

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

28/04/2017 - 05/05/2017



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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



Tuesday 2 May 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Retail Sector

Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her plans to establish a North-South retail forum; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Mary Mitchell O'Connor: As Chairperson to the Retail Consultation Forum, I am acutely aware of the importance of the sector to the economy and of the challenges facing the sector. As our largest private industry employer on the island of Ireland, the retail and wholesale sector plays a vital role providing over 275,000 jobs supporting economic growth in every city, town and village in the country.

The Retail Consultation Forum was established in 2014 as a response to the challenges experienced by the sector during the recession. This Forum provides a platform for structured engagement between the retail sector and relevant public bodies to identify practical actions which could be taken to support the sector. Membership includes the main retail representative bodies, retailers themselves and representatives from relevant Government Departments and public bodies.

One of the most immediate concerns currently facing the Sector is the impact of Brexit and how this might influence consumer decisions. I am also keenly aware of the concerns about the uncertainty surrounding border arrangements that will be in place post-Brexit, and the concerns on the depreciation of sterling. In recognition of these matters, Brexit has become a standing item on the agenda for discussion by the Retail Consultation Forum.

My Department is committed to supporting the retail sector during this period of heightened uncertainty and is working with retailers on a pilot study into the firm-level impact for enterprise of Brexit. The outcome of this study, together with the outcome of a number of additional stakeholder engagements with businesses, including retailers, will assist the Government in informing our position during the Brexit negotiations.

Furthermore, I have established a Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Enterprise Forum on Brexit and global challenges. This will provide a vehicle for discussion of enterprise, trade and investment policy implications arising from wider global challenges, with a specific focus on Brexit in the first instance. The work of this Forum will help inform me on the development of DJEI, and ultimately Government policy positions on enterprise, trade and investment, to be taken during Brexit negotiations.

A number of other relevant pieces of work are underway. My officials are currently finalising the outputs from a series of structured engagements with companies of different sizes, across different sectors and across the regions on the impact of currency fluctuations on exposed companies. The information gathered during the course of this engagement is detailed and informative and will give me a clear indication of the needs of SMEs to help them address the short and more medium and long term challenges of Brexit.

My Department is also funding a research project being undertaken in close cooperation with InterTrade Ireland by the ESRI to improve our understanding of the impact on cross border trade of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit.

My Department is also providing InterTrade Ireland with additional funding this year to undertake a range of initiatives for SMEs in the Republic of Ireland to help them adapt to the changed circumstances following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This will involve the provision of factual advice, supports for capability building and the provision of other specialist expertise for companies.

Through my Chairmanship of the Retail Consultation Forum, the sector is provided with a direct line of contact with Government in which to raise all of their concerns, including the impact of the referendum in the UK, and to work collaboratively towards practical solutions. As the Retail Consultation Forum provides a platform in which to raise these concerns, and the members have and will continue to be updated by my officials with reference to relevant developments of my Department's Brexit undertakings, there are no plans to establish a separate north south forum.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-05-02a.3738&s=cross-border+2017-04-28..2017-05-05#g3740.r>

Tuesday 2 May 2017

Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

Brexit Issues

Joan Burton asked Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the role she will have in the Government's post-Brexit strategy in view of her responsibility for regional affairs and the potential negative impact of Brexit on the Border area; if there is a specific unit in her Department to deal with the impact of Brexit on the Border region; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Heather Humphreys: I am acutely aware of the challenges arising from Brexit for Rural Ireland and for the border area in particular. I hosted a productive public forum on Brexit in Monaghan last November which was attended by a range of interests from the Border region. I also hosted a Sectoral Dialogue on Brexit in Cavan on 6 February which was attended by over 100 stakeholders from across the arts, culture, film, heritage, Irish language, regional and rural affairs sectors. This Sectoral Dialogue meeting focused on the impacts of Brexit on the sectors served by my Department, with particular attention being given to the impacts on Rural and Border communities. This event was part of the ongoing engagement with civil society initiated through the series of All-Island Civic Dialogues hosted by the Taoiseach. The actions set out in Realising our Rural Potential, the Government's Action Plan for Rural Development launched in January, will also assist in supporting rural communities, including those in border areas, to meet the challenges posed by Brexit and to position themselves to avail of the opportunities which also may arise. The Action Plan contains over 270 actions to be delivered by a range of Government Departments, State agencies and other bodies and sets out to support sustainable communities, support enterprise and employment, maximise our rural and recreation potential, foster culture and creativity, and improve rural connectivity.

The plan sets out a number of actions which will address the effects of Brexit in particular. For example, a specific piece of research will be commissioned on the impact of Brexit on rural areas, and particularly rural areas in the Border region. Also, InterTradeIreland will fund the development of a programme of initiatives to increase the awareness and capacity of SMEs to deal with the practical consequences of Brexit for cross border trade.

The Government has put in place a number of structural and other arrangements to address issues relating to Brexit. These include a n inter-Departmental Group that was formed in April 2016. My Department has been represented on the Inter-Departmental Group since its establishment. In addition, a Working Group, chaired at Assistant Secretary level and composed of officials from across the Department was established within my Department to deal with Brexit issues. This Working Group is supported by the Department's EU Coordination Unit which is also responsible for managing those issues relating to Brexit that fall within my Department's remit. These arrangements are being kept under review and will be enhanced if required in the coming period.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-05-02a.1901&s=cross-border+2017-04-28..2017-05-05#g1903.r>

Thursday 4 May 2017

Department of Health

Cross-Border Health Services Provision

Noel Rock asked the Minister for Health the conditions or criteria required to allow a person to be eligible for the cross-border healthcare directive; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Simon Harris: The Health Service Executive operates the EU Directive on Patients' Rights in Cross Border Healthcare in Ireland. In line with practice in other EU Member States, the Health Service Executive, through the National Contact Point (NCP) office, provides information for patients on the Cross-Border Directive on its website and also by phone. The principal function of the NCP (which is the mechanism specified under the Directive for the dissemination of information on the Directive by Member States) is to facilitate exchange of information for patients concerning their rights and entitlements relating to receiving healthcare in another Member State, in particular the terms and conditions for reimbursement of cost and the procedures for accessing and determining those entitlements.

Under the Directive, insured patients are entitled to have costs of cross-border healthcare service reimbursed if the healthcare service in question is among the benefits to which they are entitled in their Member State of affiliation. The Health Service Executive is pro-active in advising potential users of the Scheme that reimbursement will be at the cost of the treatment availed of abroad or the cost of providing the healthcare in Ireland whichever is the lesser. The patient is notified of this by the Health Service Executive in numerous ways: via the Health Service Executive website or in response to phone queries; on the Pro-forma invoice to be used for cases where an overnight in-patient stay is not required; and the letters issued in response to prior authorisation applications for cases involving an overnight in-patient stay will advise the actual amount to be reimbursed, based on the treatment code/s provided by the treating/referring consultant in the application form.

The Health Service Executive also advises where a patient is in any doubt as to the need to seek prior authorization before availing of a consultation or treatment abroad to contact the NCP. The NCP is happy at that stage to advise patients of the reimbursement rate that will apply to the assessment/treatment being accessed.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-05-04a.494&s=cross-border+2017-04-28..2017-05-05>