



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together



Chambers Ireland submission to the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications on the second SDG National Implementation Plan

September 2021

Chambers Ireland is the State's largest business representative network. We are an all-island organisation with a unique geographical reach; our members are the Chambers of commerce in the cities and towns throughout the country – active in every constituency. Each of our member Chambers is central to their local business community and all seek to promote thriving local economies that can support sustainable cities and communities.

Since pledging to advocate for and support the advancement of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in November 2019, our Network has been closely engaged with the aims of the goals and as such are very pleased to contribute to the Department's consultation on the second SDG National Implementation Plan. Taking a proactive approach on driving, and supporting, engagement throughout the business community has become central to our organisation's strategy.

In consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from our Network and the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council, Chambers Ireland is pleased to contribute to the Department's consultation regarding the second SDG National Implementation Plan, and we welcome the steps taken to gather the views of the business community. This is an important area of policy for our Network of Chambers as our business members look to further their engagement with the SDGs, implementing them in across their operations and supply chains. We look forward to continued engagements with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications to highlight challenges and potential opportunities for Chambers Ireland, its Network of Chambers, and the wider business community.

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Executive Summary

- The Sustainable Development Goals are a mechanism for overcoming siloed thinking, and for gaining value for state investments. The lack of resourcing and co-ordination at the institutional and departmental level must be urgently addressed to overcome this and avoid any further hindering of the implementation of the SDGs
- Civil society has a large part to play in the future implementation of the SDGs and must form a core component of the stakeholders in the next National SDG Implementation Plan through formal follow up consultations on the government implementation plan, representation on mechanisms that oversee implementation efforts and formal channels for participation in accountability processes
- There is a strong need to co-ordinate institutional actions to ensure that it does not require businesses to engage in multifarious forms of reporting and engagement resulting in the duplication of efforts which results in smaller firms avoiding contracts and tenders which involve sustainability actions and declarations
- Ireland has made slow progress in achieving the SDGs over the past 3 years. To overcome this, a cross-departmental database measuring progress and the adoption of a 'Wellbeing Budget'
- CSR must be merged into the SDGs to avoid continued duplication of the targets and outputs. In doing so, the CSR Stakeholder Forum must be integrated into the SDG National Stakeholder Forum
- Increased cross-departmental collaboration on achieving the aims of the Goals must be prioritised, ensuring all elements of the targets are considered by all departments. In doing so, the SDG Interdepartmental Working Group must be reviewed, providing greater transparency and an action-focused work plan
- The forthcoming Plan must have tangible policy actions integrated into the Plan, and not merely improve the policy coherence of the Goals
- The Secretary General of each government department should take responsibility for the SDG agenda of that department, ensuring consistency and the required capacity to meet the aims of the Goals for that department
- The department must look to international best practice from the likes of the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development when deciding on ways to promote and implement the Goals
- The second SDG Implementation Plan must be an action focused plan with clear policy outputs and strong deliverables for the whole of society to work towards
- The department needs to develop a list of suggested reporting systems for businesses to use when reporting on their sustainability progress, ensuring that there is as little of a bureaucratic burden as possible for SMEs
- The SDG Stakeholder Forum and the SDG Champions Programme need to be overhauled. It must be a deliverables focused group that is adequately resourced by government with a clear agenda circulated in advance of each meeting
- SDG Data Hub needs to be likewise reformed, transforming it into a clear, concise, and transparent website that provides a suite of readily available information on each of the actions to achieve the SDGs
- The UN Global Compact group for Ireland must be quickly enlarged.

Chambers Ireland and the SDGs

In September 2019, on the fourth anniversary of the UN SDGs, all affiliated Chambers across Ireland pledged their commitment to the SDGs.¹ This involved all Chambers, including Chambers Ireland, committing to upholding, promoting, and implementing the SDGs into their daily operations, advocating for the Goals locally and creating or supporting policies that reflect the SDGs. Having engaged our network of chambers, we have delivered an awareness building, and action-orientated communication strategy with businesses throughout the island.

Our Network understands the necessity of sustainable development and our chambers campaign for improvements in the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of the communities they are members of. Each Chamber plays an integral part in creating a sustainable environment to work and live, and they collectively work together on achieving a prosperous future for Ireland.

In representing the needs of the Network and its members, Chambers Ireland utilises the targets of the Goals as a lens to interrogate the causes of the policy priorities that our network raises and uses the SDGs to ensure cohesion in the policy recommendations and advocacy that we carry out nationally.

Since the commitment was made by the network, each of our policy outputs identify how the goals interact with our policy agenda and are used to identify parallel areas of interest and activity which can sometimes be missed in the consideration of a policy area. Examples include consideration of gender equality (SDG 5) in our submissions on the night-time economy, particularly it's interaction with safe late-night transportation for those that are enjoying the nightlife, and the workers who make it possible. Similarly, the Chambers Ireland submission on the National Development Plan 'Review to Renew' consultation² highlights how necessary that programme of activity is to deliver on climate action (SDG 13), and how, given the implementation of the Climate Action Plan, the National Development Plan will need to be realigned if we are to achieve the decarbonisation targets Ireland has committed to.

In addition, the Chambers Ireland submissions on Budget 2022,³ 2021⁴ and 2020⁵ and the Chambers Ireland General Election Manifesto 2020⁶ have all be structured around the goals, a mechanism that was useful in prioritising and deprioritising various efforts which we have advocated for.



¹ Chambers Ireland (2019), [Chambers to lead the way on SDGs](#)

² Chambers Ireland (2021), [Chambers Ireland Submission on the National Development Plan Review to Renew Consultation](#)

³ Chambers Ireland (2021), [Chambers Ireland submission on Budget 2022](#)

⁴ Chambers Ireland (2020), [Chambers Ireland Budget 2021 Submission](#)

⁵ Chambers Ireland (2019), [Chambers Ireland Pre Budget Submission 2020](#)

⁶ Chambers Ireland (2020), [Chambers Ireland General Election Manifesto 2020](#)

Achieving the SDG targets by 2030 is a collective task that cannot be accomplished without partnership and collaboration. Chambers Ireland and its Network of Chambers are rooted in communities and are a progressive voice for business across Ireland, which is why we use our platform to amplify the SDGs, the achievements of our stakeholders, and our Network in their own initiatives to implement the Goals.

