

# AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN **PUBLIC RELATIONS** **2021**



# Best Public Affairs Campaign

## Reboot & Reimagine

An Ibec campaign



### Campaign

Ibec's Public Affairs Response to the Covid crisis

### Description of Campaign

A campaign to respond to the Covid crisis and galvanise political and policy stakeholders behind a set of actions to create a national recovery and sustainable future for Ireland.



### Organisation

Ibec's in house Corporate Affairs Team

### Background to the Campaign

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby and business representative group and our members employ over 70% of the private sector workforce in Ireland. Our purpose is to help build a better, sustainable future by influencing, supporting and delivering for business success.

Ibec wanted to harness our scale and influence to be a responsible actor in the crisis and make a positive contribution to a sustainable recovery for society and business. This campaign to do so had three distinct phases.

The first focused on delivering immediate emergency measures. On the 12 of March, then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced the first lockdown. Seven days later, Ibec submitted 'COVID-19 Ibec response and priorities' to Government – a comprehensive report with a range of policy proposals to address the economic fallout of the Covid crisis. Ibec was the first organisation to lobby for income support measures which was subsequently rolled out by the Government as the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

In April, it became clear that a more comprehensive response was required. Ibec activated the second phase in our lobbying effort to develop a campaign framework and comprehensive recovery plan. Informed by member priorities, the campaign provided short, medium and long term recommendations to deal with the crisis and ensure a 'build back better' focus.

The Reboot and Reimagine campaign was launched in mid-May and consisted of over 200 fully costed policy recommendations and insights from a survey of 550 of Ireland's CEOs. The campaign was launched successfully securing strong stakeholder engagement and widespread media coverage. Most importantly, many of its recommendations were delivered in the Government's July Stimulus Package.

The third phase of the campaign was to harness the breadth and scale of the policy recommendations to foster ongoing engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. Ibec used the campaign to deliver policy priorities through direct lobbying but also to shape the discourse of the debate about the crisis. We harnessed the campaign to engage a variety of non-traditional stakeholders and to work towards Ibec's larger strategic objectives to establish a more extensive social dialogue model in Ireland.

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## **Statement of Objectives**

Ibec's Public Affairs Response to the Covid pandemic had several clear objectives from the outset:

- Be the 'first responder' to the crisis.
- Work closely with members to shape a collective response from business focused on a sustainable recovery for all.
- Deliver specific policy priorities for our members.
- Shape the discourse of the crisis.
- Maintain ongoing engagement and strengthen relationships with decision makers.
- Work towards our long-term objective of fostering a new social dialogue forum in Ireland.

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## **Programme Planning and Strategy**

### **Phase 1 – First Responder**

As the Covid crisis escalated throughout March, Ibec had to quickly secure several vital economic measures to ensure that Irish businesses were given a fighting chance to survive.

Using our extensive inhouse policy expertise, we developed and submitted a comprehensive submission to Government one week after the first lockdown was announced. It made the case that our European counterparts were well ahead in terms of levels of income continuance. The costed proposals set out the importance of the Government to act as an income source of last resort for households, guarantee liquidity and prevent escalation of cash-flow issues throughout the supply chain.

Ibec took an agile approach to lobbying over the following week. Senior members of the leadership team ran a tight but effective campaign to deliver on Ibec's priorities by taking an evidence-based approach and activating existing strong relationships with key decision makers. The Taoiseach, senior members of cabinet and senior civil servants in the Departments of Finance were all engaged.

Five days later, Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme was announced by the Government which clearly reflected Ibec's policy recommendations in its submission.

### **Phase 2 – Reboot and Reimagine**

Ibec realised early on that Covid was going to be a devastating public health crisis and fundamentally alter many aspects of Ireland's society and economy. This presented a unique opportunity to take a fresh approach to many of the major challenges that had been facing Ireland prior to the crisis ranging from issues like quality of life, housing and infrastructure.

Members too looked to Ibec to provide a recovery roadmap for the crisis to help with contingency planning, remote working and eventual reopening.



Taking a stakeholder led approach, Ibec mapped out the audiences of our public affairs campaign:

### **Members**

Ibec is a representative group whose members vary greatly by sector and by scale. The impact of the crisis of our members has varied dramatically so it was critical to be able to calibrate our campaign accordingly.

### **Key Decision Makers**

This cohort was made up primarily of key decision makers in Government, politics and the civil service. Stakeholders we engaged directly with included then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, then Leader of the opposition Micheál Martin and Martin Fraser, Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach.

### **Influencers**

From the outset the Ibec team challenged ourselves to engage with stakeholders who we did not traditionally deal with to broaden our reach. This included engaging with academics like Jennifer Petriglieri, Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour at INSEAD and President Michael D Higgins.

### **Media**

Ibec has strong media relationships across broadcast, print and digital media nationally and regionally all of which were harnessed for this campaign.

The Corporate Affairs team quickly rolled out the most comprehensive member engagement programme in the organisation's history which included liaising with the Board, National Council, Regional Executive, all 38 trade associations and our largest ever CEO survey.

### **Campaign Framework**

We needed a comprehensive recovery plan, informed by member priorities, that would provide short, medium and long term recommendations to deal with the crisis.

The Ibec Corporate Affairs team strategically decided to develop a campaign framework that would encompass all aspects of Ibec's pre-crisis campaigns, re-examined through the challenges and opportunities presented by Covid.

The comprehensive member engagement culminated in the Reboot and Reimagine Campaign document, a policy document with over 200 fully costed policy recommendations and insights from a survey of 550 of Ireland's CEOs. This was presented to our audience in tool kit format to ensure cut through for our priorities.

