



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together

Chambers Ireland submission to the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media on the Night-Time Economy

November 2020

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.

Given the importance of local economies to our members, and member businesses, Chambers Ireland's perspective is unique within the Irish business community – we seek to support thriving local economies and recognise the diversity of business environments that exist across the cities and regions of the country. For context, in September 2019 our member chambers signed a pledge to support the Sustainable Development Goals¹, with a focus on five of the goals in particular to promote decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities and communities, advancements in gender equality, and progress in the area of climate action.

Further, the theme of 'place making' was a cornerstone of our 2020 General Election Manifesto,² which like our Pre-Budget submission³ is structured to align with the 5 goals which we are particularly concerned with.

Drafted in correspondence with our Chamber Network and associated policy fora, Chambers Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission to the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media on the night-time economy as we are committed to putting 'place' at the heart of our vision for Ireland.

Introduction

Town and city centres change from the early evening into the night. A dynamic night-time offering encompasses a breadth of hospitality venues, theatre, live music, festivals, performance, shopping, nightclubs, food markets and sport events, attracts visitors and entrepreneurs, creates jobs and drives the economic development of cities. There is an interdependency amongst every part of the night-

¹ <https://www.chambers.ie/policy/sustainable-development-goals/chamber-support-for-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

² <https://www.chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Chambers-Ireland-Election-Manifesto-2020.pdf>

³ <https://www.chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Chambers-Ireland-Budget-Submission-2021-September.pdf>

time ecosystem, which is made up of the everyday services that people rely on.⁴ Cafes, bars and restaurants, artistic institutions, retailers and the transport networks are all integral to this mix.⁵

The term 'place-making' refers to strengthening the connection between people and the places they share. To do this successfully, it is important to assess the functionality of a place as well as its aesthetic and cultural expression.⁶ This relies on careful planning to enable connected, interdependent public and private spaces and simplified regulations to make it easier for local stakeholders to activate new ideas. It also means creating more adaptive public environments and carefully planning them to be more welcoming and appealing at all stages of the day and night. Vibrant streetscapes that bring together light, sound and activity are proven to enhance appeal, increase foot traffic and extend dwell time. Buzzing streets also improve the perception of safety in the evening, which is extremely important to the success of night-time hubs.

There are many reasons why we must place more concerted effort into activating our economy across more hours of the day. Having night-time hubs that are vibrant and diverse will drive more foot traffic into these areas, which creates a feeling of community connectedness, safety and increased 'dwell time' (the length of time a person remains in a specific area). Increased dwell time relates to increased customer spending, especially in retail environments, which enables businesses to expand their trading hours. This provides more jobs and greater capacity for industries to grow and small businesses to expand

Constructively identifying the elements that can strengthen a diverse, inviting and appealing offering to residents and visitors alike, of all age groups and varying interests is a positive step forward in ensuring a long-term product offering, locational attributes, services and infrastructure to support social, cultural and economic activity. A thriving night-time economy would help cities and towns to enhance their offerings for its residents, and establish urban centres as excellent places to live, study, visit and to work in.

Covid-19 has severely restricted social gatherings and has been detrimental to the night-time economy and culture of our cities, towns and villages. However, as the economy opens up (dependent on the current public health advice), the industry needs to be ready to bounce back and to have as few obstacles as possible to develop and grow. Citizens also need opportunities to experience night-time culture and social activity.

The following section outlines Chambers Ireland's recommendations which we believe must be addressed to enhance the night-time economy in urban centres across Ireland.

⁴ Committee for Sydney (2018), ['Report- Sydney as a 24-hour city'](#)

⁵ Throughout the formulation of these recommendations, the broad range of industries that make up a night-time economy were at the fore. These include 'core businesses' such as restaurants, cafes, pubs, bars, theatres, festivals, markets and live music and 'non-core' or supporting businesses, including transport, retail, service industries, educational establishments and gyms.

⁶ NSW Treasury (2020), [Sydney 24 Hour Economy Strategy](#).

Consultation Questions

1. What do you see as the key attributes of a positive night-time economy? What does the best case scenario for you (as a group) look like?

