

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

6 October 2017 – 13 October 2017



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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



Tuesday 10 October 2017

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the third plenary session of the All Island Civic Dialogue; and the actions that will be taken after same.

Simon Coveney: The third plenary session of the All Island Civic Dialogue took place on Thursday 28 September in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham and brought together almost 300 representatives across industry and civil society to discuss the challenges and opportunities posed by the decision of the UK to leave the European Union. This event focused on the impact of Brexit on enterprise and society on the island and the steps taken by organisations to become 'Brexit-ready'. There was also a discussion on the future of Europe. This session followed two successful plenary sessions held last November and February. There have also been 19 sectoral dialogues in locations across the country to discuss the impact of Brexit on specific areas including Agri-Food, Transport, Energy, Tourism and Hospitality, and Education. The most recent sectoral dialogue on cross-border health co-operation took place in Dundalk on September 8. The All-Island Civic Dialogue is ongoing and forms a key part

of our stakeholder engagement on Brexit and will continue through the negotiation process. The outcomes of the recent plenary session will again feed into the Government's approach.

As with previous dialogues, a full report of the third plenary session will be published online. It is anticipated that further sectoral dialogues will be held over the coming months. I also hope to convene a further plenary session in the near future.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-10-10a.527&s=cross-border+2017-10-06..2017-10-13#g529.r>

Wednesday 11 October 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Brendan Smith asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation if specific measures will be introduced to assist businesses in the Border region which have been impacted adversely by the fall in the value of sterling and sectors that are dependent on Northern Ireland and Britain as export markets; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Frances Fitzgerald: Since the Brexit vote outcome, my Department has had extensive engagement with businesses to understand what they need to help them adapt to the challenges posed by Brexit, not least of which the pronounced currency fluctuations that have been felt in recent months.

Given that the border counties are particularly exposed to these challenges, InterTrade Ireland, the cross-border body co-funded by the Department, is now offering two vouchers to help businesses seek advice on issues related to currency.

The first is the Trade Accelerator voucher, offering €1,000 towards the cost of practical advice from experts on specific issues, such as currency management. The second is the Brexit Start to Plan Voucher, which offers up to €2,000 towards professional advice in relation to Brexit matters.

In Tuesday's Budget, I announced a new Brexit Loan Scheme which will provide affordable working capital financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit, or will be in the future. The new Scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get much needed working capital into Irish businesses.

The new Brexit Loan Scheme aims to make up to €300 million available to businesses of up to 499 employees. The scheme will be open both to development agency clients and those businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies.

My Department is also exploring the development of a longer-term Business Development Loan Scheme which would assist firms in long term investing for a post-Brexit environment.

The 2017 Action Plan for Jobs has also identified a range of actions to facilitate the resilience of Irish businesses in anticipation of Brexit. Seventeen actions are aimed at promoting market

diversification, improving competitiveness, realising opportunities in foreign markets and attracting research and innovation talent to Ireland. Three actions focus on the specific sectors of agri-food and tourism which is a very important aspect of cross border trade. All twenty actions will be of benefit to the border region with one of them (Action 13) focusing on delivering economic growth and jobs through the North-South Council and outreach activities.

The North East/North West Regional Action Plan for Jobs is a key policy response, in the context of Brexit, for supporting employment growth in the Border region. The Plan aims to deliver 28,000 extra jobs in the counties of Cavan, Monaghan, Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal and Louth by 2020. The Plan is stimulating job creation across the region by facilitating collaborative initiatives between the public and private sector.

Enterprise Ireland also continues to support companies, including their many clients in the border counties, on a one to one basis to enhance their competitiveness and capability and build on their success in existing and new markets. Enterprise Ireland's 'Brexit SME Scorecard', a new interactive online platform which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit, is available on www.prepareforbrexit.ie. This tool is a starting point for SME management teams looking to develop an action plan to help mitigate risks and leverage opportunities which may arise from Brexit.

My Department's Local Enterprise Offices the LEOs are hosting information events around the country for core and non-core clients. These sessions enable companies learn about the potential impacts and opportunities of Brexit, and to engage in a process of strategic planning to ensure their companies have a robust strategy in place.

The LEOs are also now offering a Technical Assistance for Micro-exporters (TAME) grant, designed to help LEO clients to find new markets and exports by part-funding expenditure incurred investigating and researching export markets.

The six LEOs in the Border region are also working together with their Northern Ireland counterparts under the EU Co-Innovate Programme. The aim of Co-Innovate is to give SMEs from the manufacturing and tradable services sectors in the regions the tools and tailored support to help them to innovate, differentiate and compete successfully.

Finally, the Lean4Micro programme was designed to encourage clients to adopt Lean business principles in their organisation to increase performance and competitiveness.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-10-11a.191&s=cross-border+2017-10-06..2017-10-13#g193.r>

Thursday 12 October 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Bernard Durkan asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the degree to which she and her Department are in the course of making provision for the negative impact of Brexit with particular reference to the industries here most likely to be affected negatively; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Frances Fitzgerald: Even in advance of the UK referendum result the analytical capacity of Government had been set in motion, identifying risks and preparing responses that would best protect the interests of Irish citizens and enterprises, regardless of out the outcome.

The Government is intensifying its focus on the economic implications of Brexit, including on domestic policy measures to reinforce the competitiveness of the Irish economy, to strengthen it to deal with potential negative impacts of Brexit, and to pursue all possible opportunities that might arise. The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI) plays a key role in the

Government's response to Brexit.

