

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

17 November 2017 – 24 November 2017



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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



Tuesday 21 November 2017

Department of Health

Stephen Donnelly asked the Minister for Health the preparations made in his Department in the event of no agreement being reached between the United Kingdom and the European Union on the terms of the UK's exit from the EU; if such preparations involve the drawing up of detailed and specific contingency plans in the event of a hard Brexit and a trade regime based on WTO tariffs; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Simon Harris: The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has responsibility for coordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit. In this capacity, the Department of Health is working closely with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to address the many challenges resulting from Brexit. This cooperation also involves the relevant State Agencies.

Work at Cabinet level is being prepared through cross-Departmental coordination structures. These represent a frequent and active channel through which all relevant Departments are providing their research, analysis and overall policy input to the Government's wider response to Brexit, including its priorities for the ongoing Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK.

As the outcome of the negotiations is not yet known, an important focus of the planning and preparation being undertaken through these structures is on deepening the Government's analysis and understanding of the exact consequences of a range of different possible scenarios. This represents an intensification of efforts to build on the Government's contingency planning.

The Department of Health and its agencies have been conducting detailed analysis on the impacts of Brexit in the area of health. A number of issues are being examined and contingency planning for a range of eventualities is underway. A key issue will be to ensure that there is minimum disruption to health services and that essential services are maintained on a cross-Border, all-island and Ireland-UK basis. The health sector has a highly mobile workforce and free movement issues and the mutual recognition and assurance of professional qualifications are being considered. On regulatory issues, it is clear that having a single set of rules across the European Union is enormously helpful – to protect human health, to ensure consumer protection and to provide a level playing field for industry. The UK no longer being part of a harmonised regulatory system in relation to food safety standards, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and cosmetics could necessitate increased certification requirements or disrupt trade between Ireland and the UK. Ensuring continuity in the supply of medicines and medical devices following the UK's departure from the EU is a priority. The issue of customs is of relevance as it relates to additional food safety controls and medicines. The implications of Brexit for networks and organisations such as the EU Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, the European Reference Networks on rare diseases and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control are also under consideration.

These issues are currently being examined by my Department and its agencies and this work will continue over the period ahead. The key priorities for my Department are to ensure continuity in the provision of health services and to avoid, or mitigate changes to the current situation that would have a negative impact on human health. These are also key factors in considering the prioritisation of risks.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-11-21a.800&s=cross-border+2017-11-17..2017-11-24#g802.r>

Thursday 23 November 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Bernard Durkan asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which she continues to engage with investment and job creation interests in Northern Ireland with a view to maintaining the best possible relationship of a mutually beneficial nature with Northern Ireland and the EU in the aftermath of Brexit; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Frances Fitzgerald: My Department works closely with its counterpart in Northern Ireland - the Department for the Economy - in connection with the operation of InterTrade Ireland (ITI), the cross-border body that assists SMEs all across the island in growing North-South trade. ITI also helps its

client companies to become more competitive and investor ready by developing new products and services.

A key part of ITI's recent work has been assisting businesses, both North and South, prepare for the challenges that Brexit will present. This includes the provision of expert advice on technical issues associated with the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. The objective of this programme of work is ensuring that companies all over Ireland are as best equipped as possible to operate in the post-Brexit commercial environment.

In relation to maintaining mutually beneficial relationships on enterprise development and trade, the Government's position on preferred future arrangements following Brexit has been made very clear. We continue to work towards an outcome that will maintain the closest and most positive possible trading relationship between the UK and Ireland.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-11-23a.145&s=cross-border+2017-11-17..2017-11-24#g148.r>

Thursday 23 November 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Aindrias Moynihan asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the supports available for small and medium enterprises in view of the fact that the 2018 to 2020 expenditure report states the Government, through budget 2018, will respond to the immediate and longer term impact of Brexit across the enterprise agency supported client base; her plans for new supports; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Frances Fitzgerald: The Government is intensifying efforts to address the challenges facing Irish companies as a result of Brexit. Those efforts are focused on minimising risks and maximising opportunities by ensuring the growth and resilience of Irish enterprise across the following four pillars:

- Helping firms to compete: The Government is taking a cross-Departmental approach to create the conditions necessary for companies to expand, export and create jobs. This includes providing access to finance, our tax regime and infrastructure spend, as well as ensuring that enterprise agencies are appropriately resourced to assist companies in their drive for competitiveness.

- Enabling firms to innovate: As part of our strategy to become a Global Innovation Leader, we are targeting R&D funding through our Agencies to support innovation in new products and processes which firms need to compete and grow and to invest in the next generation of innovators.

