

Supporting the Irish polymer technology sector



Polymer Technology
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The impact of the crisis on the Irish polymer technology sector

Polymer companies have suffered severe disruptions to markets in many cases. While some companies remain open as part of the essential business list, as critical suppliers to essential supply chains, many companies are facing challenges in their core markets. Overall, it is expected there will be a demand lag after the COVID-19 crisis, well into 2021.

Phase 1 Actions to support the Irish polymer technology sector in the next 100 days

1. Government sponsored credit facilities and guarantees:

Introduce government loans, loan guarantees and credit guarantees to ensure companies have adequate supplies of cash to continue trading in the short term. Businesses that are viable in the long term but face short term cash constraints should be supported.

2. Get business open as quickly as possible: It is essential to get our companies back open as quickly as possible, within the constraints of ensuring the health and safety of workers and risks related to the re-emergence of COVID-19. Time is critical to company survival, protecting cash reserves and restoring customer confidence.

3. International supply chains and international trade: Ireland's polymer sector trades internationally and is part of global supply chains. International trade must be supported through collective regulatory efforts of government around the world. There should be a concerted effort to keep international transport links open, facilitating the movement of essential people and goods.

Phase 2 Actions to support the Irish polymer technology sector by end of 2020

- 1. Government supports to industry:** Government should examine the range of supports available to companies through Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. These organisations have a large existing network of client companies and can be used to channel new support initiatives to their clients as a direct response to the COVID-19 crisis.
- 2. Provide economic stimulus and restore economic activity:** We need to get people back to work and return to a normal economic and market environment as quickly as possible. Speed is of the essence and will make the difference between many firms continuing or going out of business.
- 3. Re-open international markets and restore trade with UK:** Shipping and transport need to be supported to ensure that our goods can reach the market. International mobility for goods and people should be restored and necessary protections put in place to enable people to travel and conduct international business.

Phase 3 Actions to support the Irish polymer technology sector by 2023

- 1. Training and skills:** With rapidly changing technologies, materials, and processes, it is essential for polymer companies to invest continuously in their people. Training and up-skilling are critical. Promote policies and conditions to make Ireland a talent development leader for the polymer industry. Continue to develop training that up-skills and re-skills talent for the sector.
- 2. Maximise B2B engagement and business development opportunities:** Facilitate interactions with relevant sectors which offer business-to-business opportunities. Help companies to identify opportunities and new markets in the light of changing market and economic trends. Enhance collaboration with strategic partners to provide opportunities for networking.
- 3. Support continued investment in technology:** The polymer sector is a high-tech sector requiring constant investment in technologies and processes. It is highly competitive so the ability to be agile and react quickly to customer requests is paramount. Government should support capital investment in the latest manufacturing and information technologies, which must be harnessed together.

Impact of phased action on the Irish polymer technology sector

The Irish polymer sector continues to evolve as one of Ireland's premier manufacturing and technology industries. The sector is well integrated into domestic and international supply chains across a range of manufacturing sectors. It is a critical subcomponent of a wide range of Irish industries and must continue to prosper and support these industries. Polymer companies in Ireland are well placed to continue their growth trajectory and technological development if they can successfully navigate the next number of months and emerge healthy from the global pandemic.

‘A rapid and safe return to work is a priority. Companies will be in a better position to weather this storm if they can open sooner rather than later. In general, polymer converters would not have difficulty in operating within the government guidelines on distancing. The polymer industry supplies many critical products and components across a wide range of markets. Many of Ireland’s best known companies rely on the continued health of our polymer sector. Government backed finance and credit guarantees would ensure most companies survive short-term cash flow constraints.’

John Wallace

Consultant, JWCS and Chair of Polymer Technology Ireland

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