By upholding and promoting the SDGs and Chambers Ireland's aim is to highlight the opportunities the Goals create and provide business with the confidence that meaningful results can be achieved. We promote how the Sustainable Development Goals positively impact businesses, communities, and livelihoods. Our work through the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council, the Sustainable Business Impact Awards,⁷ and the recently published Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business⁸ are a selection of examples of ways that we advocate for the Goals. In particular, the SDG Toolkit for Business has been hugely successful, gaining recognition from with UN and with our colleagues in the International Chamber of Commerce who we are collaborating with to replicate such a guide for the international business audience. Our work with European colleagues in the Eurochambres SDG Committee also builds on this and is very timely given the European Commission is planning to incorporate the SDGs into the forthcoming European Semester for framing its policy.

Consultation questions for consideration

Question 1: What are the top 5 (in order of preference) most important SDGs to your organisation?



Though most of the seventeen Goals are relevant to the work of Chambers Ireland, the organisation and its Network of Chambers has initially chosen to focus on five of the Goals which are of most strategic relevance to it, comprising in numerical order:

- Gender Equality (SDG 5)
- Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)
- Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9)
- Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11)
- Climate Action (SDG 13)

The targets of each of these often interlink. For example, sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) will be achieved through concrete measures to promote climate action (SDG 13) and balancing economic development (SDGs 8 & 9). Therefore, all five are *equally* as strategically relevant and important to our organisation and wider Network.

⁷ [The Sustainable Business Impact Awards](#)

⁸ [Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business](#)

Question 2: Are you engaged in any activities related to the SDGs?

One of the key drivers of the SDGs is their aptness for businesses to apply their creativity and innovation in solving the sustainability challenges. Chambers Ireland support this in several ways through its engagement in a range of activities related to the SDGs, including:

Chambers Ireland and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)

Chambers Ireland are proud members of the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the largest business representative organisation worldwide. As a member, Chambers Ireland acts as the Irish National Committee of the ICC (or ICC Ireland) which allows it to communicate its views on a range of policy issues on behalf of its members to intergovernmental organisations.

The ICC has observer status at the United Nations⁹ and played a central role in the delivery of both the Paris Agreement and in shaping the UN SDGs. The ICC is committed to advocating for coherent policy frameworks in line with the latest science and has been working with the United Nations Development Programme¹⁰ to deliver an effective global vaccine strategy, in addition to advocacy and donation vaccine efforts with UNICEF. As the institutional representative of 45 million companies worldwide, ICC recognises the urgent need to keep the rise in global temperature to 1.5°C and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

The ICC is formally recognised as a custodian of the SDGs, founded the SDG Business forum, and has actively supported the UN's Global Compact since its inception. To mark the 5th anniversary of the signing of the Paris Agreement, the ICC launched its SME Climate Hub¹¹ during the 2020 New York Climate Week to act as a one-stop shop, providing SMEs with tools and resources to curb emissions and gain a competitive advantage. The tools provided by the SME Climate Hub are freely available to small and medium-sized businesses and cater specifically to this sector with a goal to reduce emissions, improve business competitiveness and build resilience in line with the SDGs.

By signing up to the hub, businesses pledge to make the SME Climate Commitment and start taking immediate action to tackle climate change using the tools they have curated with the University of Oxford. Chambers Ireland have supported the SME Climate Hub since its launch promoting the resources readily available to businesses to switch to more sustainable methods of doing business.

Chambers Ireland enjoys close engagement with its partners in the ICC and continuously collaborates with its international networks to drive the SDGs as a pivotal benchmark for sustainable development.

The Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council

The members of the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Council are professionals working within Sustainability, CSR, Communications and Citizenship across various sectors. This Council supports

⁹ In 2016, the ICC was granted Observer Status at the UN in December 2016, providing business with direct access into the UN system for the very first time. International Chamber of Commerce (2016), [Business and the United Nations](#)

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme (2020), [COVID-19 Private Sector Global Facility announced at SDG Business Forum](#)

¹¹ The [SME Climate Hub](#) is co-hosted by the ICC, the Exponential Roadmap Initiative, the We Mean Business coalition and the United Nations Race to Zero campaign.

Chambers Ireland and our efforts to promote best practice in sustainable development and collaborates on projects to amplify the importance of the SDGs.

The Council members offer advice on increasing awareness of the SDGs and identifying partnership opportunities to provide a stronger voice for enterprise across Ireland. The insights provided by this Council are vital to Chambers Ireland and our commitment to encouraging and promoting sustainable and responsible business practices nationwide.

Chairperson of the Council is Sinéad Hickey, Head of Sustainability for Ireland and Europe at John Sisk & Son Ltd. The Council also comprises of the following members:

- Deirdre Kennedy – IBM
- Fergal Fitzgerald – ESB
- Karina Howley – KPMG Ireland
- Colm Bergin – Bank of Ireland
- Orlaith Bermingham – SSE Airtricity
- Yvonne Holmes – AIB
- Daragh Fallon – Abbott
- Nicola Woods – An Post
- Thomas McHugh – Cork Chamber
- Sinead Healy – Dublin Chamber
- James Kiernan – Chambers Ireland

Through all the changes and challenges that the pandemic brought about in 2020, these did not deflect from Chambers Ireland's commitments to the SDGs, educating our Network on their importance, and introducing members to the various steps that they can take to incorporate the SDGs into their own businesses.

In adapting to the restrictions, Chambers Ireland moved its events to online platforms and embraced the opportunity to reach a nationwide audience to continue the conversation on the SDGs and share information. In June and July 2020, Chambers Ireland ran a 5-week webinar series on the SDGs with the support of the Sustainable Business Council. Members of the Council hosted each week's webinar – focusing on one of the five SDGs which Chambers Ireland have pledged to uphold – providing a platform for industry experts to also share their insights.

The Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Impact Awards

Chambers Ireland ran the Corporate Social Responsibility Awards for sixteen years during which time it saw many great projects receive recognition for the positive benefits they made to the environment, communities, staff, charities, and people both in Ireland and abroad. Following its commitment to the SDGs in 2019, Chambers Ireland relaunched the awards in 2020 as the new Sustainable Business Impact Awards to continue the process of alignment with the Goals.

The Sustainable Business Impact Awards¹² celebrate best practice in sustainable development and social responsibility from companies of all sizes, nationwide. They recognise the meaningful and high quality-work from companies through different Awards categories, including excellence in Environment, Workplace, Communication, Social Enterprise, Community Partnership (divided into Charity, Volunteering and Community Programme), and Diversity & Inclusion. Although the Awards categories and entry criteria remain largely unchanged from the previous CSR Awards, the new brand will greatly improve Chambers Ireland’s ability to evolve this concept of sustainable business impact into the future, building on the success of all the work of previous winning and applicant companies.

