



Ríaltas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Overview of Government Supports for Indigenous Business



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supportingSMEs.gov.ie

Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted to present this report which outlines the range of supports and services available to the over 250,000 business enterprises in Ireland, across all sectors and activity.

Government recognises the critical role that entrepreneurs and businesses play in every part of the country, providing well paid and rewarding employment for our people. While we had great success with the Action Plan for Jobs, between 2012 and 2018, we recognise we need to prepare now for the longer term. Future Jobs Ireland, launched in March this year, is our whole-of-Government Strategy to prepare for the future.

As set out in Future Jobs, this Government is committed to ensuring we have a supportive policy, regulatory and taxation environment for businesses to flourish.

As part of Project Ireland 2040, we are undertaking an unprecedented level of investment in essential digital and other connectivity infrastructures across the country, which will improve productivity and reduce costs for businesses and workers long into the future, together with investments in every town and village, to provide attractive places for our people to live and work. The complementary Regional Enterprise Plans, which I launched in the first quarter of 2019, will also serve to ensure that every region can reach their potential. My Department is backing regional entrepreneurialism through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), with €60m of funding already committed to forty-two projects in 2017 and 2018, to create conducive environments for business to grow and succeed.

The significant step-up in investments in our education, training and research system, linked to the future needs of the economy and society, will ensure our businesses have access to the skills and capabilities required to realise the commercial and employment opportunities arising from science and technological innovations and rapidly changing business models.

Across Government, we are providing a wide range of firm-level supports to ensure our businesses can start, grow and scale in Ireland and continue to provide rewarding employment and improved quality of life and standards of living for our people. The Local Enterprise Offices are the first-stop-shop for all businesses in every county. The full range of supports available can be accessed on our dedicated SME web-portal www.supportingSMEs.gov.ie.

Brexit in whatever form it finally takes will mean changes to the nature of trade with our closest neighbour the UK and businesses small and large will need to adjust and respond. That is why since 2016 Government has allocated additional resources and introduced a range of new supports to help firms to adjust and compete into the future, regardless of sector, size or nationality of ownership.

I am committed to ensuring that every business with growth ambition has access to the most appropriate and coherent set of supports to meet their needs and I am committed to championing and delivering on our joined-up approach to supporting business across Government.



Heather Humphreys T.D
Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation



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Introduction

In terms of provision of business and advisory supports to indigenous local businesses, the Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation (DBEI) in conjunction with its development agencies and offices, other Government departments and sectoral support bodies, has over time built a comprehensive suite of such supports – which can be broadly categorised as information/awareness, advisory, financial, and supports for regional enterprise development. These supports are delivered through a network of bodies with a wide reach into urban and rural localities, including in the case of DBEI, Enterprise Ireland, the 31 Local Enterprise offices (LEOs), InterTrade Ireland (ITI), and MicroFinance Ireland (MFI). This paper sets out the range of supports available to all businesses in the country.

The Government takes a whole of enterprise perspective and supports the full range of businesses in Ireland. Chapter 2 sets out how this holistic perspective is reflected in the national enterprise policy and strategy *Enterprise 2025: Renewed*. Chapter 2 also gives an overview of the SME landscape, including an analysis by size and trade characteristics. This is an important context in which to evaluate the universe of supports.

Chapter 3 describes the supports available to develop and build capacity in indigenous businesses through the different stages of development from start up and growth to scaling and internationalisation (where relevant) provided by the Local Enterprise Offices, the regional Business Innovation Centres and Enterprise Ireland.

The Department has also put in place several initiatives to support start-up businesses and entrepreneurship, including through the LEO network delivery, such as the Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur (IBYE) and annual Student Enterprise Awards and Lean for Micro programmes.

There are a number of agencies and initiatives tasked with supporting and developing businesses in the regions and these are set out in Chapter 4. The Department, through measures such as the Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF), supports significant regional initiatives to build on sectoral strengths and to better leverage identified resources to improve enterprise capability. Prospects for robust enterprise growth in the regions will be enhanced by significant investments proposed under Project Ireland 2040, which recognises that a competitive, innovative and resilient enterprise base is essential to provide the jobs and employment opportunities for people to live and prosper in all regions. The Department of Rural and Community Development plays an important part in local and rural development in this context.