- Supporting firms to trade: We are supporting firms to start exporting, to grow their exports in existing markets and to diversify into new markets and regions. We will continue to attract overseas investment while working with EU partners to expand the portfolio of Free Trade Agreements.

- Negotiating for the best possible outcome: We are working across Government to ensure we get the best outcome possible for business from Brexit negotiations. My Department is leading a range of Brexit research projects which will provide an extensive evidence base and valuable analysis to inform and guide Ireland's position within the EU-27.

To underpin this strategy, as part of Budget 2018, a new €300m Brexit Loan Scheme will 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. The scheme will see a sizeable reduction in interest rates charged for lending to circa 4%. The new scheme will be delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders, to get much needed low-cost working capital into Irish businesses.

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. My Department is also scoping the development of a Business Advisory Hub which would assist SMEs to make informed funding/investment decisions and helps them avail of private market solutions or existing State supports.

Budget 2018 also provides for an additional €3 million in funding for enterprise agencies to allow for the recruitment of a further 40-50 Brexit-related staff. This will ensure a joined-up response to Brexit and help Irish exporters to grow their international sales and diversify their markets, and to secure new investments for Ireland. Those enterprise agencies serve a vital role in equipping SMEs for the challenges posed by Brexit. Through those agencies, the following supports are available or will be available:

1. Enterprise Ireland (EI)

The suite of supports that EI offers to Irish businesses in the SME sector is broad, encompassing leadership, management development and training, internationalisation, productivity, RD&I, capital investment and access to finance.

EI will continue to regularly engage on a one-to-one basis with clients to support their preparations for Brexit. In addition, it promotes awareness and preparation for Brexit through the Brexit SME scorecard, an interactive online platform developed by EI and open to all Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. It will promote export ambition and market diversification through the Global Ambition Campaign, will deliver an extensive programme of trade missions, market access programmes and other schemes in support of market diversification, and will roll out the #IrishAdvantage campaign to promote the attractiveness of Irish goods and services in export markets.

In addition, EI will ensure that our regions maximise their potential to grow and scale resilient Irish companies through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund. This regional competitive fund is designed to support the ambition, goals and implementation of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. EI, with the support of my Department, is leading in the development and implementation of this Fund of up to €60m.

2. IDA

IDA Ireland is constantly engaged with clients across its entire portfolio. Brexit has become a significant feature of IDA Ireland's strategy spanning all of its activities, including operations activities, overseas, finance, planning marketing and promotion departments.

IDA Ireland continues to work on ensuring that the Agency's strategy is fit for purpose in light of Brexit and will continue:

- To work with its existing client base to assist and support them in their growth and expansion in Ireland.
- To highlight Ireland's continued strong offering based on talent, ease of doing business, its competitive and transparent taxation regime, English as the spoken language and critically Ireland's continued access to the EU market
- To be in contact with clients, and prospective clients across the globe and continue to market a competitive value proposition to attract mobile foreign investment from global locations including the UK.

3. InterTrade Ireland

InterTrade Ireland (ITI), the Cross-border Body which my Department co-funds, assists businesses in Ireland to address the particular commercial challenges that Brexit may present for cross-border business. That Body already has developed considerable experience in promoting and strengthening North-South trade. The Government provided €250,000 in additional funding to ITI this year to allow it to undertake a range of initiatives aimed at better preparing Irish SMEs. This included the introduction of a Brexit readiness voucher scheme, strengthening the body's capacity to deliver expert advice, provision of information sessions and building awareness amongst SMEs of Brexit-related challenges. It also involves capability building and the provision of other specialist expertise.

4. Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

LEOs provide access to a range of supports for small businesses. These include innovation vouchers, trading online vouchers, lean start and management development supports.

As a result of the additional €4m in capital funding secured in Budget 2017 and maintained in 2018, a suite of LEO Brexit supports are available to small and micro businesses through the 31 LEOs nationwide. These supports, which are aimed at strengthening the capacity of small and micro businesses to better cope with the changing external environment, especially Brexit, include:

- A suite of online information addressing practical issues aimed at micro-enterprises;
- A 'Technical Assistance for Micro-enterprises' grant designed to support qualifying businesses to diversify into new markets, enabling companies to explore and develop new market opportunities;

- A 'Lean for Micro' programme available nationwide to help small businesses become more efficient and competitive;
- A 'LEO Innovation and Investment Fund' pilot programme to support innovation in micro-enterprises and to help them become investor ready so that they can scale their businesses;
- Tailored mentoring to address Brexit-related business challenges.

Source <https://www.kildarestreet.com/search/?s=cross-border&phrase=&exclude=&from=17-11-2017&to=24-11-2017§ion=>