

## Action plan



Ideas for Irish economic and social progress, contributed by citizens to the Ideas Campaign ([www.IdeasCampaign.ie](http://www.IdeasCampaign.ie))



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# 1. Introduction

Irish citizens have proven to be resourceful and creative in proposing solutions for Irish economic recovery and renewal. They responded positively and in large numbers to the Ideas Campaign's call for their ideas and support for a campaign designed to help stimulate a new type of national discussion about Ireland's economic problems.

Through ideas logged on the campaign website, through messages of support and through the media, Irish citizens have sent a powerful signal about their capacity to make innovative, positive proposals about how to improve Ireland, both economically and socially.

The ideas received demonstrate the extent and the diversity of citizens' engagement with this campaign. This document includes a sample of the ideas received which, in the opinion of the campaign's Advisory Group, are worthy of further consideration. Many more ideas which also merit consideration are published in summary form on the campaign website.

The Advisory Group considers the sample in this plan to be worthy of consideration, and in some cases implementation, by organisations (social, voluntary, business) and individuals as well as Government. The ideas selected, in fact, represent several hundreds of ideas submitted, many of which share common themes. They include ideas – such as the creation of a new Volunteer Corps, a novel community-led initiative to replace pre-fabricated school buildings and a discount scheme for paying taxes in advance – which, if implemented would produce both social and economic benefits.

The plan is being circulated to Government, political parties and organisations representing business, community, voluntary and other sectors. It is also available for download on the campaign website.

While this plan draws the Ideas Campaign to a close, its spirit, the debate it has generated and indeed the implementation of some of the ideas will carry it forward. We hope that this plan's circulation and the general debate about the ideas submitted, and indeed the campaign itself, will contribute in some small way to Ireland's future.

**May 2009**

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## 2. About the Ideas Campaign

The Ideas Campaign, an independent, citizens' initiative based in Ireland, was launched in March 2009. It aimed to:

- Seek citizens' ideas for Irish economic recovery and renewal
- Help stimulate a debate about solutions to our economic problems
- Set a challenge to people in Ireland to be innovative and creative and to play their part in planning this country's economic recovery

The campaign met with a huge response. From its launch on RTÉ's Prime Time to the 31 March deadline for submission of ideas on the campaign website, the campaign attracted enormous interest. In that period:

- The campaign website attracted 48,000 visits and over 214,000 page views
- Visitors spent an average of 4.5 minutes on the site, with the Ideas area, Ireland's Economy and Supporters pages being the most popular
- Visitors came from 116 overseas countries, accounting for 17% of website traffic
- The UK, the US and Germany accounted for the majority of traffic from outside the Republic of Ireland and three out of four ideas logged from overseas came from people born in Ireland
- The campaign's presence on social media sites grew substantially during March, with over 1,000 friends on Facebook alone.

Media interest in the campaign, and its theme, was strong. The campaign got extensive coverage on TV, radio, in print and online in Ireland and overseas. International and local media interest has continued after the submission deadline.

The Ideas Campaign was launched by AMAS, a Dublin-based online consultancy whose Managing Director Aileen O'Toole, a former business editor, led the campaign.

### More information

Read more about the campaign on [www.ideascampaign.ie/about/](http://www.ideascampaign.ie/about/)

Get more details on the campaign's media coverage [www.ideascampaign.ie/about/campaign-coverage/](http://www.ideascampaign.ie/about/campaign-coverage/)



### 3. Advisory Group

An expert Advisory Group with representatives from business, policy, academia, economics, the arts and the voluntary sector provided strategic advice and guidance on the campaign and developed this plan.

The Advisory Group members were:

- Patrick Collison, technology entrepreneur and founder of Auctomatic
- Moya Doherty, Producer of Riverdance, the world-acclaimed theatrical phenomenon
- Sean Gallagher, Chief Executive, Smarthomes (and Dragons' Den judge)
- Frank Gormley, Chair, Howard Eurocape and Founder St. Patrick's Trust
- Alan Gray, Economist, Indecon
- Paul Mooney, President, National College of Ireland
- Kieran McGowan, former Chief Executive of the IDA
- Ian McShane, Chief Executive, Behaviour & Attitudes
- Paul Rellis, Chief Executive, Microsoft Ireland
- Tina Roche, Chief Executive, Business in the Community
- Don Thornhill, Chair, National Competitiveness Council



### 4. Review process

The Ideas Campaign, through its Advisory Group, has created a short list of ideas which, in their view, have the greatest economic and social value and can be most easily implemented. The list covers ideas submitted by many hundreds of contributors, a great number of whom submitted ideas on common themes. Such ideas with multiple owners have been summarised into single ideas and put under eight broad headings.

This is just a small sample of the ideas which deserve further consideration and are published in summary form on the campaign website.

The ideas on the list are those considered by the Advisory Group to be priority ideas for consideration for action by organisations (social, voluntary, and business), individuals as well as Government. The feasibility of each idea will need to be established and more detailed assessment will have to be conducted by the parties identified.

The Group believes that there are many strong ideas on the list which, if further validated, could make a significant difference to Ireland, both economically and socially. The Advisory Group's assessment had to take account of the difficult economic circumstances and particularly the need to restore order to the public finances.

Initial screening and categorisation of the almost 5,300 ideas received for the Ideas Campaign was conducted by four accountancy firms – Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers. A team from each firm reviewed all of the ideas, summarised them and made an initial assessment of their value in economic and social terms.