Chapter 5 gives an overview of the sector specific supports available to businesses including for the food, drink and horticulture sector (Bord Bia and Teagasc), the seafood industry (Bord Iascaigh Mhara) the hospitality and tourism sectors (Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland) and the creative sector (Arts Council, Design & Crafts Council, and Screen Ireland).

DBEI collaborates with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to deliver low cost finance, with reasonable terms and conditions, through a number of schemes that are offered through the pillar banks. The Department also funds MicroFinance Ireland, and a range of angel and venture capital schemes, to ensure that Irish businesses can access appropriate financing for their operating and investment needs. The suite of financing supports is set out in Chapter 6.

Taxation incentives and reliefs are also important levers to support entrepreneurship and indigenous enterprise and Chapter 7 sets out the taxation measures which are designed to support Irish businesses to maintain and grow employment.

Chapter 8 sets out the main supports designed to address informational, technical and skills gaps in SME businesses, including the SME Online Tool, the upskilling provided by Skillnet, and the range of information guides published by the DBEI. There are also a range of information and advisory supports available to all businesses from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

Supporting and incentivising research, development and innovation is a priority of enterprise policy and the main innovation supports are set out in Chapter 9.

Brexit is a significant issue for all firms, in all sectors. The Government has been preparing both in advance of and since the 2016 UK Referendum on leaving the EU. The networks and structures that have been put in place to support indigenous local businesses have been invaluable, particularly in underpinning Brexit preparedness actions across Ireland. These are assisting businesses in identifying key risk areas and in facilitating the practical actions to be taken in response to the UK's exit from the EU.

As part of the Brexit preparations, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI), Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) and the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) are actively working with firms on certification and regulation. Through the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN), DBEI, working with the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Skills Council (NSC), has examined the needs of the broad base of business sectors and is following up with key skills and training providers.

The agri-food sector is recognised as one of the most exposed from farm enterprises through to the large processors into markets. DBEI has worked with the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) on preparedness. DAFM agencies including Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI), Bord Bia, BIM and others are working with businesses in all parts of the country. The Minister for Business, Enterprise & Innovation has worked very closely with the retail Sector as part of the Retail Consultation Forum. The Office of the Revenue Commissioners, through its management of the relevant customs and administrative regimes, provides the overall framework for trade on and off the island. Revenue collaborate with all agencies in raising awareness and preparing business to meet current and future compliance requirements.

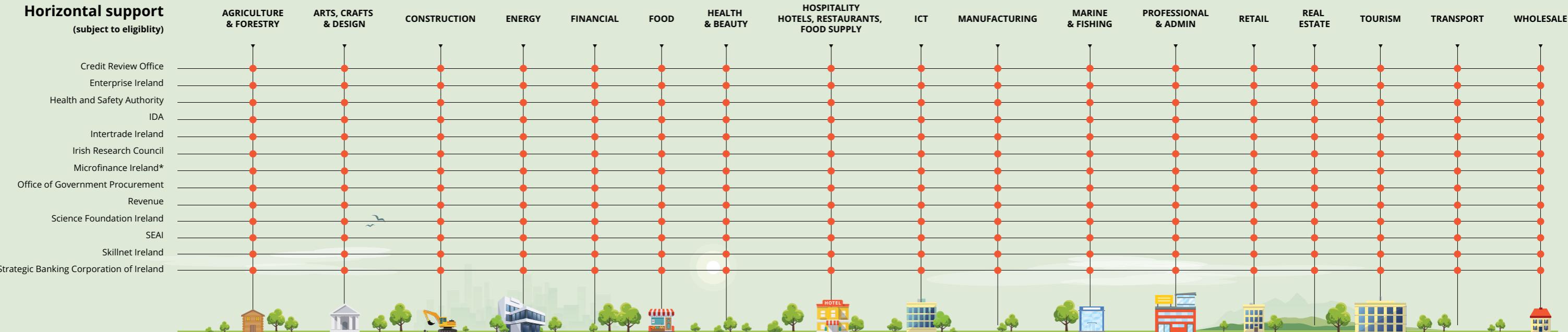
There are a wide range of Brexit supports available to all businesses, to sustain employment and increase resilience and to support competitiveness, innovation and market diversification where relevant. These supports are summarised in Chapter 10. The Government published its Brexit Contingency Plan in December 2018 and an update at the end of February 2019.

The Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department will continue to build and develop the support system for indigenous businesses to underpin strong economic and employment growth in all regions. Following the success of the Action Plan for Jobs process, the Government in 2019 launched Future Jobs Ireland, which moves the focus beyond numbers of jobs created to quality and sustainable jobs. This, together with other initiatives for the future, is set out in Chapter 11.

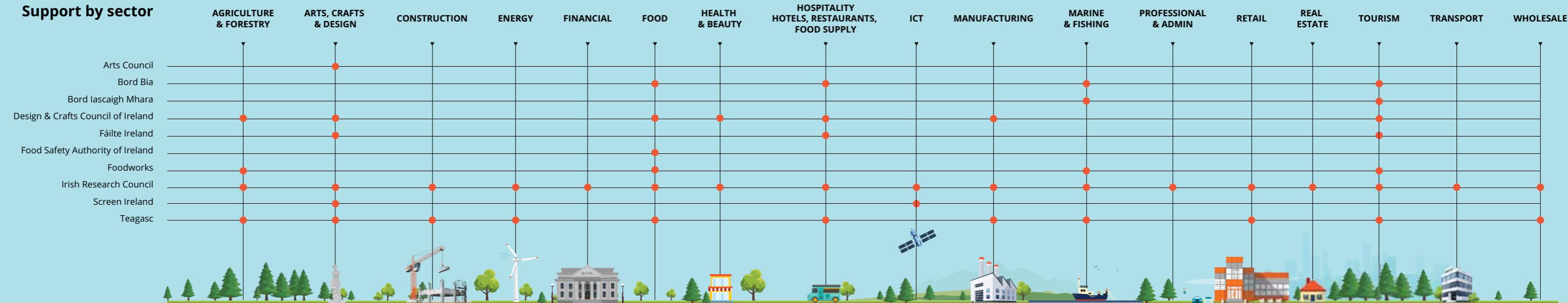
There are a wide range of Brexit supports available to all businesses, to sustain employment and increase resilience and to support competitiveness, innovation and market diversification where relevant.

Selected Government supports for businesses in Ireland

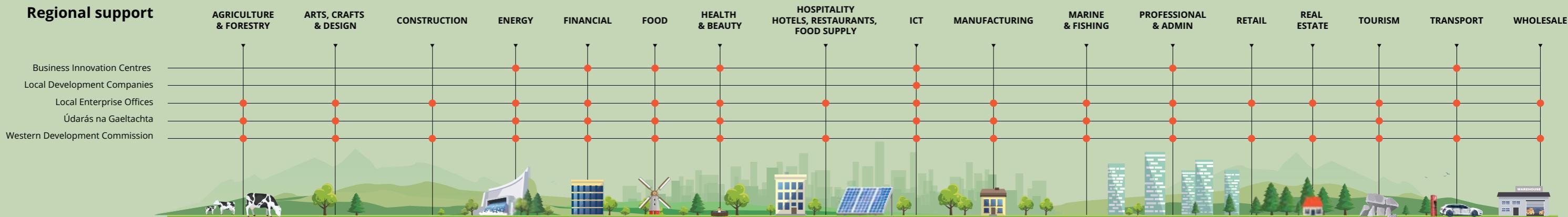
Horizontal support (subject to eligibility)



Support by sector



Regional support



* Supports offered only to micro enterprises



2 | Background

2.1 Enterprise Policy

The Government's national enterprise policy, **Enterprise 2025: Renewed** is a whole of enterprise strategy – encompassing all sectors and activities in the economy, and across all regions of Ireland. The actions to achieve sustainable full employment need to be delivered not only by the enterprise development agencies, but also by several Government Departments who have a role to play in ensuring we have a supportive and internationally differentiated business environment.

