory module
- Labour market training
- Increased mobility
- Voluntary experience

#### INCREASED RANGE OF COURSES

Limiting government funded courses means only a small section of our unemployed are catered for. A limited number of places should be offered for courses in other sectors than what is currently offered, encouraging a wider range of unemployed youth to enrol back into education. Courses should be more practical ranging from vocation, arts and crafts to business skills such as presentation skills; they should be infused with an entrepreneurial spirit and guidance to encourage the young unemployed to set up their own businesses.

#### CAREER GUIDANCE

*Similar to the ideas of the "National Youth Unit" in Denmark<sup>10</sup>*

Career Guidance is imperative to the success of any education system. Young people need to know what courses to take in order to secure a job; what route to take in order to get into their preferred industry and how

to improve skills they already hold and how to market them to employers. Having a variety of courses is not beneficial if they are not used as stepping stones to a larger goal. By providing a guidance service on a national scale, young people can create a plan devising what they need to do in order to get their dream job. Having a plan and goals acts as a constant motivation for learning and by getting a professional opinion young people can have confidence in their choices and be confident in moving forward. Currently 'career direction' is offered through FÁS/SOLAS, however we believe a more personal system will be more efficient and act as a regulation method for job seekers allowance. It will also mean the participants will provide invaluable information on how our system is working and gaps which need to be tackled. A more personal approach allows young people to confide in their counsellor, express their worries and find a unique solution and pathway for them.

#### **JOB PREP: COMPULSORY MODULE**

*Similar to the ideas of the "job club" in Norway*

Job prep will give information about all the practical ways of getting a job. It will encourage the participants taking a course to go to career events, by having this module on a course the group can go together, the idea being that they will motivate one another to attend these events. It will also deal with the practical side of getting a job such as CV writing and mock interviews. It would better Norway's system and insist that to take a course you would have to be a part of the 'job club', it would act as a compulsory module to complement the course, regularly informing participants of job openings in the sector which they are studying.

#### **LABOUR MARKET TRAINING**

*Similar to the ideas of the "labour market training" in Sweden, "Practical Training" in Denmark and "Work Practice and Employment Training" in Finland*

Taking a labour market training course should let you create your own course consisting of modules which are central to what employers look for. After attending a guidance meeting young people can design their own course in order to tackle, computer basics, presentation skills etc. Young people should be able to pick a range of modules creating a unique course for themselves which will improve the individual job seekers possibilities of getting employed. This means that a person can acquire qualifications that are targeted at a specific job, and that the person for example can develop their interpersonal skills or become better in other social contexts. During this course a person may be referred to work practice and employment training within the State or in the private sector. For young people with no education, "labour market training" may inspire them to commence an education because they find out what it is like to work in a certain type of job. Labour market training is meant to make it easier to get into the labour market by allowing each individual to identify and learn skills which they may be lacking.

#### **INCREASED MOBILITY BETWEEN COURSES**

Young people should not be limited to their undergraduate degree; the state should offer conversions courses between colleges. There is a culture of protectionism in place for some courses such as postgraduate degrees in economics, science and technology; the state in line with third level institutions should offer summer conversion courses giving the opportunity for students to study a different discipline than they may have during their undergraduate. A greater mobility between courses means that young people can acquire skills applicable to a range of different industries, leading to increased probability of them being able to find work and also act as a faster way to tackle job gaps in the market.

#### **VOLUNTARY WORK CERTS**

Voluntary organisations should offer on the job training working towards a certificate. Volunteers should be able to enter into a program to do a set number of hours for a pre-decided number of weeks and earn a certificate in recognition of a new skill that they may have acquired while on the volunteer program. This will offer an incentive for young people to volunteer even if they are in employment or education.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

YFG believes that tackling these six key areas will give the unemployed greater access to and knowledge of the education system; creating a culture of continual learning and personal growth and development.

## YOUNG FARMERS

Young Fine Gael recognises the enormous cost of entry into farming for young farmers and through these policies we hope to lower the costs of entry into farming 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 through the following policies: 1. To provide incentivised funding for Young farmers who hold a green cert. 2. To reopen the early retirement scheme in order to let young farmers progress in their career. 3. That start-up funding should be accompanied by mentoring, supervision of payments and targets as it is in the UK to ensure that young farmers get the most out of the funding.