Considering the pandemic and its widespread impact over the past 18 months, the 2021 Sustainable Business Impact Awards are critically important this year in the context of a strong post-pandemic recovery that puts sustainability at its core. As a body that represents businesses across Ireland, we know first-hand how difficult the pandemic has been for local economies and SMEs. Nonetheless, Chambers Ireland believes that sustainability must not be allowed to slip from the agenda as the economy recovers.¹³

The Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business

Building on our extensive work to promote the SDGs, Chambers Ireland launched its SDG Toolkit for Business¹⁴ in July 2021. Based on significant contributions from the Sustainable Business Council, the Toolkit encourages employers of every size to advance their sustainability journey by integrating the Goals into their day-to-day activities.

The SDG Toolkit for Business equips business with the knowledge to take leading action across a range of issues and signal the direction to achieve a sustainable society in Ireland. Chambers Ireland encourages SMEs and larger companies to engage with the Toolkit and their local chamber in support of our collective work to secure a better, greener, and fairer planet in the years ahead.



Beyond raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals, the principal aim of the Toolkit is to drive action on achieving the goals by bringing simplicity and practical guidance. We recognise that while it may seem like a daunting journey for a business to embark on, as we have learnt integrating the goals into business brings opportunities and structure to many of the activities they are already planning to introduce. As the 17 Goals have been created so that organisations, businesses, and communities can identify the Goal(s) to which they feel they can

¹² [The Sustainable Business Impact Awards](#)

¹³ Chambers Ireland (2021), [Sustainability must not be allowed to slip from agenda during recovery, says Chambers Ireland at launch of the 2021 Sustainable Business Impact Awards](#)

¹⁴ [Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business](#)

contribute, however large or small, we highlight how every business can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Chambers Ireland and the United Nations Global Compact

As a special initiative of the UN Secretary-General, the United Nations Global Compact is a call to companies everywhere to align their operations and strategies with Ten Principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment, and anti-corruption. Its ambition is to accelerate and scale the global collective impact of business by upholding the Ten Principles and delivering the Sustainable Development Goals through accountable companies and ecosystems that enable change.

There are approximately twenty Irish organisations signed up to the Compact.¹⁵ Chambers Ireland has applied to become a participant and we look forward to encouraging Chambers from across our Network to sign up to the Compact and further their work in the implementation of the SDGs. However, the application timeline for the process is approx. 4-6 months. This is too long to wait when the urgency to act is now. We urge the department to work with its international counterparts to speed up this process. We also urge the department to work with other government departments to accelerate the establishment of an Irish Global Compact network – as Ireland is one of the only remaining EU countries that does not have one.

Question 7: Thinking back over the last number of years, what factors have supported your work regarding sustainable development?

Over the past number of years, Chambers Ireland has significantly increased its engagement and policy advocacy in sustainable development by leveraging the ideas and aims of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to transition to the SDGs, focusing all elements of the organisation and its outputs on the aims of the Goals. Chambers Ireland has done so in several ways:

- **CSR** – Chambers Ireland and its Network of Chambers has long been engaged in CSR as part of the overall sustainable development agenda. In 2013, for example, it launched a new guide to Corporate Social Responsibility for SMEs, highlighting the many simple ways that smaller organisations could engage with CSR and the positive effect that this would have on a business's bottom line.¹⁶ This work was further progressed by Chambers Ireland's engagement with the then Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation's National CSR Stakeholder Forum and annual running the national Chambers Ireland CSR Awards which commended best practice in CSR (this was relaunched in 2020 as the Sustainable Business Impact Awards). Chambers Ireland also facilitated a CSR Policy Council (since rebranded as the Sustainable Business Council), made up of senior professionals working in this area to drive Chambers Ireland's policy and to assist in getting the Chamber Network and its members engaged in socially responsible business practices. CSR provided an excellent platform over the past number of years for Chambers Ireland to drive its agenda in sustainable development and have positively utilised this experience in its transition to the SDGs.

¹⁵ Irish Times (2021), Fewer than 20 Irish companies have signed up to UN Global Compact

¹⁶ Chambers Ireland (2013), [Guide to Corporate Social Responsibility for SMEs Launched](#). The full guide is accessible [here](#).

- **Grassroots organisation with a broad Network and business buy-in** – Chambers Ireland and its wider Network is a grassroots organisation that enjoys large-scale business buy-in for the sustainability agenda, as indicated through its 2019 pledge to the SDGs.¹⁷ Sustainability is now something that can be marketed and sold by businesses as consumers become more conscious of their environmental footprint. Businesses are also conscious of this and are continuously reviewing supply chains to secure more sustainable methods of doing business, something which is even more attractive if it can positively impact the organisation's bottom line. The combination of all these elements, and the risk of future EU and national directives and legislation on implementing sustainable business practices, means that there is large scale buy-in from Chamber members across the country. Though Chambers Ireland and individual Chambers lead regularly lead out on SDG initiatives, we are beginning to see more and more businesses take the lead on this which supports our overall work in this policy sphere.
- **Understanding the on-the ground challenges for businesses, and then being able to synthesis those observations into an understanding of the national challenges that lie behind them** – As a result of businesses taking action to address the SDGs and the sustainable development agenda, this enables Chambers to interpret the challenges that businesses on the ground face in implementing changes. Chambers Ireland, through its various policy and stakeholder forums (such as the Sustainable Business Council, the Chambers Ireland Public Affairs Forum, and the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Infrastructure and Planning Taskforce) gather this information and synthesises the observations to understand the national challenges behind them. This in turn leads to the development of a large selection of Chambers Ireland's national policy recommendations, evidenced in its large volume of policy consultation submissions over the past number of years.¹⁸

Question 8: Thinking back over the last number of years, what factors have hindered your work regarding sustainable development?

Lack of resourcing and co-ordination at the institutional and departmental level

The national development agenda is closely linked to the SDGs, supported by a complex framework of central policies and procedures. The great strength of the Sustainable Development Goals is their role in finding complementary processes within policy. Housing has long been a concern of Irish businesses because of the impact of the housing shortage on their operations. Often, members of staff spend months of each year attending viewings trying to find accommodation. These extra pressures have a deleterious effect on productivity. Once they find accommodation, they often seek increased pay to support the increased rent, in effect privatising a public policy failure. Those that are forced to commit to long commutes have lower productivity levels, experience a lower quality of life, and are often forced to seek new employment which is closer to where their home and family are. Recruitment from abroad is also an issue for many businesses as potential members of staff often pass through to the offer stage only to withdraw because of the difficulties and costs associated with housing. Other, particularly younger members of staff, frequently emigrate to other jurisdictions

¹⁷ Chambers Ireland (2019), [Chambers to lead the way on SDGs](#)

¹⁸ [Chambers Ireland Policy Submissions](#)

because of the inadequacy in the supply of housing, which creates problems for businesses as onboarding early career members of staff becomes a perpetual process and means that there is a hollowing out of skills within many cohorts.