While Government needs to take the lead in terms of framing the policy agenda, the Advisory Group is of the view that groups (such as business organisations and voluntary bodies) as well as individuals can also take leadership in furthering economic recovery and renewal.



## 5. Action list in summary

This section offers a high level summary of the ideas. See section 6 for more details on each.

	Idea	Idea for action by Government	Idea for action by community, voluntary or business organisations	Idea for action by individual businesses, entrepreneurs and citizens
	<b>Active Citizenship</b>			
1.	Create a new Volunteer Corps to engage the unemployed in community and voluntary work in Ireland and internationally, without losing their unemployment benefits	✓	✓	✓
2.	Build capacity and awareness in community and voluntary groups to enable them to 'employ' volunteers effectively		✓	
3.	Make more efficient use of school capital stock as a community resource, for example using buildings out of class/term time for adult education, after-school childcare etc.	✓	✓	
	<b>Government Finances</b>			
4.	Enable communities to replace rented prefabricated school buildings with permanent structures at no net cost to the State by raising community/private funds	✓	✓	
5.	Offer a discount for taxation paid in advance by companies and individuals to provide the government with revenue in advance and at a lower rate than the cost of borrowing	✓		
6.	Create a cyber budget website to allow companies and individuals to suggest a budget to the government and see potential outcomes such as that in place in France		✓	✓

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7.	Examine feasibility of introducing national recovery bonds <i>A version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009</i>	✓		
8.	Ensure that there is not an automatic 'use it or lose it' approach to public funding. Allow those in receipt to rollover unspent funds to the following year's budget to facilitate medium-term planning and savings	✓		
9.	Review integrated initiatives to derive maximum value from the public sector property portfolio through utilising vacant space, purchasing rather than renting etc.	✓		
10.	Facilitate individuals' access to part of paid-up pensions without incurring a tax penalty to allow them to meet short-term financial commitments	✓		
	<b>Stimulating Enterprise and Employment</b>			
11.	Extend all planning permission which has expired in the last four years if completed in the next 24 months, unless there are valid planning reasons, to stimulate the construction industry	✓		
12.	Make changes to job seekers' allowance to incentivise placement of graduates <i>A version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009</i>	✓		
13.	Expand two-way mentoring schemes across industry and within communities to facilitate sharing of skills, ideas and expertise		✓	✓
14.	Create an online Dragon's Den site for Irish entrepreneurs to pitch their business ideas and attract investment from around the world		✓	✓
15.	Adopt microfinance operations for the provision of credit to small enterprises in low income areas		✓	✓

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16.	Provide a one-stop-shop virtual helpdesk for start-ups with advice on legal, HR, patents, accountancy issues etc.		✓	✓
17.	Consider feasibility of a lending/borrowing online matching scheme to facilitate access to credit such as exists in US and UK			✓
18.	Create a comprehensive online forum for SMEs to band together to increase their buying power and their negotiating position with suppliers		✓	✓
19.	Encourage large firms to introduce agreed credit terms specifically for SMEs		✓	✓
	<b>Developing the Knowledge Economy</b>			
20.	Develop a coherent 'Ireland' brand for education in order to draw more international students to our third-level institutions	✓		
21.	Provide for earlier entitlement for unemployed to access education schemes  <i>A version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009</i>	✓		
22.	Establish a network of test bed facilities linked with universities and institutes of technology where unemployed engineers and scientists could prototype and develop technology-based ideas with possible business potential	✓	✓	
23.	Give priority to IT education (as an exam subject) and IT in education (online learning resources)	✓		
24.	Teach business skills as part of all PhD education as a means of promoting the knowledge economy	✓		
25.	Consider the merits of further prioritising Maths and Science at second level by awarding extra CAO points in	✓		

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	these subjects			
26.	Increase further education and training opportunities for the unemployed including through eLearning and blended learning	✓	✓	
	<b>Promoting Arts, Sport and Cultural Activities</b>			
27.	Make exercise space and outdoor equipment for old and young people available to facilitate healthy living and social interaction in communities all around the country	✓	✓	
28.	Establish a county-by-county project to record the stories and voices of Ireland's elderly which could then be brought together on an all-Ireland basis and marketed to the Irish diaspora		✓	
29.	Establish ticket booths in city centres selling discount tickets for that day's events in order to increase the visibility and accessibility of Ireland's cultural life		✓	
	<b>Encouraging Green Initiatives</b>			
30.	Evaluate the feasibility of creating a National Allotments Scheme run by local authorities or others in conjunction with landowners	✓		✓
31.	Increase measures to promote a 'Green Island' integrated brand for Ireland. Position Ireland as a green food island producing premium, natural foods	✓	✓	
32.	Consider feasibility of specialised green text alerts from Met Éireann to facilitate pre-emptive changes to heating levels in homes and offices to improve energy efficiency			✓



	<b>Boosting Tourism</b>			
33.	<p>Consider innovative ways to stimulate tourism revenues, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boost genealogy tourism by promoting the National Archives and organising clan gatherings</li> <li>• Launch a campaign to attach the Discover Ireland weblink to the foot of emails originating in Ireland</li> <li>• Develop cycle tracks and cycle lanes, for example open up disused railway tracks for this purpose</li> <li>• Hold a Modern World Fleadh to showcase Irish culture and attract tourists</li> <li>• Promote Dublin as a romance destination as it holds the relics of St. Valentine</li> </ul>		✓	✓
34.	Establish a three-month pilot of free off-peak travel for tourists to reduce the cost of holidaying in Ireland and attract more visitors	✓		
35.	Encourage schools to organise transition year trips within Ireland to assist tourism		✓	✓
	<b>Public Sector Reform</b>			
36.	Explore the potential impact of providing greater flexibility for small scale public sector procurement to reduce costs and increase access to public contracts by SMEs	✓		
37.	<p>Encourage voluntary early retirement in the public sector</p> <p><i>A version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009</i></p>	✓		