Young Fine Gael believes that the implementation of these policies will secure a livelihood for the future young farmers of Ireland.

### Policy 1:

**To provide incentivised funding for Young Farmers who hold a green cert**

#### BACKGROUND

In recent times a lack of incentivised funding to young farmers who hold a green cert<sup>11</sup> has led to less productivity from young farmers. Young Fine Gael believes that incentivized funding needs to be prioritised and targeted at supporting young farmers who hold a green cert to help them to start up and develop their farm business.

#### YFG POLICY

YFG proposes that incentivised funding should be provided 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 activity<sup>12</sup>.

#### RECOMMENDATION

YFG recommends providing incentivised funding for Young farmers who hold a green cert as supports for these young farmers are vital for starting up in the agriculture industry.

### Policy 2:

**To reopen the Early Retirement Scheme in order to let young farmers progress in their career.**

#### BACKGROUND

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 reaches 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 they're eligible for the old age pension too, regardless of means or income (not always the case in the past). These issues form a block on new entrants, or people getting into farming later upon inheritance<sup>13</sup>.

#### YFG POLICY

YFG proposes that the early retirement scheme should be reopened in order to let young farmers progress in

their career. The scheme aims to provide income for older farmers who stop farming. Encourage the replacement of these older farmers by young farmers in order for them to progress in the agriculture industry and encourage reassignment of agricultural land to non-agricultural uses where it cannot be farmed.

#### RECOMMENDATION

YFG recommends re-opening the Early Retirement Scheme in order to provide a stable income to older farmers who stop farming and to encourage young farmers to replace them and progress in the agriculture industry.

### Policy 3:

**Start-up funding should be accompanied by mentoring, supervision of payments and targets as it is in the UK to ensure that young farmers get the most out of the funding.**

#### BACKGROUND

The Welsh Young Entrants Support Scheme<sup>14</sup> helps to ensure that young farmers get the most out of the funding in order to make the industry more viable and progressive. This scheme is open to all farmers under the age of 40. Similar schemes have been set up in Scotland and Northern Ireland. To qualify, they must either be in the process of setting up as head of the holding for the first time or have established themselves in that position during the previous year. The grants are available to fund capital expenditure. The new entrants are then given further support through a mentoring service delivered by established farmers. A more progressive agriculture industry will lead to more jobs for newly qualified young farmers and currently unemployed young farmers.

#### YFG POLICY

YFG proposes that start-up funding should be accompanied by mentoring, supervision of payments and targets as it is in the UK to ensure that young farmers get the most out of the funding. This would lead to a better trained industry and would ensure farmers get the most out of their funding through supervision of payments and targets. This would progress the agriculture industry and create more jobs for newly qualified young farmers and currently unemployed young farmers.

#### RECOMMENDATION

YFG recommends that start-up funding should be accompanied by mentoring, supervision of payments and targets as it is in the UK to ensure that young farmers get the most out of the funding. This is recommended in order to progress the agriculture industry and secure jobs for newly qualified young farmers and currently unemployed young farmers.

## YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

At a time when youth unemployment remains at 26%<sup>15</sup> the importance of entrepreneurship cannot be understated. While Job Guarantee schemes will offer some benefits in terms of training, their value and effectiveness cannot match the economic benefits accrued from incentivising and encouraging young people to start their own businesses. Ireland already maintains some advantages in this regard. Our education system is generally well regarded and our rate of early school leaving is less than 10%, compared to an EU average of 12.8%<sup>16</sup>. 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.

### Policy 1:

**Promotion of entrepreneurship in the education system through volunteering and multilingualism.**

#### BACKGROUND



The education system is a crucial vehicle through which a greater appetite for entrepreneurship can be promoted. There is increasing emphasis being put on volunteering at EU level, particularly through the new Erasmus+ programme<sup>17</sup>. The government should ensure that educational institutions extract maximum benefit from what is on offer, particularly in terms of funding for volunteering projects. Additionally easy access to European markets offers great potential to young entrepreneurs. However limitations in foreign language ability frequently create barriers. Ireland measures poorly against its EU counterparts in terms of foreign language training<sup>18</sup>.

