

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

07/04/2017 - 14/04/2017



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved at 00:01 on Thursday 26 January 2017.



Thursday 13 April 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Brexit Issues

Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the additional supports that have been put in place to date to assist businesses that are heavily or totally dependent on Northern Ireland or the British market, in view of the uncertainty that has arisen due to Brexit and currency fluctuations; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Mary Mitchell O'Connor: In Budget 2017, I secured additional monies, both current and capital, to support Enterprise Ireland's strategic response to Brexit, including 39 targeted posts, both at home and abroad to support its clients across all markets.

There are 1,500 Enterprise Ireland (EI) client companies recording exports to the UK. They employ 100,000 people across the country and have exports of over €7 billion. Enterprise Ireland is particularly working with companies in the UK market who are most exposed in areas such as engineering, food, construction and timber to maintain their market share.

Enterprise Ireland's #PrepareforBrexit communications campaign featuring the 'Brexit SME Scorecard' on was launched in March. The 'Brexit SME Scorecard' is a new interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies, whether they are EI clients or not, to self-assess their exposure to Brexit under six business pillars.

The Scorecard generates an immediate report which provides advice as well as information on supports and resources to Irish businesses preparing for Brexit. The Prepare for Brexit website also includes case studies of clients who have achieved export success in a range of key sectors and markets and features tips and advice. Enterprise Ireland is also running a series of Brexit events featuring expert speakers throughout the country to promote the tool and encourage companies to prepare for Brexit.

Enterprise Ireland has introduced a 'Be Prepared Grant' which offers up to €5,000 in funding to support exporting client companies develop a Brexit Action Plan. It is designed for SMEs who would benefit from further research and the use of external expertise in developing this plan.

Training and supports in terms of management capability, leadership, marketing/sales skills, innovation and R&D is being intensified to help companies to build market share and create new market opportunities.

Enterprise Ireland is also delivering a suite of supports that help clients reduce supply-chain costs and drive efficiencies and cost reductions as a means of improving operating margins, thereby increasing competitiveness.

Furthermore a range of measures are being put in place to supplement the existing Local Enterprise Office (LEO) supports, including:

- Supports to facilitate micro enterprises to develop new internationalisation opportunities;
- Roll out of a national Lean for Micro initiative to drive firm level competitiveness;
- Brexit-focused mentoring and training initiatives; and
- Local level awareness raising and information sharing about Brexit, including; seminars, workshops and cross-border business networking.

In Budget 2017 I was also able to provide additional funding to InterTrade Ireland, the Cross Border Body which has specific responsibility for developing Cross Border Trade. InterTrade Ireland is undertaking a range of initiatives for SMEs trading across the border to help them adapt to the changed circumstances. Assistance will include the provision of factual advice, supports for capability building and the provision of other specialist expertise. In addition, this funding will enable a study to be undertaken by the ESRI which will improve our understanding of the impact of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit. Work is currently underway on this project.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-04-13a.954&s=cross-border+2017-04-07..2017-04-14#g956.r>

Thursday 13 April 2017

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Northern Ireland

Tommy Broughan asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the status of the implementation of the PEACE IG V 2014 - 2020 programme; if the various programmes under the four specific objectives have commenced; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Paschal Donohoe: My Department has joint responsibility with the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland for the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), which manages the E U-funded PEACE and INTERREG cross-border programmes. Together these programmes will see investment of more than half a billion euro in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland over the period 2014-2020.

The PEACE IV Programme was adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015 and formally launched on 22 January 2016. The Programme is co-funded by the Irish Government, the Northern Ireland Executive and the European Union.

Along with match funding from the two Member States, the PEACE IV programme has a total value of €269 million. The focus of the PEACE IV programme is on social inclusion and combatting poverty, with investment in four key priority areas where it aims to make significant and lasting change, namely:

- Shared Education, with a total value €35.3 million;
- Children and Young People, with a total value €67.1 million;
- Shared Spaces and Services, with a total value €99.4 million; and
- Building Positive Relations, with a total value €51.7 million.

All of the funding calls for the PEACE IV programme have now been completed.

Currently a total of 19 projects have been approved across four Specific Programme Objectives. Sixteen of the approved projects are Local Authority Plans. Two projects have been approved in the area of shared education, while one focusing exclusively on victims and survivors has also been approved.

The total value of the projects approved to date is over €99 million. This represents a programme commitment level of 39%.

The Letters of Offer issuing to successful applicants includes a safeguard clause negotiated by my officials and their Northern Ireland counterparts to Brexit-proof projects to the greatest extent possible. This gives programme beneficiaries the confidence they need to proceed with the implementation of projects.

Further projects, with a total value of more than €367 million, are currently under assessment. Letters of Offer will continue to issue to successful applicants in the coming months. It is anticipated that the PEACE IV Programme will be fully committed by the summer of 2017.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-04-13a.35&s=cross-border+2017-04-07..2017-04-14#g37.r>

Thursday 13 April 2017

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Cross-Border Projects

Brendan Howlan asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans to secure EU funding for cross-Border projects, as outlined in the Taoiseach's speech to the IIEA.

Paschal Donohoe: As I have previously indicated to the House, this Government remains firmly committed to the successful implementation of the PEACE and INTERREG Programmes and to successor programmes post-2020.

Ireland currently takes part in three EU-funded cross-border programmes with the UK: the PEACE Programme, the Ireland/Northern Ireland/Scotland INTERREG Programme and the Ireland/Wales INTERREG Programme. The programmes have a combined value of €650 million over the period 2014-2020.

The Government is justifiably proud of its role in securing EU funding for a fourth PEACE programme, and I acknowledge the Deputy's role in securing that funding.

The programmes have made an enormous contribution to cross-border cooperation and remain important drivers of development in a cross-border context. More than that, the programmes have been a key element of the EU's continuing commitment to the process of peace building and reconciliation and support for the Good Friday Agreement.

As part of the contingency planning undertaken prior to the UK referendum, my Department identified the potential risks to these programmes. As soon as the referendum result was known the process of working through the issues facing the programmes commenced so as to ensure that beneficiaries could continue to receive funding, regardless of Brexit.

I am pleased that on 28 October 2016 I was able to announce that agreement had been reached on a safeguard clause that will Brexit-proof letters of offer to programme beneficiaries.

In the short-term my objective was to secure the programmes and give programme beneficiaries the confidence they need to proceed with projects. That has been achieved.

In the medium term my objective is to see these programmes successfully implemented out to 2020, through a period during which the UK is likely to leave the EU. The safeguard clause should ensure that this can happen.

My long term objective is to see successor programmes beyond 2020.

PEACE and INTERREG are well regarded in Ireland North and South in the UK and throughout the EU, so I believe the necessary goodwill is there for successor programmes.

Moreover, the regulatory framework for programmes with Third Countries already exists. My officials have commenced work on examining such programmes to see how they might form a model for cross-border programmes post-2020.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-04-13a.5&s=cross-border+2017-04-07..2017-04-14>