➤ **A safe, vibrant and inclusive public realm**

Safe, healthy, and successful night economies are closely connected outcomes. In particular, prosperity after dark does not occur at the expense of but in conjunction with public safety; safe streets are a necessary prerequisite for a vibrant night-time economy.⁷ Improvements to the public realm can play a significant role in how safe people perceive an area to be. Street lighting which enhances the safety of all urban areas, and the services of our county and city councils to support additional hours for late evening street cleaning and bin collection is essential to ensuring a location that invites people in and leaves a good impression. Investment in placemaking and amenities is essential.

Excellent street lighting, open and pedestrian-focused spaces enhance the safety and overall look and feel of both towns and cities. In enhancing the night-time economy, significant investment will be needed in ensuring that our streets and urban spaces are and feel safe. Specific investment and co-ordination in terms of greater street policing and CCTV should also be examined. In addition, investment in street lighting and lighting for public spaces and parks should be strongly considered. This will enable longer opening times for urban spaces where people can safely socialise and exercise, especially during the winter months.⁸

There is also scope to enhance a repertoire supported with cultural venues that offer music, theatre, art (late opening galleries) and a broad entertainment scene. Nationally the Arts and Culture sector, the venues its supports and the related employment it supports have been devastated by Covid-19. Placing emphasis on the opportunities to rebuild and support a strong recovery in this space will be crucial nationally.

Currently opening hours are quite restrictive and therefore not accessible to the majority of residents who work typical office hours, Monday to Friday. Cultural venues must be supported and resourced effectively to meet this opportunity. For example, in 2019 the National Art Gallery in Dublin trailed a new offering with their 'Thursday Lates' aimed at encouraging those working 9-5 to visit the gallery which was met with much success. There is huge scope to expand this kind of programme across the country in other cultural venues.⁹

⁷ Committee for Sydney (2018), ['Report- Sydney as a 24-hour city'](#)

⁸ For example, Central Park, NY is closed between 1am-6am and Hyde Park, London is closed only between 12am-5am.

⁹ Received through feedback from Dublin Chamber. More information can be found here: Image (2019), [Have you been to the Thursday Lates in the National Gallery?](#)

2. What cultural, creative or other activities are currently missing from the night time economy?

➤ Diversification of night-time activity

Some of the most exciting cultural and creative activities can and do happen at night. It is vital that support is given to a diversity of events and offerings to strengthen the night-time economy, attracting a wider demographic out into town and city centres at night thereby creating more opportunities for community-building and economic growth. A successful night-time economy should avoid a single sector dominating the experiences on offer. Instead, a broad choice of activities 'after hours' – a mix of attractions that cater for a diversity of ages, income levels and cultures should be incorporated.

There is scope to enhance a repertoire supported with cultural venues that offer music, theatre, art (late opening galleries) and a broad entertainment scene. Nationally, the arts and culture sector, the venues its supports and the related employment it supports have been devastated by Covid-19. Placing an emphasis on the opportunities to rebuild and support a strong recovery in this space will be critical throughout the recovery.¹⁰

A specific fund, aimed at encouraging those in the arts and culture sector to run events or increase their opening hours to later in the evening would help to ensure a diverse range of offerings where alcohol is not to the fore. Government support for innovation and new offerings in this sector, and others, would be of significant benefit as businesses grapple with decimated revenues this year.

3. What are the challenges for your particular group and others? Any suggested solutions?

➤ Underfunded and inadequate infrastructure

Movement during the night is a keen concern which needs to be addressed in all urban centres. Facilitating the movement of people in and out of a town at night will be very different to during the day with a different range of transport options available. There is also the consideration that needs to be given to the way people move around a town a night, including accessibility issues.

Current infrastructure deficits must be addressed. The success of the night-time economy will depend on ensuring that the urban infrastructure required to support changes and developments is included in the planning process. With the expansion of the night-time economy, both consumers, students and late-night workers will need to have access to these services to commute to and from home, places of employment, and entertainment and cultural venues. In particular, late night workers in the hospitality industry already face significant pressures in this area, as the lack of housing in cities and towns has compounded the issue and has increased commute times for many employees. Poor availability of late-night transport can also mean people

¹⁰ Currently opening hours are quite restrictive and therefore not accessible to the majority of residents who work typical office hours, Monday to Friday. Cultural venues must be supported and resourced effectively to meet this opportunity. For example, in 2019 the National Art Gallery trailed a new offering with their 'Thursday Lates' aimed at encouraging those working 9-5 to visit the gallery which was met with much success. Image (2019), [Have you been to the Thursday Lates in the National Gallery?](#)

end up spending more time in night-time precincts after businesses have closed, increasing the potential for violence and anti-social behaviour.