#### RECOMMENDATION

There needs to be a greater emphasis placed on volunteering and internships in later years to increase the experience and innovation skills of young people<sup>19</sup>. There should also be a renewed and reformed focus on multilingualism, with this process beginning in primary school.

## Policy 2:

### Fully integrating the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

#### BACKGROUND

The European Qualifications Framework<sup>20</sup> for lifelong learning (EQF) provides a common reference framework which assists in comparing the national qualifications systems, frameworks and their levels. It serves as a translation device to make qualifications more readable and understandable across different countries and systems in Europe, and thus promote lifelong and life-wide learning, and the mobility of European citizens whether for studying or working abroad. This framework allows educational qualifications to be more easily compared throughout the European Union. At present however, the framework is not present in many aspects of third level education and is largely unknown in the private sector. This further restricts mobility for entrepreneurs within the European Single Market.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The government must commit to work with other EU states in continuing to integrate the European Qualifications Framework into both the education system and business sector.

## Policy 3:

### To improve the business environment

#### BACKGROUND

The Youth of the European People's Party has recently pointed out that the EU is the highest taxed, least competitive area in the OECD<sup>21</sup>. Europe today struggles on its way to recovery, trying hard to implement growth measures, create jobs, boost entrepreneurship and attract investments. At the same time public spending is still inexplicably high and tax systems across the Member States remain complicated and hostile to citizens, businesses and investors.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The government must commit to maintaining low levels of tax on work and business, as well as a drive to reduce unnecessary regulation. This aim will help all entrepreneurs, including young people.

## Policy 4:

### Improve the PRSI system for the self employed

#### BACKGROUND

The government should commit to reform of the PRSI Class S for the self employed. At present those who are self employed pay PRSI at 4% without benefiting from the low income exemptions of PAYE workers<sup>22</sup>.

Additionally they cannot access the Employee Tax Credit<sup>23</sup>. This is particularly difficult for those who are self employed on lower incomes. In parallel, despite paying into the system the self employed cannot access the same range of social protection benefits as employees such as Jobseekers Allowance or Illness Benefit. This 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 employees<sup>24</sup>. 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.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The government should commit to reform of the PRSI Class S for the self-employed by;

1. Lowering the rate of Class S PRSI to 3%;
2. Reforming the Employee Tax Credit, in order to include the self employed;
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.

## Policy 5:

### Dealing with failure

#### BACKGROUND

In order to foster a culture of entrepreneurship it is important to foster a less damning attitude towards business failure. One area in particular in which this could be achieved is bankruptcy. While welcoming the recent reforms contained in the Personal Insolvency Act 2012 which reduced the normal period of bankruptcy in Ireland to 3 years, it is important to remember that it remains more beneficial to declare bankruptcy in England and Wales, where the normal period is 12 months. Irish citizens can exercise their EU rights and declare bankruptcy in any member state; however in practice this potential is only open to those who can afford it.

#### RECOMMENDATION

In order to account for this difference between the two countries and to improve the general attitude towards business failure the government must commit to further reducing the normal period of bankruptcy to 12 months.

## Policy 6:

### Public Procurement Reform

#### BACKGROUND

Public procurement projects are often out of reach of many SMEs due to their huge scale and cost.

#### RECOMMENDATION

The government must commit to breaking up public procurement. This move would give SMEs greater opportunities to bid for government contracts, which at present are largely dominated by large companies. In addition greater opportunities would be available to young entrepreneurs, particularly if the government chooses to favour companies run by young people.

Employment activation measures for young people are shown to have a limited impact during an economic crisis, with the benefits not being realised until economic growth returns. Furthermore, youth unemployment, and employment in general tends to lag behind economic growth. Therefore state-run training and employment programmes often do not have the desired social and financial benefits. In contrast, prioritisation of youth entrepreneurship has the potential to increase productivity and employment not just for young people, but for all private sector workers.