We are building an evidence base to inform policy decisions, relating to both our immediate support for enterprise and our longer term desired outcomes from the negotiations. This incorporates an extensive suite of studies (both externally commissioned and in-house research) and surveys, addressing the key enterprise aspects of Brexit.

- In April my Department published the outputs from a series of structured engagements with companies (of different sizes, across different sectors and across the regions) and from a survey of a thousand SME business owners to "Understand the Implications of Brexit for Irish SME's".

- A study analysing the "Potential Impact of WTO Tariffs on Cross-Border Trade" has been published in conjunction with InterTrade Ireland. This study provides an understanding of the impact of different trade and tariff regimes which might be imposed following Brexit, together with data on the extent and concentration of Cross Border Trade, including information on this trade by product and firm types, and barriers to exporting, all in the context of Brexit.

In terms of ongoing research commitments, the Department is currently working on:

- A major study examining the "Strategic Implications arising from EU-UK Trading Patterns". This study will provide an evidence base on key trade and investment questions to inform Ireland's position as part of the wider negotiation on the UK's future relationship with the EU. It will quantify the possible impact of a range of Brexit scenarios on trade and investment and will provide significant data on possible sectoral impacts of Brexit.

- A study examining the "Sectoral implications arising from Brexit" focused on 18 sectors most exposed to the UK is underway and is due to be completed by end 2017. This research examines the implications at firm-level for Ireland's most exposed enterprise sectors of the UK being outside of the European Single Market and Customs Union. The study is expected to be completed by end 2017.

- A study examining the "Import Content of Irish Exports: Implications of Brexit for Inputs and Competitiveness" and the extent to which Irish firms source intermediate inputs from the UK has just commenced. This research will provide empirical evidence on the import content of Irish firms' exports, how firms & sectors may be exposed to changes in the trading environment after Brexit and the impact of Brexit on inputs, and competitiveness.

- A study examining the "Skills needs arising from the Potential Trading and Regulatory Implications of Brexit" has commenced – with a particular focus on sectors such as logistics and freight. This research is being undertaken in my Department on behalf of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

Informed by this evidence base and extensive stakeholder engagement, we are inputting to and helping to shape the Irish position in the negotiations regarding the UK's exit from the EU. DBEI officials based in the Permanent Representation in Brussels, the Embassy London and at the WTO in Geneva are also essential to this work, engaging with other Member States and institutions and sharing intelligence with the wider Departmental system.

At Ministerial and official level we are central to the diplomatic effort across Government engaging our EU partners including the European Commission, individual Member States and the European Parliament.

This has led to a much greater understanding and appreciation across the EU of the uniqueness of Ireland's relationship with the UK and the potential impact of Brexit on Ireland – including the impacts at a sectoral level.

We are also engaging with counterparts in the UK at Ministerial and official level to deepen bilateral contacts generally and to ensure that our concerns regarding the potential impact of Brexit on Irish enterprise in particular are well understood.

In terms of our policy response, the focus has been to assess the possible implications and impacts of Brexit across policy areas of the Department and to ensure that the necessary supports are in place.

We are leveraging the expertise and enhancing the capacity of our Enterprise Agencies to ensure that they are in the best possible position to address the needs of their client in relation to competitiveness, innovation and market diversification. This is being achieved through the provision of information, training and other supports.

I have also secured an additional €3 million to enable the recruitment of a further 40-50 staff as part of DBEI 'Boots on the Ground'. This will bring the total additional Brexit related posts in the Department and across the Agencies to 100 in 2018.

Enterprise Ireland is key in this regard. In responding to Brexit, Enterprise Ireland's strategy is to support clients in sustaining and growing exports to the UK while also encouraging and supporting diversification into new markets outside the UK.

EI is in regular contact with some 600 clients across all sectors who are most reliant on the UK market; there is a particular focus on sectors such as food, construction and engineering that are most exposed to the UK and which provide major employment across all the regions.

EI's 'Brexit SME Scorecard' is an interactive online tool which can be used by all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. The tool prompts companies to consider the potential impact of Brexit across their business and provides suggested actions.

EI has introduced a 'Be Prepared Grant' which offers up to €5,000 in funding to support exporting client companies to research and develop a Brexit Action Plan.

Likewise, the Local Enterprise Offices are key points of context for engagement with enterprise. The LEO's are organising local workshops, seminars and training to assist companies to better understand the challenges of Brexit. LEOs also have a range of supports to help clients to respond to those challenges, to become more competitive and to source new markets.

Finally, we are targeting State supports to help vulnerable firms to adapt, in order to reinforce enterprise and employment, across all sectors and regions. In Budget 2018, a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme was announced to provide affordable financing to Irish businesses that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future. The new scheme is open to all trading SMEs and large firms employing less than 500.

In addition, I have asked my officials to progress with the Department of Finance and the SBCI and EIB the development of a Longer-Term Loan Scheme, together with a new Business Advisory Hub service, which would focus on business development to allow enterprises to position them for a post-Brexit environment.

Of course, there may also be sectoral opportunities as a result of Brexit. IDA continues to identify potential for mobile FDI in key sectors and actively pursue these opportunities including through targeted trade missions and rollout of advertising campaigns to promote Ireland's offering particularly in talent and tax.

Financial Services is a key sector where we have strengths and opportunities. IDA is taking a targeted but realistic approach to pursuing these opportunities – this is being done in the context of upholding regulatory standards that apply in Ireland managed by the Central Bank.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-10-12a.102&s=cross-border+2017-10-06..2017-10-13#g104.r>