Funding for public transport interventions, increased 24-hour bus and rail routes and sustainable transport (such as overnight secure bicycle parking and designated protected safe cycling routes for accessing, traversing and exiting urban zones) should all form part of the future infrastructure investment to develop the night-time economy.

➤ **Recognising excellence**

The importance of the night-time economy from a business perspective cannot be underestimated and businesses that excel in this area should be recognised. The Purple Flag initiative, which is largely regarded as a UK endeavour and has been introduced to some extent in Ireland, works by awarding a Purple Flag to a location that meets or excels in managing the night-time economy.¹¹ A similar standard of recognition for excellence in the night-time economy in Ireland would be welcome as there is a concern that the accreditation is overly orientated towards the UK market. The aim should be to give recognition to areas that are not only culturally vibrant and full of thriving bars, cafés and theatres but also put safety and public realm to the fore.

Within the chamber network, the Purple Flag accreditation has been successfully achieved by Ballina, Ennis, Limerick, Cork and Tralee Chambers.¹² However, collaboration with national government in this area has been highlighted as somewhat challenging in the past. While our Purple Flag destinations play a key role on the frontline of delivering excellence in nightlife, and the impact this has on tourism (as recognised by Fáilte Ireland) this has not previously been recognised by government. This will need sufficient attention in the post-pandemic recovery.

The formation of the Night Time Economy Taskforce is a huge step forward and demonstrates Government recognition of how important our towns and cities are after dark. Moving forward, this is an ideal starting point for developing a long-term relationship with Government that allows our member Chambers to coordinate activity, support positive policy-making and ensure we are all on the same page with regards to the recovery of Ireland's towns and cities post-Coid-19.

It must be bore in mind that as practitioners that manage towns and cities after dark, Chambers will be on the frontline of delivery when it comes to policies involving night time economies and must be sufficiently supported and resourced to do so.

➤ **Incentives to trade**

Incentives for traders to adapt to later night opening hours will need to be considered by the taskforce as businesses will require additional staffing and will also face higher utility bills, etc. should they expand their opening hours. Additional costs to businesses must be worth the switch to later opening. To aid the business community and to increase consumer awareness a communications campaign that incentivises a diversity of trade and extends business opening hours could be hugely beneficial and self-sustaining over time as more businesses engage.

¹¹ Association of Town and City Management (2020), [Purple Flag Status: How It Fits Place Management Policy](#)

¹² <https://www.chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Places-Matter-Chambers-Ireland-Guide-to-Local-Economic-Development.pdf>

Feedback from our member chambers (including Ballina, Cork, Tralee, Ennis and Dublin) has highlighted a hesitancy for single traders to increase their trading hours as they incur additional overheads and doing it as a standalone and without a coordinated approach is a deterrent. If there was a coordinated approach with buy-in and incentives to engage, we could propel a behavioural shift and additionally enliven our streets in the evening and night-time.

➤ **Further engagement with businesses**

The consultation questions paper briefly outlines the significant impact that the Covid-19 crisis has had on the night-time economy and the culture of our urban centres. We welcome the establishment of the night-time economy taskforce, the commitment to this area in the Programme for Government, and the consultation process.

However, we are concerned that many of the stakeholders in this space, who have been severely impacted by Covid-19 restrictions, will be unable to engage fully with the consultation process due to its timing. For that reason, we would ask from the outset that the Department consider a broader public consultation to enable extensive engagement with all stakeholders and citizens on what they want the night-time economy to look and feel like as the re-opening of the economy progresses into the new year.

4. What in your view is a best practice example of a successful night-time economy internationally and/or are there international examples we can draw from?

➤ **Managing and promoting the night-time economy**

Currently, the night-time economy across town and city centres is not something that is actively managed, promoted or co-ordinated. Rather it operates on a somewhat *ad hoc* basis. There is no single person or agency with responsibility for promoting the night-time economy, or of addressing its downfalls and challenges.