Framing the housing issue within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals highlights the institutional need to focus attention and resources on the goal of achieving sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). It highlights that transport investment, activation of vacancies, and planning reform are all interlinking elements of solving the housing problem, but they will also help address our climate action (SDG 13) agenda, and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). Each of those elements are necessary conditions for addressing the housing problem, but without co-ordination at the highest level across all three elements, no housing policy agenda can succeed.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a mechanism for overcoming siloed thinking, and for gaining value for state investments. Many policies are reinforcing, so with interdepartmental collaborations towards defined goals, like the SDGs, the effectiveness of spending can be amplified, and the efforts of individual departments can also be supported by the actions of other departments without requiring extra resources. Where additional resources are needed is at the co-ordination level, but with the Sustainable Development Goals being both well-defined and simple guides to action the shared efforts of state bodies need only to be looking where areas of collaboration can occur and these synergies can develop.

The lack of resourcing and co-ordination at the institutional and departmental level should be urgently addressed to avoid any further hindering of the implementation of the SDGs. Bodies such as Chambers Ireland would benefit from this co-ordination in particular as this would make advocacy for a particular policy area much more streamlined and efficient. We further suggest that each Secretary General be responsible for delivering on the goals within their department as they have the skills and powers to enforce the targets for each unit.

Question 9: Thinking about the next few years, what opportunities do you think there are to progress your work with regard to sustainable development?

There is a great opportunity to build on the work that has been undertaken to date on the SDGs and to develop this to progress the targets. From Chambers Ireland's perspective, the following is a selection of the opportunities that we plan to engage in to progress our own work in this area:

Societal buy-in

Ireland benefits from an active civil society which, together with the private sector, has engaged with the SDGs since their adoption.¹⁹ As such, civil society has a large part to play in the future implementation of the SDGs and must form a core component of the stakeholders in the next National SDG Implementation Plan. Civil society can take on a variety of functions in the implementation process through spurring government action through persistent advocacy and acting as a watchdog holding government to account to their commitments. They can also be useful tools in advising local

¹⁹ [Ireland: Voluntary National Review 2018](#)

and national government on concrete implementation measures to take, building on their experience on the ground.

To ensure effective society engagement in the implementation of the SDGs, it is important that involvement not be of a merely informative nature. Civil society should have formal roles, such as through formal follow up consultations on the government implementation plan, representation on mechanisms that oversee implementation efforts and formal channels for participation in accountability processes.²⁰ By doing so, this will enable the aims of SDG 16 to be met through “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making.”²¹ By its geographical nature, Chambers Ireland and its Network will continue to work with local communities through its member outreach to progress the goals in localities across Ireland. This must also be supported by government through its strategic priority commitment in the first SDG National Implementation Plan to increase SDG awareness.²²

A recognition that behaviours must change

Achieving the SDGs will require individual citizens, businesses, and wider communities to make meaningful, long-term changes to their behaviour. Chambers Ireland and its Network are ready to help make this happen. The recent launch of the Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business is just one example of how we are encouraging businesses to adapt their behaviours. This, however, needs wide support from government and its agencies also.

We cannot rely on technological innovation alone to achieve widespread reductions in carbon emissions or biodiversity depletion. No matter how many energy-efficient appliances, home insulation and water-saving devices we produce or install, technical efficiency won't be enough unless people change their ingrained habits.²³ A more sustainable future requires every facet of Irish society to rethink its core values and to adapt our behaviours.

This must be led from a top-down approach, involving much more than an effective marketing campaign and encouragement for socially desirable pro-environmental action. Overhauling the SDG Data Hub is one method of doing this to provide an authentic and transparent database of how Ireland is performing in implementing the SDGs. Government must lead so that wider society can follow this example and make lasting behavioural changes.

A growing willingness to get there

The effects of climate change that can be seen across the world and closer to home in Ireland bear witness to the recent findings of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report²⁴ that the current scientific understanding of climate change is that there is growing confidence in the link between carbon dioxide

²⁰ The 2018 Voluntary National Review found that although it is growing, public awareness of the SDGs in Ireland was below the EU average at 36%.

²¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [Goal 16](#)

²² [The Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020](#)

²³ Steg and Velk (2009), [Encouraging pro-environmental behaviour: An integrative review and research](#)

²⁴ IPCC (2021), [AR6 Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis](#)

in the atmosphere, rising global temperatures, and accelerating climate impacts. The hotter summers and cooler, wetter winters are evidence of this.

The IPCC have supported this finding by updated climate models that provide more detailed projections about possible future conditions which depend on the choices humans make about carbon emissions. We continue to see the need to quickly alter our behaviours and the growing willingness to get there and limit climate change. The recent call for the Irish national broadcaster to increase its coverage of climate change is just one example of this growing willingness to achieve our collective climate action (SDG 13).²⁵

Further, a recent national study that Chambers Ireland conducted on the shaping Ireland's electricity future demonstrated an overwhelming feedback for greater ambition and prioritisation of renewable energy in the design of Ireland's electricity network for the coming years.

Chambers Ireland will build on this increasing eagerness of business and wider society to progress our work, messaging, and policy recommendations for government to achieve our collective national and global targets in line with the SDGs.

Question 10: Thinking about the next few years, what risks might undermine your work with regard to sustainable development?

Continued lack of engagement at the institutional level

Chambers Ireland supports the fuller integration of sustainable actions within businesses, however there are many strands of activities which relate to sustainability but are not at present being co-ordinated. Within the Department of Enterprise there is the commitment to the OECD Guidelines; the Department of Finance and the Office of Government Procurement is developing an agenda for the inclusion of Green and Social considerations; and the European Commission is working on a Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive which while focused on publicly traded firms will also include non-traded firms which are part of their value and supply chains. There is a strong need to co-ordinate these actions to ensure that it does not require businesses to engage in multifarious forms of reporting and engagement resulting in the duplication of efforts which results in smaller firms avoiding contracts and tenders which involve sustainability actions and declarations.

A failure to ensure that these (and similar) activities are co-ordinated will result in reputational damage to sustainable development because the associated administrative burden will come to be views as a burdensome hurdle which excludes ordinary businesses from participating rather than as a vehicle for creating further and deeper engagement with the goals.

²⁵ RTÉ (2021), [How RTÉ News is covering climate change](#)

Question 11: When thinking about Ireland's progress in achieving the SDGs over the past 3 years, how would you assess Ireland's progress?