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38.	Facilitate career breaks and shorter working week in public sector <i>A version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009</i>	✓		
39.	Launch an internal public service campaign to encourage employees to identify ways of creating efficiencies and saving money	✓		
40.	Create greater economies of scale in public sector IT through cloud computing, rationalisation, hardware and software purchasing etc.	✓		
41.	Examine the feasibility of introducing an integrated system to increase efficiency for the collection of fines by the government	✓		
	<b>Improving Healthcare</b>			
42.	Explore potential to recycle medical equipment, for example crutches, stair lifts etc., to create savings in the HSE	✓		
43.	Take measures to facilitate the use of lower-cost generic drugs, for example by pre-printing 'or generic equivalent' on all prescriptions, or through other initiatives	✓		
44.	Enable mobile phones to register owners as organ donors so that the information can be accessed instantly in the case of an accident			✓



## 6. Action list in detail

This section gives more details of the ideas and their justification, and includes quotes from citizens to the Ideas Campaign where appropriate.

Active Citizenship	
1.	<p><b>Create a new Volunteer Corps to engage the unemployed in community and voluntary work in Ireland and internationally, without losing their unemployment benefits</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government, groups and individuals</i></p> <p>Many citizens suggested through the Ideas Campaign that there should be a way to allow and encourage people who are on unemployment benefit to do voluntary work in Ireland or internationally without losing their benefits. Multiple proposals were received about what type of volunteering could take place – from helping out in schools to assisting the elderly. This could involve work for existing voluntary organisations or the establishment of new specialised volunteer groups.</p> <p>This Volunteer Corps should be compensated on the model used for those that are unemployed.</p> <p>In addition, the allocation of overseas aid should be re-examined with a view to encouraging unemployed skilled individuals to apply their skills in overseas projects. These individuals should be entitled to retain their unemployment assistance.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>“There are a huge number of people happy and willing to apply diverse skills and roll up their sleeves on a focused task for the greater good.”</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>“This will stimulate people to stay focused, contribute positively to society and boost their own self esteem in the process. It will also help unite people to develop stronger community bonds which have been cast aside in favour of the self.”</i></p> </div>



<p>2.</p>	<p><b>Build capacity and awareness in community and voluntary groups to enable them to “employ” volunteers effectively</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups</i></p> <p>There are already thousands of people registering to volunteer and there are significant numbers who have professional skills and are highly experienced. The capacity within the community and voluntary sectors to properly manage significant numbers of new volunteers must be developed.</p> <p>There is a need to build capacity within the community and voluntary sectors in order to manage and maximise the benefit from this talented pool of volunteers. We need these sectors to create and define meaningful roles for volunteers and they need support to do this.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p><b>Make more efficient use of school capital stock as a community resource, for example using buildings out of class/term time for adult education, after-school childcare etc.</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government and groups</i></p> <p>Schools are important resources central to all communities. Outside of school hours and term time, however, their capital stock is underutilised. There are many activities that school buildings could be used for that would benefit the community. Examples include adult education, after-school child care, community group meetings, preschool education, sports and youth clubs. If there are insurance or other obstacles to this, these should be overcome.</p> <p>This would provide low-cost, well-equipped venues for these activities and develop the school as the central point of the community year-round.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><i>“The sports facilities of schools should be made available to local communities... A lot of schools have gymnasiums that are locked up more often than they are used.”</i></p> </div>



Government Finances	
4.	<p><b>Enable communities to replace rented prefabricated school buildings with permanent structures at no net cost to the State by raising community/private funds</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government and groups</i></p> <p>Many schools are using expensive rented prefabricated buildings. This proposal envisages communities or other private funds being used to invest directly in school buildings. Instead of the sums being paid on rent these funds are used to repay loans/investment taken out by local communities.</p> <p>One way to finance this might be through education bonds, which would mature over the medium to long term. Bond subscribers could earmark their purchases for specific projects. Measures could be introduced to ensure that schools in disadvantaged areas did not end up losing out.</p> <p>This initiative would accelerate the provision of permanent school buildings, while also creating jobs in the construction sector. It would reduce government’s prefab rental costs and also provide an outlet for private investment in the community with a guaranteed return.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>“Given the importance of our children’s education to the future viability and growth of the economy, there is an imperative for significant investment in our schools and educational facilities.”</i></p> </div>
5.	<p><b>Offer a discount for taxation paid in advance by companies and individuals to provide the government with revenue in advance and at a lower rate than the cost of borrowing</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>The Ideas Campaign proposes that the Revenue Commissioners provide a discount on taxation paid in advance by individuals and businesses. The discount should be less than</p>