### **Campaign Amplification**

We ensured that the document provided both a macro narrative for the Ibec as a whole, but also had the detail for our trade associations and members to deal with very specific policy areas and sectoral issues. This allowed the organisation to amplify our campaign message through every strata of the organisation.

Whereas digital had been playing an increasingly important role in Ibec's corporate communications before the crisis, the pandemic forced us to find new ways of engaging stakeholders. This included sharing speaking points and messaging for employees on our inhouse digital platform 'the Fount' and developing a wide variety of digital assets including PowerPoint templates and social media content.

On the day of the launch, 18,000 of Ibec members were contacted directly through the CEO update e-mail which provided the key messages of the campaign, a copy of the campaign document and a call to action to amplify the campaign through the member's individual networks. A similar note was shared internally amongst Ibec's 240 staff members to ensure alignment across the organisation. A launch event was held for members and other stakeholders with over 640 people in attendance.

A comprehensive engagement programme with key decision makers was launched with Government Ministers, Secretary Generals and key opposition spokespeople all receiving formal letters from our CEO including tailored messaging to their areas of interest and with offers of follow up engagement. In all over 150 TDs, MEPs and Secretaries General received a letter and a copy of the report.

The campaign delivered quality, editorial coverage across the board. The Corporate Affairs team challenged ourselves

to try new media platforms using the campaign to launch Ibec Voices, a podcast series offering unique insights into business in Ireland which delivered thousands of listeners and was an important platform for the campaign.

### Phase 3 - Ongoing influence

There was widespread media coverage of the campaign with over 200 individual media hits across tv, radio, print and online. Critically, our analysis of the coverage showed that Ibec's positions were not just being reported but shaping the discourse on the response to the pandemic.

A wide variety of stakeholders referenced the report from opinion pieces in national broadsheets, tweets from opposition politicians and commentary on tv debates. A highlight for the Corporate Affairs team was President Michael D Higgins talking about the campaign when he was interviewed on the Late Late show in May 2020.

Ibec built on the extensive engagement from the launch to organise a series of virtual events with key decision makers. This included events with then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Minister of Finance Paschal Donohoe, Minister for Health Simon Harris, HSE CEO Paul Reid, EU Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, Governor of the Central Bank Gabriel Makhlouf, Sinn Féin President Mary Lou McDonald and Fianna Fáil leader, Micheál Martin TD. We also hosted a series of closed roundtable events with political and societal stakeholders including parliamentary parties and NGOs providing outreach to those worse impacted. Over 3,500 stakeholders attended these events.

Being an effective actor in the early stage of the crisis, positioned Ibec as a trusted party. Ibec was a key player in the development of the Government's National Return to Work Safely Protocol and launched the protocol with then Minister for Business Heather Humphreys in May 2020.

Most importantly, many of Ibec's proposals from Reboot and Reimagine were reflected in subsequent economic and policy announcements from Government.

The July Stimulus addressed many priorities Ibec identified in Reboot and Reimagine such enterprise liquidity, upskilling and getting people back to work, infrastructure and the continuation and repurposing of the Wage Subsidy Scheme.

Similarly, Budget 2021 published in October, commitments to a new National Economic Plan, a Social Progress Indicator, and an independent Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare, all key Ibec asks in our Reboot and Reimagine campaign, were delivered.

Finally, a lasting testament to the success of Ibec's Public Affairs Response to the Covid pandemic was a commitment from Government given in February 2021 that Social Dialogue will be the established model for Government interaction over the coming years. This has been a key pillar of Ibec campaigning in recent years and now provides structured and regular access to cabinet for meaningful policy dialogue, influence and outcomes.

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## Measurement

- **Be the 'first responder' to the crisis**

**Delivered:** Five days after our submission and extensive lobbying, the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme was announced by the Government.

- **Work closely with members to shape a collective response from business focused on a sustainable recovery for all**

**Delivered:** To develop the campaign's policies, Ibec conducted our most comprehensive member engagement programme in the organisation's history included liaising with the Board, National Council, Regional Executive, all 38 trade associations and our largest CEO survey ever.

- **Deliver specific policy priorities for our members**

**Delivered:** The July Stimulus addressed many priorities Ibec identified in Reboot and Reimagine such enterprise liquidity, upskilling and getting people back to work, infrastructure and the continuation and repurposing of the Wage Subsidy Scheme. In Budget 2021, commitments to a new National Economic Plan, a Social Progress Indicator, and an independent Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare, all key Ibec asks in our Reboot and Reimagine campaign, were delivered.

- **Shape the discourse of the crisis**

**Delivered:** The campaign played a substantial role in shaping the discourse about the crisis and engaging a broader range of stakeholders. A wide variety of stakeholders referenced the report from opinion pieces in national broadsheets, tweets from opposition politicians and commentary on tv debates.

- **Maintain ongoing engagement and strengthen relationships with decision makers**

**Delivered:** Ibec delivered this objective through direct lobbying, sharing insights and policy recommendations and engaging stakeholders with virtual events. Ibec has submitted 43 lobbying returns on this campaign to date.

- **Work towards our long-term objective of fostering a new social dialogue forum in Ireland**

**Delivered:** A clear illustration of Ibec's success in promoting social dialogue is the Government's commitment to Social Dialogue through Labour Employer Economic Forum (the tripartite structure between Ibec, the trade unions and Government). The Government has announced that all meetings of LEEF will be chaired by An Taoiseach and members of the cabinet will attend. With this in place, business and Ibec's stakeholders are at the core in steering the national agenda.



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