## SOCIAL WELFARE REFORM

The economic cost of youth unemployment to Ireland is estimated to be 2% of GDP (€3.16billion)<sup>25</sup>. In addition to the financial burden, youth unemployment impacts society as a whole as people struggle to overcome the effects of decreased earnings, emigration, lack of fulfilment, and the mental health issues associated with them. The Department of Social Protection can play a unique role in reducing the level of youth unemployment while simultaneously encouraging the development of new skills and improving the overall quality of the Irish workforce. In order to do this, YFG proposes that three fundamental reforms must occur in the Irish welfare system. These are; 1. replace welfare with a system of mutual obligation, 2. offer tax incentives to employers who hire unemployed youths from the live register, and 3. cap social welfare benefits at industrial wage levels. These policies should all be implemented alongside, or where relevant, as part of the government's commitment to the Youth Guarantee which proposes to guarantee young jobseekers under the age of 25 a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship, or work experience within four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

### Policy 1:

#### Introduce a system of mutual obligation into the social welfare system

##### BACKGROUND

Unemployed youths face additional challenges in securing work when compared to older adults as they usually only have their experiences of education to fall back on rather than experience in the work force. YFG recognises that the Irish government is trying to move away from passive policies to more active policies by implementing Labour Market Programmes such as JobBridge, the National Internship Scheme and the Work Placement Programme as part of 'Pathways to Work'<sup>26</sup>. However participation in labour market programmes is still below the EU average<sup>27</sup>. For the majority of people, youth unemployment is not a lifestyle choice therefore YFG proposes that a system of mutual obligation be introduced to empower jobseekers with new skills, provide them with a sense of purpose, make them more employable, and ultimately reduce the overall level of unemployment.

Traditional social welfare benefits systems are usually awarded based on certain conditions, such as searching for work, or based on meeting criteria that would position the recipient as unavailable to seek employment or be employed<sup>28</sup>. Workfare or a variation of it is currently implemented by the UK, USA, Australia, Canada, and the Netherlands<sup>29</sup>. Under workfare, recipients have to meet certain participation requirements to continue to receive their welfare benefits. These requirements are often a combination of activities that are intended to improve the recipient's job prospects (such as training, rehabilitation, and work experience) and those designated as contributing to society<sup>30</sup>. Putting unemployed people into a workplace-like environment attempts to address the argument that one of the biggest barriers to employment for the unemployed is their lack of recent work experience. Workfare schemes vary between those that encourage direct employment to get individuals off the live register and directly into the workforce (e.g. 'Mandatory Work Activity' in the UK), and those that are intended to increase human capital by providing training and education to those currently in the welfare system (e.g. Mutual Obligation in Australia)<sup>31</sup>.

YFG recognises the flaws associated with workfare in countries such as the UK. 'Mandatory Work Activity' in the UK reported a success rate of 2.3% in 2012 (18,270 people out of 785,000 people enrolled on the Work Programme had held down employment for six months or more). When compared to the fact that 5% of long-term unemployed would be expected to find employment if left to their own devices, the Mandatory Work Programme in the UK is regarded as less successful than doing nothing at all<sup>32</sup>. The British Government are still holding out for more long-term data before refining their system. Due to the weaknesses associated with 'Mandatory Work Activity', YFG is placing an emphasis on human capital development as a policy rather than traditional workfare.

In Australia, welfare assistance is operated on a proactive system of 'Mutual Obligation'. Mutual Obligation is

based on a concept that welfare assistance provided to the unemployed of working age should involve some return responsibilities for the recipient<sup>33</sup>. This involves an obligation that unemployed job seekers should 1. actively seek work, 2. constantly strive to improve their competitiveness in the labour market, and 3. give something back to the community that supports them. Accepted Mutual Obligation activities include 'Work for the Dole', Community Development Employment Projects, voluntary work, and careers counselling. Work for the Dole activities 'provide eligible job seekers with work experience which helps job seekers to learn new skills and improve their chance of finding a job'<sup>34</sup>. Job seekers benefit from Work for the Dole activities by developing on-the-job skills, demonstrating abilities to potential employers, obtaining references from work experience employers, making new work contacts, taking part in training, and staying connected to the workforce. A Work for the Dole placement might see a job seeker working as part of a team with other job seekers, or be an individual placement with a host organisation (such as a community group or charity). The type of tasks could vary but can include opportunities to develop skills in computing, maintenance of vehicles and buildings, landscaping or gardening, restoring historic buildings and vehicles, or helping members of the community such as the elderly, people with disability or children among others.