	<p>the rate of interest on government borrowings.</p> <p>This would act as an incentive to taxpayers to pay early, providing much needed revenue to the government in the short term. This would provide the government with tax revenues in advance and effectively reduce the cost of government borrowings.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p><b>Create a cyber budget website to allow companies and individuals to suggest a budget to the government and see potential outcomes such as that in place in France</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>An initiative to increase awareness of the public finance should be considered. One proposal is a cyber budget (a website with an online budgeting tool) whereby companies and individuals could draw up suggested government budgets and see the different scenarios based on what they propose. An example of a similar initiative is the French cyber-budget site <a href="http://www.cyber-budget.fr/">http://www.cyber-budget.fr/</a>.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p><b>Examine feasibility of introducing national recovery bonds</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>The proposal is to introduce an ‘Irish Patriot Bond’ to be administered by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA). It would draw on the goodwill of Irish people abroad and domestically who would be willing to invest money in Ireland's future. It should guarantee a return on the amount invested when Ireland emerges from the economic downturn. Pro-rata enhanced returns would be offered for larger amounts and longer maturity periods.</p> <p>The bond would be intended as a means to raise finance at a cheaper rate than currently available on international markets.</p> <p><i>The Ideas Campaign notes that a version of this idea was announced in the Budget on 7 April 2009.</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><i>“I live abroad and am willing as a proud Irishman to contribute/invest when Ireland needs it.”</i></p> </div>



<p>8.</p>	<p><b>Ensure that there is not an automatic ‘use it or lose it’ approach to public funding. Allow those in receipt to rollover unspent funds to the following year’s budget to facilitate medium-term planning and savings</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Organisations in receipt of government funding are allocated funds on an annual basis. Unspent funds cannot, in general, be carried over to the following year. This can lead to last-minute spending on non-essential items and in some cases acts as a disincentive to achieve value over the longer term.</p> <p>This proposal is designed to allow more long-term budget planning, say over the next three years, instead of the automatic ‘use it or lose it’ approach. This would create incentives to seek out savings and efficiencies. Recipient organisations could then plan ahead and reduce financial uncertainties and this would remove the incentives for wasteful expenditure near year end.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p><i>“By allowing rollovers, budgets can be better spent on planned developments or equipment rather than frivolous spending.”</i></p> </div>
<p>9.</p>	<p><b>Review integrated initiatives to derive maximum value from the public sector property portfolio</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Given the current state of the property market, there may be opportunities for the public sector to purchase premises at reasonable prices, rather than continuing to rent. An integrated public sector approach might also enable vacant space in certain public sector buildings to be used by other organisations thus reducing the overall rental costs. This would maximise the value derived from public sector property portfolio.</p> <p>The purchasing, rather than rental, of premises could provide medium to long-term Exchequer savings. Ensuring that one part of the public service does not renew or take out leases or buy new premises if there are suitable vacant spaces in other public sector</p>



	<p>buildings would reduce the overall costs.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p><i>“In many cities and towns public services have developed incrementally and are located in multiple sites (old offices) in those cities and towns...there must be opportunities for relocation and sharing property and services between public sector bodies”</i></p> </div>
<p>10.</p>	<p><b>Facilitate individuals’ access to part of paid-up pensions without incurring a tax penalty to allow them to meet current financial commitments</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Consideration should be given to allowing individuals access to a portion of their pension funds without incurring a taxation penalty.</p> <p>This would allow those who have invested money in their pensions and who now find themselves in distressed financial circumstances, due to redundancy or other factors, the flexibility to meet their day-to-day commitments by borrowing against or drawing down a portion of their pension funds.</p> <p>This would apply to individuals who have paid up pensions and should be subject to carefully restricted conditions.</p>

	<p><b>Stimulating Enterprise and Employment</b></p>
<p>11.</p>	<p><b>Extend planning permission which has expired in the last four years if completed in the next 24 months, unless there are valid planning reasons, to stimulate the construction industry</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Planning permissions which have expired in the last four years should be extended for</p>

	<p>projects which are completed within the next 24 months. This would be automatic unless the local authority explicitly informs the applicants within 2-3 months that circumstances have changed to such an extent that proceeding would not be consistent with good planning policies.</p> <p>There should be an opportunity, however, for the public to register any objections to such projects and this should be taken account of by planners within the 2-3 month period. All current environmental and other standards would have to be met and this should be highlighted in amending legislation. This would stimulate the construction industry by giving opportunities for developments but only if carried out immediately.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p><i>“As part of an economic recovery, these projects which have had permission granted would be able to get off the ground quicker and get the economy and the construction industry working again.”</i></p> </div>
<p>12.</p>	<p><b>Make changes to job seekers’ allowance to incentivise placement of graduates</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>There are large numbers of recent graduates now on the live register. Any job vacancies which arise are so oversubscribed that these graduates who have little or no work experience are immediately excluded. Incentives and assistance should be offered to employers who take on a recently-qualified graduate.</p> <p><i>The Ideas Campaign note that this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009.</i></p>
<p>13.</p>	<p><b>Expand two-way mentoring schemes across industry and within communities to facilitate sharing of skills, ideas and expertise</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>Two-way mentoring could be better harnessed by businesses, organisations and communities in Ireland to exchange skills and expertise.</p> <p>Businesses in the US and other countries use two-way mentoring to younger employees to impart knowledge to existing employees while allowing experienced employees to advise</p>

	<p>newer colleagues.</p> <p>Companies could enhance their skillsbase by opening the channels between new employees with academic and technical knowledge and more senior employees, with years of sectoral and company experience. Similarly, redundant executives could be paired with entrepreneurs. On a community basis, local meetings could bring together those who have business, practical or creative skills to share.</p>
<p>14.</p>	<p><b>Create an online Dragon’s Den website for Irish entrepreneurs to pitch their business ideas and attract investment from around the world</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>Ireland has the second highest rate of early-stage entrepreneurs in the world, according to the OECD, but access to capital remains a barrier to start-ups. An online Dragon’s Den could be set up whereby Irish entrepreneurs pitch their ideas through the internet to potential investors.</p> <p>This would allow Irish entrepreneurs to access capital and get their start-up off the ground.</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p><b>Adopt microfinance operations for the provision of credit to small enterprises in low income areas</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>Individuals and businesses are experiencing difficulty in accessing credit. Microfinance, whereby individuals or groups can make available their funds to others usually within their own communities, provides a local model for addressing this problem. It has worked successfully in India and Africa and has been used successfully in Ireland in the past.</p> <p>Use of successful microfinance models that have worked in other countries need to be considered.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><i>“Microfinance would allow businesses that are solid and stable to get access to much needed funds without being paralysed by the crisis of confidence affecting the banks.”</i></p> </div>