We can learn from our international counterparts in this space. For example, in London the Night Czar has responsibility for functions beyond those of co-ordinating and promoting the night-time economy. The role involves taking a holistic approach on engaging with wider societal issues such as transport, public realm, and safety.¹³

The creation of such a role could be aligned to each of the 31 local authority districts and rooted in the local community, with support from An Garda Síochána. This would enable the responsible individual/agency to work with both the local council and industry to develop night-time economy plans, ensuring that they represent a partnership between local government, local businesses, community groups and the Gardaí to deliver sustainable night-time economy hubs. A dedicated role within the Department to oversee the implementation of any future national night-time economy strategy (and to work with local teams) would also be beneficial.

¹³ Greater London Authority (2020), [Night Czar](#)

➤ Pilot programmes

Covid-19 has exacerbated many of the challenges that were experienced by towns and cities pre-pandemic, including the need to constantly innovate and compete to attract people and investment. Business operation restrictions and social distancing requirements that have been implemented to protect public health have compounded these and other issues. However, the renewed focus on the need for collaboration between businesses and the local authorities across the country should not be overlooked. The swiftness with which local authorities have responded, for example, to the need for changes to the public realm to facilitate walking and cycling in the context of social distancing, has been refreshing and eye-opening to the possibilities post-Covid-19. This ability and desire to work together to design innovative solutions to enable businesses to trade through the re-opening and recovery periods will be increasingly important in the months and years ahead.

Trial runs and pilot programmes are an excellent and engaging way of establishing the positive potential of a new policy initiative, as well as any unforeseen problems, without having to be subject to the same scrutiny as a permanent process. Pilot programmes and trials should be used in relation to some of the significant changes proposed in relation to changing current licensing laws and restrictions on businesses and late night venues.

Research and feedback from our member chambers highlighted the following examples that illustrate the breadth of opportunity for both a lively and commercially successful nightlife that could be trialled in Irish cities and towns:

- **Late night dining markets** such as *TimeOut Market* in Lisbon.¹⁴ With 24 restaurants, 8 bars, a dozen shops and a high-end music venue called 'Rive Rouge', the TimeOut Market is home to some of the city's best known (and longest-running) market vendors of meat, fish, fruit and flowers.
- **Boxpark, Shoreditch UK.**¹⁵ Beginning with the humble ethos of bringing shipping containers to East London, Boxpark transformed the space into the world's first pop-up dining and shopping destination in 2011. Fast forward nearly a decade with three venues at iconic locations, Boxpark has become the biggest food, culture and social hub in London with local communities at its heart. This unique experience is based on Boxpark's Eat. Drink. Play. philosophy.
- **Amsterdam Dance Event, 'ADE'** – Amsterdam's Dance Event, ADE¹⁶, has a festival programme that hosts over 2,500 artists performing in 140 of Amsterdam's finest music and nightlife spaces. In 2019, the festival attracted 400,000 visitors spread out over almost 200 venues providing an unrivalled economic boost throughout the City.

In order to embrace Ireland's role as a modern society with world-class night-time local economies it is important that ambitious and creative thinking is brought to bear on this area. In expanding the night-time economy, pilot programmes and trials should be embraced as a way to learn what

¹⁴ <https://www.timeout.com/lisbon/restaurants/time-out-market-lisbon>

¹⁵ <https://www.boxpark.co.uk/>

¹⁶ <https://www.amsterdam-dance-event.nl/en/about/>

works and what does not, allowing for flexibility and creativity in relation to all sectors involved in the night-time economy.

Conclusion

The appeal of urban spaces as places to live, work and visit is a key aspect its attractiveness and should be seen as the most important pre-condition for the future economic success of town and city centres. A thriving and diverse night-time economy is vital if that vision is to be realised across all town and city centres in the post-pandemic recovery and years ahead. Ireland, for its size, can be as good if not better than anywhere in Europe for nightlife.

It is important to highlight that any new regulations introduced as part of a future strategy will not be applied in a way that harms business competitiveness or discourages new and diverse trading activity. This means addressing the challenges that currently limit those wanting to launch or expand into something new, while, at the same time, making it easier for entrepreneurs and SMEs to navigate state and local regulations, such as licensing requirements and the development application process. It also means helping businesses who operate in the day to make it commercially viable to transition to trading at night.

We highlight the opportunity to engage with private sector business representation and believe this to be instrumental to facilitate fully representative discussions of future pathways and actions that are informed via ground up engagement. We emphasis the value of consultations and welcome all future opportunities to engage on this and associated topics.