The Australian system of mutual obligation is an efficient system that provides flexible work experience opportunities for job seekers to assist them in re engaging with their community and the workplace, offer opportunities for structured training for all job seekers where appropriate and available, provide work experience that will develop or enhance a job seeker's ability to work as part of a team, be guided by a supervisor, work independently, communicate effectively and improve motivation and dependability, and seek local community involvement in activities that will generate outcomes to benefit the community<sup>35</sup>. Mutual obligation has been recommended by eminent bodies such as the OECD and acts as an effective system to improve the skill set of job seekers.

The systems of workfare and Mutual Obligation have come under much criticism for 'exploiting the unemployed'; particularly from those with left wing ideals. YFG first and foremost respects the rights of every citizen in Ireland. The proposed system of mutual obligation is not a system of mass exploitation and free labour but an effective and efficient system to equip the unemployed with valuable skills and provide them with a sense of purpose through work or education. We believe that aside from acquiring skills and experience to make jobseekers more employable, it will enhance both the physical and mental health of the unemployed by reducing the feelings of doubt, stress, anxiety, and depression usually associated with unemployment and reduce the risk of turning to alcohol and drugs.

#### YFG POLICY

YFG proposes that the Irish government should adopt a system of Mutual Obligation. This should be based on the Australian model as well as taking into consideration the recommendations made by the OECD and obligations to the Youth Guarantee. The aim of introducing mutual obligation is to assist benefit recipients by increasing their education and skill levels. Those on jobseeker's allowance should be obliged to be in some form of education, work experience, community care, or contribute hours of voluntary work to charities. This should be done while actively seeking work. We believe that those on jobseekers allowance should be given six months to seek employment before being obliged to partake in mutual obligation. After the six months is up the jobseeker should have a meeting with his/her caseworker to identify their weaknesses that have hindered employment. This can be done through feedback from unsuccessful interviews and analysis of their curriculum vitae. The participant and case worker will then agree on what the next suitable course of action should be (e.g. education or experience). We believe that this system should link up with current programmes (e.g. JobBridge, the Work Placement Programme, and Community Services Programme). The system should also promote entrepreneurship and creating a business plan under suitable coaching should count as participation. We firmly recognise that jobseekers should not be forced to work below their education level and any participation in mutual obligation should benefit the jobseeker and that their rights are respected at all times. If the jobseeker refuses to engage with their caseworker and the Mutual Obligation system, their benefits would be reduced over time, upon engaging with their caseworker and the system their benefits would be restored.



#### RECOMMENDATION:

YFG recommends replacing welfare with mutual obligation/workfare to empower jobseekers by increasing their education and skill levels and make them more employable.

Increase the number of caseworkers available to those on the live register to ensure that there is sufficient job search monitoring of participants and that active participation in mutual obligation is occurring.

The new mutual obligation system must be evaluated annually to firstly iron out any teething problems and then each following year to ensure that it is effective in reducing the level of unemployment and providing jobseekers with new skills.

The additional payments associated with some of the programmes such as JobBridge which currently provides participants with an extra €50 per week on top of their social welfare payment should be reviewed annually to take into account external factors such as the economy.

## Policy 2:

### Offering tax/payment incentives to employers who hire unemployed youths on live register

#### BACKGROUND

The role of the government is to create the conditions necessary for employment. This involves improving the economy and making Ireland an attractive place to do business. YFG acknowledges the efforts of the government to tackle the low level of unemployed people being hired with the creation of payment incentives such as the JobsPlus Scheme which 'encourages and rewards employers who employ jobseekers on the Live Register'<sup>36</sup>. It is designed to encourage employers and businesses to employ people who have been out of work for long periods<sup>37</sup>. JobsPlus is available to all employers in the private (including commercial semi-state), community, not-for-profit and voluntary sectors and employers can avail of JobsPlus when filling positions that arise as a consequence of natural turnover. It is not open to public service employers<sup>38</sup>.

Currently the Department of Social Protection will pay an incentive to the employer monthly in arrears over a 2-year period. It will provide 2 levels of regular cash payments:

- A payment of €7,500 for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than 12 but less than 24 months
- A payment of €10,000 for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than 24 months

#### YFG POLICY

The JobsPlus initiative does not specifically tackle the issue of Youth Unemployment. YFG proposes that the government should tackle youth unemployment directly by offering an additional tax or payment incentive to employers who hire unemployed youths on the live register. There should be two levels to this – one for youths on the live register between 4 and 12 months and one for long term unemployed youths (over 12 months on live register). This initiative should link into the government's commitment to the Youth Guarantee and can be additionally funded through the EU Social Funds and the money saved from getting young people off welfare. Tax or payment incentives for employers like this will assist the government in creating employment for the youth guarantee as a substantial number of jobs will need to be created to fulfil the commitment.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

YFG calls for a sister initiative to JobsPlus to pay incentives or offer tax breaks to employers who hire unemployed youths from the live register.