<p>16.</p>	<p><b>Provide a one-stop-shop virtual helpdesk for start-ups with advice on legal, HR, patents, accountancy issues etc</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>The creation of a one-stop-shop virtual helpdesk for start-ups would provide a full range of advice and services to potential start-ups in areas such as legal, human resources, patents, accounting and information technology.</p> <p>Despite the range of supports available to start-ups, many entrepreneurs and unemployed people interested in establishing their own business find it hard to access all the advice and services needed from a single source.</p>
<p>17.</p>	<p><b>Consider feasibility of lending/borrowing online matching scheme to facilitate access to credit, such as those that exist in the US and the UK</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by individuals</i></p> <p>Given the difficulties experienced by businesses in accessing capital, the creation of lending “marketplaces” should be examined. Websites such as Zopa in the UK (<a href="http://uk.zopa.com">uk.zopa.com</a>) and Prosper in the US (<a href="http://www.prosper.com">www.prosper.com</a>) provide for direct peer-to-peer transactions between potential borrowers and prospective lenders.</p> <p>This could be a viable alternative source of finance to bank loans and may facilitate individuals’ and businesses’ access to credit.</p>
<p>18.</p>	<p><b>Create a comprehensive online forum for SMEs to band together to increase their buying power and their negotiating position with banks, suppliers</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>Over 90% of Irish businesses are SMEs and they could use their buying power to greater effect. An online forum to facilitate SMEs cooperating and coordinating on sales orders, negotiating with service providers and achieving economies of scale would allow SMEs to create efficiencies and save money.</p>



19.	<p><b>Encourage large firms to introduce agreed credit terms specifically for SMEs</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>Public sector bodies are subject to the Prompt Payment Act whereby suppliers such as SMEs must be paid within 30 days or else interest is charged on late payments. There is no equivalent requirement in the private sector although some businesses have taken leadership and stipulate transparently when they will pay their suppliers.</p> <p>This proposal envisages a code among large entities to adopt similar principles to ensure that their commercial arrangements, with SMEs in particular, are fair and consistent. This would assist SMEs with their cashflow and introduce increased certainty to their financial planning.</p>
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<b>Developing the Knowledge Economy</b>	
20.	<p><b>Develop a coherent 'Ireland' brand for education in order to draw more international students to our third-level institutions</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>As an English-speaking country with a well-regarded education system, Ireland has considerable potential to tap into the earnings and employment creation opportunities of the international market in third-level education. A coherent framework should be put in place to achieve this goal.</p> <p>Proposals under this heading include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All-island education marketing to overseas students with a single brand (similar to a UK model)</li> <li>• Establish twinning arrangements between Irish universities and institutes of technology and Chinese third-level institutions</li> <li>• Become a world leader in TEFL education</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the adequacy or otherwise of language skills in the workforce from an economic perspective and devise programmes to meet the deficit</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>“Apart from the obvious benefits of students spending money in the Irish economy, the ongoing networking for the future leaders of business and industry educated in Ireland and returning to their home countries to spread the word about the benefits of Ireland is one that should not be ignored.”</i></p> </div>
<p>21.</p>	<p><b>Provide for earlier entitlement for the unemployed to access education schemes</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Reduce the time that a person has to be on the dole to qualify for the Back to Education allowance. This will have a short-term impact of giving those who are unemployed the opportunity to remain active and to broaden their skills. It will also keep the country moving forwards as a knowledge economy.</p> <p><i>The Ideas Campaign notes that a version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009.</i></p>
<p>22.</p>	<p><b>Establish a network of ‘test bed’ facilities linked with universities and institutes of technology where unemployed engineers and scientists could prototype and develop technology-based ideas with possible business potential</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government and groups</i></p> <p>Some highly qualified and experienced electronic and software engineers are finding it difficult to secure jobs. These people represent a real asset to Ireland, if they are correctly utilised.</p> <p>The proposal is to explore the feasibility of establishing a network of ‘test bed’ facilities linked with universities or institutes of technology where unemployed engineers and scientists could prototype and develop technology-based ideas with possible business potential.</p>



	<div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p><i>“There is an opportunity...to put down a marker to the global investor community about the type of investment location the island of Ireland...aspires to be. An island at peace with itself, ‘looking outwards’ through the eyes of the innovation community at home, and seeking to develop novel ideas and forge strategic alliances across the globe.”</i></p> </div>
<p>23.</p>	<p><b>Give priority to IT education (as an exam subject) and IT in education (online learning resources)</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>An overarching ambition and driving force of the Irish education system is to make Ireland the most technology-literate country in the world. The case for a big push on IT education is evident. A variety of proposals were received that merit further consideration. These could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide IT as a subject in the Junior and Leaving Certificates and build ICT skills into the school curriculum</li> <li>• Develop arrangements in schools where teachers with higher levels of IT competencies would take a lead in the development and mentoring of their colleagues</li> <li>• Encourage the recycling of IT equipment from businesses and third level institutions into schools</li> <li>• Distribute school books and learning materials to schools and pupils electronically; distribute PDF copies and or distribute the material electronically through memory sticks. Encourage the use of laptops/netbooks by students – the cost of simple laptops is now becoming competitive with the annual cost of purchasing books.</li> </ul>
<p>24.</p>	<p><b>Teach business skills as part of all PhD education as a means of promoting the knowledge economy</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>One proposal to the Ideas Campaign involves the development of EngD doctorate</p>