There is no shortage of reports on Ireland's progress in meeting the SDGs and the lists of policy actions in place, or needed, to support this. A 2018 Voluntary National Review,²⁶ for example, extensively details the suite of national policies in place to address the 17 Goals. A 2020 Social Justice Report on Measuring Progress provides an overview of the pace of delivery of 15 comparable EU countries on delivering the Goals, with Ireland placed tenth overall behind the likes of Denmark, Sweden, Austria, and Germany.²⁷ The authors of this report conclude that Ireland faces challenges in 6 SDGs,²⁸ significant challenges in 7 SDGs²⁹ and major challenges in 4 SDGs.³⁰

If we look at Eurostat's 2021 report on Sustainable Development in the European Union³¹ Ireland is progressing well towards many of the SDGs and is performing better than the EU average, however there are some Goals that Ireland is progressing worse at than the EU, especially climate action (SDG 13), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9), and gender equality (SDG 5). Coalition 2030's report on Ireland's implementation of Agenda 2030 also outlines the country's slow progress in getting to grips with the implementation of the SDGs and the dramatic need to strengthen its commitment to the agenda.³² Without referencing an exhaustive list of reports and findings, it is apparent that Ireland has made slow progress in achieving the SDGs over the past 3 years. To overcome this, Chambers Ireland recommends the following:

Measuring change through a cross-departmental progress database

The 17 SDGs address not only measurable changes of wellbeing, economic development, and better environments, but also how these changes will be induced by a means of clearly defining 169 targets to be achieved by 2030 and indicators to measure how it contributes with respect to the various SDC targets. Effectively measuring the outcomes of an intervention will help in shaping the direction in which a project moves for effective implementation.³³ In the Irish context, the first National Implementation Plan 2018 provides an 'SDG Matrix' which identifies the responsible Government Departments for each of the 169 targets and an 'SDG Policy Map' indicating the relevant national policies for each of the targets. While the SDG Policy Map is useful in deciphering where the responsibility of each Goal's targets lies, there is no corresponding database that measures the progress of each department in achieving these targets.

With the wealth of reports available on Ireland's progress on achieving the SDGs (which often utilise different reporting mechanisms) it is difficult to ascertain which is the most relevant and has the correct, up to date information. This makes it equally difficult to assess Ireland's overall progress.

²⁶ [Ireland: Voluntary National Review 2018](#)

²⁷ Social Justice Ireland (2020), [Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2020](#)

²⁸ No poverty (SDG 1), good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).

²⁹ Zero hunger (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), and climate action (SDG 13).

³⁰ Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), life below water (SDG 14), life on land (SDG 15), and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17). Social Justice Ireland (2020), [Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2020](#)

³¹ Eurostat (2021), [Sustainable Development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context](#)

³² Coalition 2030 (2018), [Coalition 2030 Report](#)

³³ KPMG (2017), [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\): Leveraging CSR to achieve SDGs](#)

Developing structured indicators are a crucial next step for the forthcoming Implementation Plan. These will help in understanding if the expected development changes are being realised. In terms of measuring the impact and quantifying the progress on SDG targets, developing effective indicators to gauge success is important. Chambers Ireland recommends that the Department include a corresponding frequently updated database of where each government department is in achieving their set targets under the 17 Goals, and who is the responsible person in the department for reporting/oversight, enabling greater transparency and one central location where stakeholders and interested parties can easily access information and can check on progress.

‘Wellbeing Budget’

In 2019, New Zealand introduced its very successful ‘Wellbeing Budget’ which, rather than using economic metrics such as GDP, used a much broader range of outcomes, including human health, safety, and flourishing, to assess the success of government policies. This form of SDG reporting has been very successful with other governments, including the UK, examining similar plans.

What is unique about a ‘Wellbeing Budget’ is that it is focused on *directly* addressing problems, rather than on promoting economic growth in the hope that the wealth produced by growth (if achieved) will provide the necessary resources to address public priorities.³⁴ The aim is to measure progress; to check if policy initiatives are achieving the stated objectives. In effect, it is like a report card to evaluate the Government’s performance.³⁵

Chambers Ireland believes that the introduction of a similar ‘Wellbeing Budget’ in Ireland would be a very welcome move by the department, or something of a similar format, in which the Government clearly states its priorities and the approach it will take to deliver on these priorities

Question 12: Have you any recommendations that you would like to share that you think would help us to further progress in the next Implementation Plan?

Merge CSR into the SDGs

Feedback from our Sustainable Business Council tells us that there is a need to fully merge the CSR into the SDGs to avoid continued duplication of the targets and outputs. The only main difference between CSR and the SDGs is in relation to social enterprise, therefore this should be incorporated into the second national SDG implementation plan.

It should be noted that one of the failings of the CSR programme experienced by the Chamber Network was the failure to sufficiently engage smaller businesses. CSR seemed to be the domain of larger businesses with little room for SMEs to engage. Whereas the SDGs provide a much broader

³⁴ Social Justice Ireland (2020), [Measuring Progress: The Sustainable Progress Index 2020](#)

³⁵ The OECD and NESC have advocated for this approach for many years, most notably in the NESC 2009 report on [Well-Being Matters: A Social Report for Ireland](#)

opportunity and suite of targets for micro, SMEs and MNEs to engage in the Goals, regardless of their business model or modes of operation. However, unless there is a complete integration of the CSR into the SDGs there is the risk that the SDGs may be seen as something that SMEs are solely focused on. Chambers Ireland recommends a holistic integration of the CSR into the SDGs to prevent this and provide a space for all businesses to engage.

We also recommend that the CSR Stakeholder Forum and the National SDG Stakeholder Forum be imminently incorporated into one national SDG Stakeholder Forum, reflecting government policy of focusing on the Sustainable Development Goals. This will avoid future duplication of the workload and stakeholder meetings and provide greater clarity and focus for the group.

Review of the SDG Interdepartmental Working Group

The establishment of the SDG Interdepartmental Working Group was a very positive step to streamline policies across the whole of government, with all ministers retaining responsibility for implementing the individual SDGs relating to their departments.³⁶ However, the follow-through on this commitment is dubious. The official gov.ie webpage for the SDG Interdepartmental Working Group³⁷ outlines that only two meetings of the group have taken place on 10 October 2019 and 11 December 2019. Both sets of meeting notes are also provided. However, a parliamentary question from Deputy Holly Cairns on 18 May 2020 to the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications reveals that there have been 21 meetings of the Interdepartmental Working Group, with the most recent taking place on 23 April 2021.³⁸ Further details of the most recent group meetings are provided by the Minister, yet only 4 meetings appear to have taken place in 2020, and only 1 cited for 2021. Furthermore, no meeting notes are publicly readily available.