YFG calls for the Government, Revenue Commissioners and employer representative groups to efficiently market and advertise the financial incentives to hiring employers or to those employers who might hire unemployed youths if they were aware of these incentives.

The government should conduct an annual review to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme to discover and rectify any problems and identify ways to make the system more efficient and implement the changes in a speedy manner.



## Policy 3:

### Capping social welfare benefits at the average industrial wage level

#### BACKGROUND

YFG believes that social welfare should be a safety net and not a long term source of income for the unemployed. In 2013, The Department of Social Protection released startling figures stating that one in seven people living on Jobseeker's allowance had never worked a single day or made any form of PRSI payments<sup>39</sup>. This indicates that there are people living on social welfare as a lifestyle choice. Ireland still has a high level of jobless households in comparison to EU standards despite the decreasing level of unemployment<sup>40</sup>. This places a burden on the welfare system and society as a whole. Ireland has a very generous social welfare system in comparison to other countries and unfortunately, it is still the case that some jobless households through various benefits can earn more than working households. This defeats the purpose of jobseeker's allowance as a supportive means until employment is found. In order to tackle the particular unfairness of the welfare system for employed low income families, countries such as the UK, Norway and the Netherlands have successfully introduced welfare reforms to discourage people from living on welfare as a lifestyle choice and to encourage people to seek employment while simultaneously restoring fairness to the system<sup>41</sup>.

#### YFG POLICY

YFG believe that a welfare cap should be introduced in line with the average industrial wage level. The welfare cap should specifically apply to jobless households. We believe this will restore fairness to a system which can be taken advantage of. We also believe that this will discourage people from becoming reliant on social welfare as a way of life and encourage them to seek employment or enter education.

We believe that an adequate level of income support for those in jobless households is necessary as over one half are either adults with a disability or are children. The introduction of a benefit cap is to ensure that a jobless family doesn't earn more through welfare than a working family and encourage those who are choosing not to work to seek employment. We acknowledge that the rate at which social welfare benefits are withdrawn needs to be carefully planned to avoid in-work poverty and that exceptions will need to be made in circumstances of disability, death benefits, and households living on a pension.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

YFG proposes that a welfare cap be introduced to ensure that unemployed households do not claim more on social welfare than a household on the average industrial wage would earn. Exceptions to the welfare cap should include households receiving disability allowance, death benefits, and those on pensions.

YFG recommends that the welfare fraud control initiative continues to be funded to restore confidence and faith to the welfare system in Ireland.

## TAX SYSTEM

YFG believes that the government is not in business of creating jobs, we believe that it is up to the government to create the ideal business environment for job creation. While Ireland has the necessary policies for the creation of high-end, high-spec jobs, job creation in associated business normally gets forgotten about. YFG believe that using the tax system a sustainable job creation climate can be created to benefit young people in the creation of jobs.

## Policy 1:

### To introduce an Earned Income Tax Credit

#### BACKGROUND

At present the minimum wage rates in Ireland stand at the following:

1. €8.65 per hour for an experienced adult worker.
2. €7.79 per hour for those over 19 and in 2nd year of first employment.
3. €6.92 per hour for those over 18 and in first year of first employment.
4. €6.06 per hour for those aged under 18<sup>42</sup>.

These are among some of the highest minimum wage rates in Europe<sup>43 44</sup> and act as a barrier to job creation. With youth unemployment rates of 26% and an overall unemployment rate of 12% in the first month of 2014<sup>45</sup>, a high minimum wage disincentivises businesses from locating in Ireland and employing workers. We must act to tackle this problem and increase our competitiveness. YFG believe if we tackle this problem of high minimum wage rates we can increase job rates among all age groups.