	<p>programmes for engineering postgraduate students. This would be a complementary but distinctive and separate stream to the PhD in order to create a cohort of postgraduates who get exposure to industry and business related skills and orientation. The programme would include course work and industry-related research in a sponsoring company.</p> <p>This proposal has potential application beyond engineering. The Government is committed to doubling the numbers of PhD graduates as a vehicle to promoting a knowledge-based economy. The movement of people is the main vehicle for the transfer of knowledge and skills from third-level to businesses.</p> <p>Most PhD graduates have little or no business skills and are initially seen by many employers as a cost rather than as employees who can make an early contribution. The development, within PhD education, of strands which include advanced business education (e.g. inclusion of some of the content of MBA programmes) and some business experience could be a powerful means for diffusing advanced knowledge and skills into the business sector.</p>
<p>25.</p>	<p><b>Consider the merits of further prioritising Maths and Science at second level by awarding extra CAO points in these subjects</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>This proposal involves giving “points premiums” to maths and science subjects in the CAO applications system and giving these subjects more time and attention in school timetables.</p> <p>A possible related idea is to allow Leaving Certificate students taking the higher level maths papers to also sit the ordinary level paper. Many students are deterred from opting for higher level maths by its perceived difficulty and fear of failure. The ordinary level maths papers could be scheduled for the last day of the exam period which would give students an either/or option.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><i>“One day a child expressing an interest in a science degree will be heralded with the same glee that greeted the announcement that a son wanted to become a priest in the Ireland of old.”</i></p> </div>



26.	<p><b>Increase further education and training opportunities for the unemployed including through eLearning and blended learning</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government and groups</i></p> <p>Providing unemployed people with opportunities for personal education, training and development, protection of self esteem and opportunities to do worthwhile work is not just worthwhile but essential if we are facing into a medium-term prospect of high levels of unemployment.</p> <p>There is a case for improving the coherence of existing policy measures and developing new ones under a coherent framework. The Ideas Campaign recommends that the Government develops an agreed strategy, possibly through the social partnership framework.</p> <p>A starting point might be to consider an implementation plan for a Danish-style Flexicurity scheme, which allows for a combination of labour market flexibility (measured by a high level of job mobility), social security (a generous system of social welfare and unemployment benefits) and active labour market programmes. This is seen by its admirers as facilitating the ongoing transformation of the Danish economy.</p>
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	<p><b>Promoting Arts, Sport and Cultural Activities</b></p>
27.	<p><b>Make exercise space and outdoor equipment for old and young people available to facilitate healthy living and social interaction in communities all around the country</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government and groups</i></p> <p>Outdoor community exercise equipment should be provided as has been done in other countries. This could really boost our quality of life, sense of community and reduce our expenditure on healthcare and organised entertainment. Such community exercise facilities, and exercise classes, have proven to be highly successful elsewhere in improving public health.</p>



<p>28.</p>	<p><b>Establish a county-by-county project to record the stories and voices of Ireland’s elderly which could then be brought together on an all-Ireland basis and marketed to the Irish diaspora</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups</i></p> <p>Ireland has undergone enormous changes over the past few generations. Many of our elderly people have experienced these and related changes first hand and have a unique and valuable perspective on Irish life.</p> <p>A project should be initiated around the country to collect the disappearing voices within our communities. This could be done on a county-by-county basis involving schools, youth groups, local businesses and local radio. The individual county projects would then be brought together on an all-Ireland basis on national media and marketed to the Irish diaspora.</p> <p>This would create a network of personal inter-generational links as well as capturing a priceless piece of our heritage.</p>
<p>29.</p>	<p><b>Establish ticket booths in city centres selling discount tickets for that day’s events in order to increase the visibility and accessibility of Ireland’s cultural life</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups</i></p> <p>Cultural life in around Ireland is very active. However, we can learn a lot from how other countries promote their cultural activities. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of setting up ticket booths (similar to TKTS in New York City) in cities to sell unsold tickets for that evening’s performances at discounted prices. Tickets would be available for all theatres and music venues, including not-for-profit venues.</p>

<p><b>Encouraging Green Initiatives</b></p>	
<p>30.</p>	<p><b>Evaluate the feasibility of creating a National Allotments Scheme run by local</b></p>

	<p><b>authorities or others in conjunction with landowners</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government and individuals</i></p> <p>There were many proposals about the creation of allotments and a National Allotments Scheme whereby people would be allocated a patch of land to cultivate. Such a scheme would put underutilised land to work, promote sustainability, self-sufficiency and healthy eating. Local authorities and landowners would charge a modest fee for use of their land.</p> <p>For individuals, allotments would keep them active and involved in their local community. Particularly among those who are unemployed, looking after allotments would give a new sense of purpose and help stretch household budgets. Allotments would help to reactivate communities and put a natural resource to good use. Minimal investment would be needed.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>“This would offer people a chance to grow their own fruit and vegetables, enhanced community spirit, education, increased health benefits and a real chance to be that little bit greener.”</i></p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p><i>“I am a farmer and I am willing to make available arable plots...free.”</i></p> </div>
<p>31.</p>	<p><b>Increase measures to promote a ‘Green Island’ integrated brand for Ireland. Position Ireland as a green food island producing premium, natural foods</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government and groups</i></p> <p>Increased measures to promote the development of a ‘Green Island’ brand for Ireland should be pursued. This would contribute to tourism and promote our exports.</p> <p>As an island, relatively unaffected by any neighbour’s pollution, Ireland is ideally located to capitalise on growing consumer demand for organic and specialist foods. A strategy would be developed to increase the proportion of organic food produced here and the use of natural harvesting methods.</p> <p>Ireland could become a leader in certain food specialties. In export markets, we would</p>