This is very confusing and lacks transparency, especially given the commitment in the first meeting notes to hold monthly meetings throughout 2020 considering the increased work plan.³⁹ Though the pandemic stalled many projects, programmes and working groups, it is regrettable that this Interdepartmental Working Group has not received the attention that it requires given the scale of the challenge to meet the aims of the 17 SDGs. Chambers Ireland strongly urges DECC to review this group as soon as possible, enabling monthly meetings (or more, depending on the need), while also ensuring transparency of the Group's workplan and targets. This Group must ensure that concrete actions are being taken by every Minister in every government department.

Implicit in the design of the SDGs is that each goal and target have various degrees of dependency and influence on others, but it remains unclear exactly how these interlinkages work. The integrated nature of the goals and targets means that progress on one goal or target is linked through causal

³⁶ Gov.ie (2021), [Sustainable Development Goals Interdepartmental Working Group](#)

³⁷ Gov.ie (2021), [Sustainable Development Goals Interdepartmental Working Group](#)

³⁸ Houses of the Oireachtas (2021), [Sustainable Development Goals – Dáil Éireann Debate, Tuesday 18 May 2021](#)

³⁹ The increased work plan also gave rise to the Department of the Taoiseach, chair of the group, outlining the possibility that the Group may have had to meet more than once per month to deal with the workload.

Departments of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (2019), [Interdepartmental Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals \[SDGs\] Thursday 11th December 2019](#)

relationships and feedback loops to other goals and targets.⁴⁰ Positive advances in some SDG targets are counterbalanced by negative developments in others.

For instance, positive trends in greenhouse gas emissions may be cancelled out by trends in energy efficiency and renewable energies and biodiversity-related indicators. This indicates that any given SDG is dependent on associated with trends in related SDGs, under the responsibility of other government departments. The implication of this is that policy design and implementation for sustainable social, economic, and environmental, development should fully consider connectivity between SDGs.⁴¹

However, analysis⁴² of both the Lead and Stakeholder Departments and the alignment of policy documents towards SDG Targets reveals that most Targets are only aligned with one Department and its own policy document(s) with few instances of Stakeholder Departments contributing policy documents to any given Target. This suggests that in most cases Stakeholder Departments have an interest in the ‘outcome’ of the implementation of any given SDG Target, but this is not necessarily reflected in their Departmental responsibilities. It may also mean that there is little facility for a Lead Department to be able to assess the impact of how its policies impact upon other policy areas, implying a weak, or absent, policy framework across government departments. In effect, the implementation of any Goal is difficult if not impossible if it remains the responsibility of one Department. Comprehending how and to what extent policy documents align to more than 1 SDG and/or Target, and whether alignments lead to synergistic or incompatible outcomes, is important to determine in what way policy coherence can be gained. Chambers Ireland urges the Department to strengthen cross-departmental collaboration on achieving the aims of the Goals, ensuring all elements of the targets are considered by all departments.

Tangible policy actions

Eamon Ryan, Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications outlined on 11 February 2021 in a written response to parliamentary questions from Deputy Jennifer Whitmore that an important element of the first Implementation Plan is the SDG Policy Map and SDG Matrix, which details the lead and stakeholder Department for each of the SDGs and 169 targets. The SDG Policy Map identifies national sectoral policies against the 17 Goals and related targets. The Minister further highlighted that ensuring and improving policy coherence across the Goals is a critical feature and area for consideration in developing a revision of the National Implementation Plan.⁴³ This is echoed in the consultation outline.⁴⁴

However, Chambers Ireland believes that the forthcoming Plan must have tangible policy actions integrated into the Plan, and not merely improve the policy coherence of the Goals. The IPCC’s latest report highlighted the mammoth task that we collectively must halt further environmental damage. It

⁴⁰ A. Breuer, H. Janetschek, D. Malerba, (2019), [Translating Sustainable Development Goal \(SDG\) interdependencies into policy advice](#)

⁴¹ For instance, policy design for energy (SDG 7) and advancing sustainable consumption (SDG 12), which largely happen independent of each other, are connected, and have wider implications for other policy areas directly, such as climate action (SDG 13), marine and land development (SDGs 14 & 15), and indirectly towards many others.

⁴² Le Tissier, M and Whyte, H. (2018), [Identifying Interactions for SDG Implementation in Ireland](#)

⁴³ Houses of the Oireachtas (2021), [Sustainable Development Goals – Dáil Éireann Debate, Thursday - 11 February 2021](#)

⁴⁴ “While the National Implementation Plan itself will not include policy actions, it will aim to support and promote policies across government which contributes towards meeting the Goals and identifying opportunities for enhancing policy coherence.” Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (2021), [Consultation on the second SDG National Implementation Plan](#)

is no longer sufficient to have a plan that loosely maps out the steps required to achieving the Goals – we must see tangible, actionable measures in the second SDG Implementation Plan to achieve these national aims.⁴⁵

Sectoral engagement through increased departmental commitments

Driving the SDG agenda in each department, (with a form of internal champions programme) that leads to SDG-based strategies in each department and in turn feeds into the sectoral space of each department is strongly recommended. This would make it much easier for the likes of Chambers Ireland to meet with a specific person/point of contact in each department in relation to the Goals. The appointed person/point of contact in each government department with responsibility for delivering on the Goals should be the Secretary General as this senior role grants them the capacity to implement lasting changes.

Furthermore, Chambers Ireland strongly urges the implementation of full departmental reporting for all government departments and not solely the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications. The government must lead on the SDG agenda so that others can follow suit. It cannot expect civil society, businesses, and large organisations to take the lead on this if it is not seen to also be held equally accountable through regular reporting requirements.

Should the department take such a lead on the SDG agenda, then the Ceann Comhairle could consider asking the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform to consider how the monitoring of the department's actions on the Sustainable Development Goals could be integrated into the business of the Oireachtas Committees.

Learn from international best practice

There is always room to learn from international best practice and adopt the models used in other countries to replicate similar achievements. This is no different when we look to the SDGs. Some of the examples of international best practice that the department should look to when thinking of ways to further progress the next Implementation Plan include the following:

- In **Italy** the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) was established to raise awareness among the Italian society, economic stakeholders, and institutions about the importance of the 2030 Agenda and to spread a culture of sustainability. This initiative dates from February 2016, was spearheaded by the Unipolis Foundation and the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, and currently brings together over 230 members, including the most important institutions and networks of civil society. Over 600 experts from member institutions contribute to the activities of ASviS in different working groups dealing with specific SDGs and cross-cutting issues.⁴⁶ Key activities⁴⁷ of ASviS include:

⁴⁵ Horan, D.'s (2020) study on [Enabling Integrated Policymaking with the Sustainable Development Goals: An Application to Ireland](#) provides further background on policy coherence for sustainable development demonstrating the important role that monitoring and coordination tools, based on the SDGs, are to coordinated interrelated government ministries for integrated policymaking at national level.