However instead of decreasing standards of living for those on the minimum wage YFG propose a different and unique solution in the form of a restructuring of the minimum wage combined with an earned income tax credit to maintain income levels for lower paid workers. This solution we believe is a 'third way' between lowering living standards for those on low incomes and maintaining the current uncompetitive rates.

### RECOMMENDATION

YFG would propose a twofold strategy to introduce an Earned Income Tax Credit:

Step 1:

- To restructure the minimum wage businesses pay to workers by €2 so that the rates businesses would pay to minimum wage workers would be as follows:
  1. €6.65 per hour for an experienced adult worker.
  2. €5.79 per hour for those over 19 and in 2nd year of first employment.
  3. €4.92 per hour for those over 18 and in first year of first employment.
  4. €4.06 per hour for those aged under 18.

Step 2:

- To institute an earned income tax credit on the part of the government of €2 for the workers whose wages have been reduced. This would mean that although the minimum wage would have been cut, these workers would still receive the same amount of pay as the government would subsidise the difference in earnings through an earned income tax credit.

YFG believes this policy would lead to job growth and thus economic growth. It is a pro-business policy as it lowers costs for businesses. However it is also a pro worker policy as it maintains standards of living for lower paid workers and it will create jobs for those seeking work. This policy represents a 'third way' between the diametric opposite positions of lowering the minimum wage alone to create jobs and thus lowering the living standards of lower income individuals and maintaining uncompetitive high minimum wage rates which damages job creation prospects.

## CHILDCARE

At present, the system of childcare supports that exists in Ireland is not sufficient in tackling the social issues that affect young people, such as lack of employment and education opportunities, in addition to a high degree of welfare dependency among young parents. Addressing this issue in a supportive manner will be vital in reducing welfare dependency among young parents and increasing future employment and education prospects for themselves and their children.

## Policy 1:

### Streamline childcare supports in order to reduce welfare dependency in One-Parent Families

#### BACKGROUND

One of the major problems facing young parents (under 25), who are seeking to return to education or gain employment, is childcare costs<sup>46</sup>. While there is a limited availability of funding for young parents who are in this situation, there is a lack of overall transparency with regards to payments. An example of this is the Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP) which is only available in certain parts of the country, and runs on a limited budget<sup>47 48</sup>. For many young parents, this payment is vital in ensuring that they remain in education. On the other hand, certain third level colleges, such as University College Dublin provide subsidised childcare facilities for lone parents, up to 50% of overall costs<sup>49</sup>.

Currently, the One-Parent Family Payment stipulates that those wishing to receive payments must have weekly earnings under €425, and will in turn receive a €188 weekly payment, in addition to €29.80 per dependent child<sup>50</sup>. However, there has been a recent steady reduction in availability per child from up to 18 years of age in 2011, to 7 years of age by 2014/2015 (depending on when payment began)<sup>51</sup>.

Approximately 42% of one-parent families, or 92,326 parents are in receipt of this payment, while up to 69% of individuals living in lone parent households are in a state of deprivation<sup>52</sup>. This indicates the level of importance of this payment in maintaining living standards for one-parent families, and also highlights the need for a set of guidelines to introduce a streamlined payments system. Noting that lone parent families are a particularly vulnerable societal group, a system which incentivises and support education and employment opportunities, as the current system is failing to achieve this.

#### YFG POLICY

We believe that the current social welfare system does not sufficiently encourage or support lone parents in their pursuit of employment or education. As education can be vital in ensuring future job stability, we would like to place a particular emphasis on this issue. We also believe that the lack of transparency that exists in the current system prevents young parents from gaining information on what sources of funding are available to them to further their education and employment prospects. The current One-Parent Family Payment does not provide sufficient incentive or direct support to young parents in gaining these essential opportunities. These schemes could also ease the financial burden which exists for young parents currently in employment or in education.

#### RECOMMENDATION

A clearer payments system introduced nationwide to provide services that already exist in some third level institutes, and through the TPSP. Under the current system, it is difficult to obtain information on what specific payments are available for young parents.

The incentive scheme that exists in UCD, which provides 50% of childcare costs for lone parent students, could provide assistance for young parents in Third Level Education if rolled out across the sector.

Increased direct funding to programmes such as the TPSP, as a means of supporting young people in education and reducing future dependency on welfare programmes such as the One-Parent Family Payment.

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