	<p>promote products which would be seen as credible given Ireland’s location, natural food heritage and green credentials. Economic benefits would be from greater export earnings and more employment in farms and food businesses as well as increased tourism.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p><i>“Our produce would become the Swiss watch of the food world.”</i></p> </div>
<p>32.</p>	<p><b>Consider the feasibility of specialised green text alerts from Met Éireann to facilitate pre-emptive changes to heating levels in homes and offices to improve energy efficiency</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by individuals</i></p> <p>The Ideas Campaign proposes an examination of the potential of a specialised green text alert service. If a cold snap or heat wave is imminent, then a notification by text message would inform the recipient and advise them to manually adjust their heating or cooling system. This potentially could be funded by text fees.</p> <p>Also, if weather predictions could be given for GPS coordinates, a smart thermostat product could pre-emptively turn down the heat in a hot spell and slowly heat up during a cold spell. This would not need to be SMS based.</p> <p>This would facilitate the provision of comfortable living and working conditions, while reducing energy bills and saving energy.</p>

	<p><b>Boosting Tourism</b></p>
<p>33.</p>	<p><b>Consider innovative ways to stimulate tourism revenues</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>Ireland is famous for its tourism industry and tourism has traditionally been a huge revenue generator for the country. We need to continue to be innovative in our approach to tourism</p>

and continue to offer a wide range of attractions to visitors from all over the world. Several innovative ways to boost tourism revenues were proposed including:

- **Boost genealogy tourism by promoting the National Archives and organising clan gatherings**

Millions of people around the world claim Irish ancestry. There is an opportunity to increase the numbers travelling to Ireland to research and celebrate their family history. The National Archives should be promoted and advertised as a way of attracting tourists to Ireland. Clan gatherings could also be organised for all of those around the world with the same surname or links to that name. This would be a great celebration of Irish identity as well as providing a boost to tourism.

- **Launch a campaign to attach the Discover Ireland weblink to the foot of emails originating in Ireland**

Irish people use email to communicate with friends and contacts all over the world. This practice could be used to attract increased numbers of tourists to Ireland by offering an option to automatically attach the Discover Ireland weblink to the foot of all emails from Ireland.

- **Develop cycle tracks and cycle lanes, for example open up disused railway tracks for this purpose**

Adapting unused railway lines as cycle tracks and establishing new routes and links would open up the country to a new type of tourism. With a network of cycle tracks tourists would spend longer in rural Ireland and so boost revenues for local pubs, restaurants, heritage sites, campsites and B&Bs. This could be considered by community groups or tourism interests.

- **Hold a Modern World Fleadh to showcase Irish culture and attract tourists**

A big event such as a Modern World Fleadh would not only promote and celebrate Irish culture and attract tourists, but it could also raise spirits and create a positive focus for the nation.

- **Promote Dublin as a romance destination as it holds the relics of St. Valentine**



	<p>St Valentine’s relics are in Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin. This is a little-known fact in Ireland and abroad. This should be promoted as a tourist attraction and Ireland should become a top romance tourism destination. A St. Valentine’s festival would bring tourists to Ireland and boost tourism revenue during the low season.</p>
34.	<p><b>Establish a three-month pilot of free off-peak travel for tourists to reduce the cost of holidaying in Ireland and attract more visitors</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by government</i></p> <p>Cost-competitiveness should be a key focus in attracting overseas tourists to Ireland. The provision of free off-peak public transport to tourists could generate additional tourism revenue. This merits further consideration possibly on a three month pilot basis.</p>
35.	<p><b>Encourage schools to organise transition year trips within Ireland to assist tourism</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by groups and individuals</i></p> <p>It is now commonplace for students to go on trips abroad as part of transition year in secondary school. Schools could be encouraged to organise increased numbers of transition year student trips within Ireland to assist tourism. Hotels in Ireland could offer special rates and specially designed itineraries for school groups including trips based on languages, heritage sites or adventure activities.</p> <p>This would increase tourism revenue in Ireland and also promote a better knowledge of the country and its heritage.</p>

	<p><b>Public Sector Reform</b></p>
36.	<p><b>Explore the potential impact of providing greater flexibility for small scale public sector procurement to reduce costs and increase access to public contracts by SMEs</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p>