⁴⁶ OECD (2020), [A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis report](#)

⁴⁷ ASviS (n.d.) [Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development](#)

- **ASviS report:** Starting in 2016, ASviS presents a report⁴⁸ each year that documents Italy's progress in achieving the SDGs. The report shows data and concrete policy recommendations to improve people's quality of life, reduce inequalities and improve environmental quality. The report can be freely accessed online and aims to become a monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanism for policymakers and their commitments towards the SDGs.
 - **Information and awareness-raising:** ASviS has conducted various awareness-raising activities on sustainability issues at large and on the 2030 Agenda among public sector, businesses, public opinion, and citizens. Among others, its website⁴⁹ is dedicated to each of the SDGs and its newsletter and multimedia products offer daily updates on sustainable development. ASviS is also active on social media and launches awareness-raising campaigns through them (e.g., 'Saturdays for Future'⁵⁰).
 - **Education for Sustainable Development:** ASviS, together with the Ministry of Education, University and Research, has developed an e-learning course on the 2030 Agenda, available to all teachers and recently translated in English. It also launched the yearly contest "Let's score 17 Goals"⁵¹ open to all schools in the country. Moreover, the Alliance focuses on higher education and co-operates with several master's courses and summer schools. ASviS is also developing projects with the Italian University Network for Sustainable Development and the National School of Administration to include sustainable development education in the adults' learning system.
 - **The Sustainable Development Festival:** ASviS organises the annual Sustainable Development Festival⁵² which takes place throughout Italy for 17 days, corresponding to the 17 SDGs. In 2019, 1,060 events took place all over Italy, 300 of them promoted by universities involving thousands of students. The festival was one of the three finalists, picked from over 2,000 projects, in the UN SDG Action Awards.
- In **Norway**, there is no national overarching strategy document or action plan for the SDGs. However, they are integrated into key policy processes. Each ministry is assigned with a responsibility for the SDGs matching with their competencies, while the Ministry of Finance is responsible for co-ordinating SDG reporting and to compile the yearly budget proposal presented to the parliament in accordance with the SDGs. To promote the localisation of the SDGs, the Ministry of Local Development and Modernisation has released an "expectation document", where it is stated that the government expects regional and local authorities to include the SDGs in their planning.⁵³
 - In **Argentina**, the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policies (Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales, CNCPS), responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, is promoting co-operation agreements with the provinces to promote vertical co-ordination of the SDGs. Together with the Cooperation Agreement, the CNCPS provides provinces with an adaptation guide including methodological suggestions on the utilisation of the SDGs as a management and planning tool at the subnational level. The

⁴⁸ ASviS (n.d.) [ASviS report](#)

⁴⁹ [The Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development](#)

⁵⁰ SDG Watch Europe (2019), [Saturdays for Future](#)

⁵¹ Italian Ministry of Education and Research (2018), [Let's make 17 goals. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development](#)

⁵² ASviS (n.d.), [The Sustainable Development Festival](#)

⁵³ OECD (2020), [A Territorial Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals: Synthesis report](#)

CNCPS also invites provinces to participate in the voluntary Provinces Report (*Informe Provincias*), which seeks to highlight annual progress on the adaptation of the SDGs in each territory, in relation to the SDGs under review by the High-level Political Forum every year. At the time of signature, the province had already adopted the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda, set up focal points responsible for the local implementation of the SDGs and provided adequate resources. However, the signature was a trigger to use the adaptation guide as a key tool to ensure consistency between the provincial and national SDGs indicator frameworks. The province also committed to reporting to the CNCPS on the localisation process.

Question 13: Have you any ideas that you would like considered in respect of the structure and objectives of the next Plan?

Action focused plan with strong deliverables

The second SDG Implementation Plan must be an action focused plan with clear policy outputs and strong deliverables. The time for analysing the current situation has passed. The IPCC sixth assessment report is testament to this. We must take strong action. What businesses now need is a strong Plan that is focused on actionable and achievable outputs.

Chambers Ireland and its stakeholders believes that a strong message from government in this Plan will be an excellent benchmark for the whole of society to work towards in achieving the targets of the SDGs. There must be a clear set of deliverables that can be referred to in forthcoming reviews of the Plan so that progress can be accurately measured.

Standardised benchmarking system

It is important for companies to use internationally recognised standards for sustainability reporting such as the comprehensive standards offered by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).⁵⁴ As sustainability reporting has evolved over the last number of years, several key principles have emerged. GRI has for example defined ten principles for sustainability reporting: stakeholder inclusiveness, sustainability context, materiality, completeness, balance, comparability, accuracy, timeliness, clarity, and reliability.⁵⁵ These are helping companies prepare high-quality information on the issues that matter and are useful for both sustainability reporting as well as communications overall. While the SDGs provide a framework for companies to understand their sustainability context, a sustainability report can home in on the effectiveness of the business to meet these aims.

Feedback from the business community tells us that there is a need for *one* standardised benchmarking system that all Irish businesses can adopt when analysing their sustainability progress. Currently, the lack of a single system, or direction from the DECC on the most preferable system to

⁵⁴ The [Global Reporting Initiative](#) is the independent, international organisation that helps businesses and other organisations take responsibility for their impacts, by providing them with the global common language to communicate those impacts. We provide the world's most widely used standards for sustainability reporting – [the GRI Standards](#).

⁵⁵ GRI, United Global Compact and wbcscd (n.d.), [SDG Compass: The guide for business action on the SDGs](#)

use, means that businesses are forced to employ their best judgement in choosing a system that might best reflect their progress in the Goals. However, many businesses, especially SMEs, do not have the means or expertise to devote sufficient time to evaluate which system is best to employ and often set out on a report that they cannot, and are not appropriately equipped, to answer. A single standardised methodology would greatly benefit those businesses and promote wider reporting on the Goals among the wider business community.

Chambers Ireland also recommends that in addition to the department developing a list of preferred/suggested reporting mechanisms for businesses, that they also ensure that any future standardised benchmarking should be as administratively easy as possible to use. It is imperative that businesses are not bureaucratically burdened with red tape and unnecessary reporting requirements when they embark on reviewing their progress.