	<p>Many supplies and services under the public sector procurement regime may be the subject of framework agreements put in place a year or more ago, when prices were generally higher than they are now. A review of the procurement rules for small scale purchasing should be carried out. These arrangements for public sector purchasing should be non-binding on the awarding authority.</p> <p>Equally, contracts are often too large, either in volume or range of products or services, for SMEs to supply. Authorities should examine the possibility of managing their procurement needs through the use of lots. With careful management or encouragement all non-binding agreements to supply could be re-tendered with the emphasis placed on breaking needs down into lots for which SMEs can more easily tender.</p> <p>This approach ought to increase access to the public procurement process for SMEs, increase competition and ultimately reduce public expenditure.</p>
<p>37.</p>	<p><b>Encourage voluntary early retirement in the public sector</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Encouraging voluntary early retirement in the public sector would reduce the public sector wage bill or could provide vacancies to be filled by the unemployed.</p> <p><i>The Ideas Campaign notes that a version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009.</i></p>
<p>38.</p>	<p><b>Facilitate career breaks and shorter working week in public sector</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Facilitate public sector workers to take career breaks or to shorten their working week. This would empower individuals to change their work/life balance if they can afford to. Again it would serve to either reduce the public sector wage bill or create vacancies.</p> <p><i>The Ideas Campaign notes that a version of this idea was implemented in the Budget on 7 April 2009.</i></p>



<p>39.</p>	<p><b>Launch an internal public service campaign to encourage employees to identify ways of creating efficiencies and saving money</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>New initiatives are needed to eliminate waste and ensure a culture of value for money within the public service. Public servants themselves see opportunities to save money and should be actively encouraged to participate in cost-saving drives.</p> <p>All public service employees should think about ways that they can develop process improvements and promote innovation in the public service. A mechanism should be set up to allow them to log cost-saving proposals.</p>
<p>40.</p>	<p><b>Create greater economies of scale in public sector IT through cloud computing, rationalisation, hardware and software purchasing etc.</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>The public sector is a huge purchaser of IT equipment and services. To ensure that this consumption is cost efficient and fully effective, a review of public sector IT is proposed with a view to creating an integrated IT infrastructure which maximises savings and economies of scale.</p> <p>Cloud computing is one way in which savings could be made. This technology allows for underutilised capacity during lulls to be utilised in another function, for example by allowing a number of public sector bodies to share excess capacity IT storage. This would yield short to medium term returns. Virtualisation and consolidation should reduce hardware and running costs. Requirements and guidelines for future IT projects should be set out in advance so that they will be able to leverage a virtual data centre approach.</p>
<p>41.</p>	<p><b>Examine the feasibility of introducing an integrated system to increase efficiency for the collection of fines by the government</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Inefficiencies in how fines are collected were highlighted to the Ideas Campaign. Offenders are taken to prison by Gardaí for sums of money of less than €100. This proposal involves</p>

	<p>collecting fines directly and streamlining how fines are collected and administered. An electronic mechanism for collecting and tracking fines should be explored.</p> <div data-bbox="381 457 1320 598" style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p><i>"I work as a Garda. I recently brought a man to prison for an unpaid fine in the region of €500. The taxi cost around €350! Never mind the cost of two Gardaí to accompany him."</i></p> </div>
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Improving Healthcare	
42.	<p><b>Explore potential to recycle medical equipment, for example crutches, stair lifts etc., to create savings in the HSE</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>Crutches and other medical equipment are supplied to patients and grants are offered for stair lifts and other devices. Several contributors to the Ideas Campaign said that they had difficulty returning such equipment, as there appears to be no scheme in place for it to be recovered and reused.</p> <p>A programme of recycling medical equipment would reduce waste and reduce in savings for the HSE. Any insurance or other issues should be overcome.</p> <div data-bbox="381 1434 1304 1629" style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p><i>"My mother, having been discharged from hospital, was given a crutch for her fractured leg. When mended she returned it to A&amp;E, only to be told 'it's now yours to keep', though she explained she no longer needed it. It now collects mildew in the shed."</i></p> </div> <div data-bbox="386 1675 1312 1795" style="border: 1px solid red; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p><i>"My mother used a stair lift for ten months, then she died. We paid €5,000 and got a grant of €4,300. Now we are left trying to get rid of it."</i></p> </div>

<p>43.</p>	<p><b>Take measures to facilitate the use of lower-cost generic drugs, for example by pre-printing “or generic equivalent” on all prescriptions, or through other initiatives</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by Government</i></p> <p>It is accepted that generic drugs may not always be significantly cheaper than branded equivalents but new initiatives should be implemented to encourage the use of lower cost generic drugs. These initiatives might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pre-printed line on all prescription documents which states “or generic equivalent”. If the doctor wants to opt out, he/she has the option to delete this line when writing the prescription</li> <li>• Those using the medical card system should be supplied with generic rather than branded drugs where cheaper</li> <li>• Information on the comparative costs of the branded and generic versions of the top 30 prescribed drugs to be provided to all GPs on a quarterly basis</li> <li>• Drugs Refund Scheme to refund the price of lower cost drugs</li> <li>• Encourage the development and enforcement of a code of practice regarding the acceptance by doctors of hospitality from pharmaceutical companies</li> </ul>
<p>44.</p>	<p><b>Enable mobile phones to register owners as organ donors so that the information can be accessed instantly in the case of an accident</b></p> <p><i>Idea for action by individuals</i></p> <p>A facility on mobile phones to register oneself as an organ donor should be provided. All the relevant information (name, next of kin, blood group etc.) could be stored either on the phone or by the phone company. This would facilitate sign up to the organ donor scheme and allow the donor information to be accessed immediately in the case of an accident.</p>



## 7. Acknowledgements

This campaign would not have been possible without the hard work of many, many people – campaign staff, volunteers, members of the Advisory Group, media and campaign supporters (businesses and organisations which helped spread the message or helped with donations in kind).

It also would not have happened without such a positive, enthusiastic response from Irish citizens who embraced the idea of a grassroots campaign focused on proposing solutions to Ireland's economic problems.

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