Question 14: Have you heard of the SDG Stakeholder Forum? If aware of the SDG Forum, are you happy with the current format? If you have any recommendations on how we can improve the current format, let us know

In the first instance, Chambers Ireland recommends that the CSR Stakeholder Forum be merged with the SDG Stakeholder Forum to avoid future duplication. In addition to this, we believe that there is an opportunity to review and reform the Forum as it currently stands. Each meeting should be action driven, with a clear agenda circulated in advance of each meeting to ensure efficiency and the best results from each session. Every meeting of the Forum needs to be structured and Goals focused. For example, each agenda item must reflect one of the seventeen goals and correspond to its dedicated targets. With that there must be a method identified to quantify the actions needed and how these will be achieved.

To do so, Chambers Ireland recommends that this Forum be adequately resourced by government. SDG Stakeholders on the Forum need to be assured that there is the means to act on and implement the actions decided upon to ensure that this does not become a ‘talking shop’. The recent IPCC sixth Assessment Report highlights the urgency of all of society acting now. Bringing together the key stakeholders for implementing the Goals is an excellent means of deciding on actions to be taken at a national level to achieve the Goals. This opportunity must not be wasted and should be action-heavy in its conclusions.

Question 15: Have you heard of the SDG Champions Programme? We are currently reviewing the SDG Champions Programme; do you have any recommendations you would like considered as we design the next programme?

Though the pandemic halted many of the planned activities throughout 2020 and most of 2021, and subsequently many of the SDG Champion events and engagements that would have taken place, the SDGs Champion Programme is a worthy initiative to raise awareness of the SDGs across society to achieve the 17 Goals.

However, there are some areas which we believe could be improved to make the Programme a more engaging and actions focused experience for the Champions involved, including:

- **Structure** – the structure of the Champions Programme should be tailored to the needs of the Champions, with an introductory workshop on the workplan, key stakeholders, chief outputs, and an outlined calendar of events for the Champions to engage in.⁵⁶ A mentorship element of the Programme would also be a welcome addition to ensure that the Champions are fully briefed on the roles and responsibilities of being a Champion. We also suggest a series of follow up meetings between the Champions, mentors, and Department officials to review the progress of the Programme throughout the year and to also enable peer and industry learning
- **Objectives focused** – there is scope for a provision of objectives for the Champions to be developed so that they have actions to work towards. These can then be utilised by the Champions for future SDG reporting requirements and can be adopted beyond the Programme to promote the Goals.
- **Communications** – depending on the size and type of the organisation, Champions may not be able to allocate resources to develop a full schedule of communications for the year as Champions. Chambers Ireland propose that development of a full communications pack for the Champions to utilise throughout the year, in addition to a calendar of events for them to work towards. A multinational company is more likely to be able to allocate resources for the promotion of the SDG Champions Programme than an SME or community organisation. All Champions should be given an equal opportunity to fully engage in the Programme, benefiting their organisation and the wider community.
- **Reporting Mechanism** – fundamental to any successful project/programme is the requirement to regularly report on its progress. Chambers Ireland recommends that the SDG Champions Programme includes a reporting mechanism for all Champions as a means for the Department to understand the success and pitfalls of the Programme, and equally for the organisation to review their progress and areas that they may require further help with. This too would be useful for additional reporting requirements that the organisation may be engaged in, such as an annual sustainability report, etc.

⁵⁶ Meeting notes from a meeting of the SDG Interdepartmental Working Group on 10 October 2019 highlights the plans that were underway by DECC (DCCAIE at the time) for the SDGs Champions Programme, including the development of an interdepartmental calendar of planned events for which there could be SDG Champions engagement. Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (2019), [Interdepartmental Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals \[SDGs\] Thursday 10th October 2019](#)

Question 16: Have you heard of the SDG Data Hub? Have you any recommendations on what you would like to see on the SDG Data Hub?

The SDGs ‘Geohive’⁵⁷, or Data Hub, is a good idea but has not been utilised to its full potential. The last time that the website was updated was in 2019, aside from the SDG Update Report that was uploaded in March 2020.⁵⁸ Furthermore, this Update Report only contains one page of an update on SDG 1 with very little additional information.⁵⁹ There is no information available on the ‘Events’ page. The SDGs tracker pages for each of the 17 Goals (designed to measure the progress of each of the Goals) do not load. And finally, the ‘Data’ section of the website displays largely outdated data and statistics.⁶⁰

This Data Hub must be completely overhauled. It needs to be taken control of by one team that is fed information from across each government department. We have previously recommended that the Secretary General of each department be the responsible person/point of contact on the implementation of the SDGs in that department. They too should be the person who feeds this information to the unit in charge of updating the Data Hub website. The Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development have a very interactive website that would act as a good steering point for the SDG Data Hub.⁶¹

A clear, concise, and transparent website that provides a suite of readily available information on each of the actions to achieve the SDGs will be an excellent tool for not only the government, but also businesses, business representative organisations such as Chambers Ireland, wider civil society and interested international stakeholders who look to measure Ireland’s progress in meeting the Goals. We further suggest that an updated SDG Matrix with a corresponding database on the achievements of the responsible departments be embedded in this website so that all information is centrally located and easy to access.

The first SDG National Implementation Plan states that Ireland was one of seven countries invited to take part in the initial phase of the SDG Geospatial Data Hub “and remains committed to its ongoing development”. We strongly recommend that this Data Hub must become the go-to one-stop shop for all SDG government related information.

Question 17: Do you have any other ideas or suggestions for supporting SDG awareness and engagement in the next National Implementation Plan?

The first SDG National Implementation Plan set the scene for putting the SDGs into action on a national level. The second iteration of the Plan now needs to avoid a replication of this and instead focus on tangible actions and key deliverables for achieving the aims of the Goals. Chambers Ireland urges that department to use this consultation period and the input of key SDG stakeholders to

⁵⁷ [Ireland SDGs Geohive](#)

⁵⁸ <https://irelandsgd.geohive.ie/search?collection=Document&type=pdf>

⁵⁹ [SDG Update Report March 2020](#)

⁶⁰ <https://irelandsgd.geohive.ie/search?collection=Dataset>

⁶¹ [The Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development](#)

overhaul national policy plans to implement the Goals on a cross-departmental basis Cohesion between government departments must be emphasised.

Finally, the UN Global Compact group for Ireland must be quickly progressed. Action must be taken sooner rather than later. Chambers Ireland stands ready to support the department and wider government in bringing this into fruition as soon as possible and we look forward to engaging on this in the coming months.

Everything we do during and after this pandemic must be with a strong focus on building more equal, inclusive, and sustainable economies and societies that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and the many other global challenges we face.