Enterprise 2025 sets out actions in three main areas:

- one, at firm and sectoral level: realising a step change in enterprise productivity, innovation and trade performance, both at the level of the firm and in terms of broadening the sectoral mix;
- two, on the international stage: differentiating Ireland internationally including in the areas of talent/skills – our people are our key asset – involves developing, retaining and attracting talent; attractive places to invest, live and work throughout Ireland (place-making); innovation which will be at the core of our economic performance; and being connected through trade, business, research and technology; and
- three, the business environment: excelling at the basics in Ireland's business supportive environment including access to finance; a competitive taxation regime; world class infrastructure; and cost competitiveness.

Enterprise policy is a rolling agenda and requires a continuous assessment of action to be undertaken on an annual basis. Many of the actions in Enterprise 2025 - at both business environment and firm level - are key to driving productivity growth across all sectors; including investments in talent and in physical, digital and research infrastructures. At the level of the enterprise, initiatives to stimulate RD&I, Lean, mentoring, leadership and skills development, continuous learning and trading online deliver enhanced productivity growth and competitiveness.

The suite of supports available are tailored to meet differing needs across the life-cycle of a company and to the appropriate size, existing capabilities, market orientation and ambition.

While the Action Plan for Jobs was an important lever in reducing unemployment from over 15% in 2011 to 4.4% in May 2019, in the context of Brexit and other global challenges it is now time to move the focus beyond numbers of jobs created to quality and sustainable jobs. **Future Jobs Ireland** is the Government's plan to meet all these challenges. Launched on 10 March 2019, it sets out ambitious targets and actions to drive this transformation of our economy. These include funds, policies and initiatives that: enhance productivity, especially among SMEs; promote indigenous entrepreneurship, especially in the regions; encourage clustering and stronger links between domestic and foreign owned firms; and assist businesses to move up the value chain, to protect jobs and to build resilience for the future.

2.2 The Irish SME Landscape

When assessing the universe of supports for Irish businesses it is important to understand the context and dynamics of the enterprise base in Ireland. The latest data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicates that there were over 250,000 active enterprises in the private business economy in Ireland in 2016, with nearly 1.5 million persons engaged. According to the CSO latest Business in Ireland report, micro-enterprises employing less than 10 accounted for 91.8% of firms and 27% of employment. Small firms employing between 10 and 49 accounted for 7% of firms and 22% of employment, while medium sized firms accounted for 1.2% of firms and 20% of employment. SMEs accounted for 99.8% of total number of enterprises in 2016 and over 68% of all persons engaged.

In addition, SMEs generated 50.2% of total turnover in the business economy and over 41% of Gross Value Added was attributed to these enterprises. The SME sector was a strong employment creator through the recovery of the economy - three in every five new jobs created since 2011 were in SMEs.

Table 1. Numbers of Enterprises in Ireland and Persons Engaged, 2016

Size	Active Enterprises	% Total Enterprises	% Change 2011-2016	Persons Engaged	% Total Persons Engaged	% Change 2011-2016
Micro <10	229,534	91.8%	3%	392,829	26.6%	6%
Small 10-19	10,748	4.3%	14%	143,842	9.7%	14%
Small 20-49	6,166	2.5%	23%	183,730	12.4%	24%
Medium 50-249	3,003	1.2%	25%	290,604	19.7%	26%
Large >250	582	0.2%	26%	467,231	31.6%	22%
Total	250,033	100%	4%	1,478,236	100%	17%

Source: CSO Business Demography 2016

2.3 Trade Characteristics of Enterprise Base

In overall trade terms, the number of businesses that import significantly exceeds the number that export, by a factor of 4 to 1. According to the CSO, in 2017, there were 31,661 enterprises that imported more than €5,000, with SMEs amounting to just over 93% of the total. There were an additional 11,440 businesses that had imports to the value of less than €5,000. Almost 70% of all importing enterprises are classified as micro (less than 10 employees), and these accounted for €12.7 billion, or 17% of total imports. In contrast, imports by large enterprises totalled €25.1 billion, or 34% of total imports. Table 2 below illustrates the number of importers by enterprise size and the value of their imports.

Table 2. Number of Importing and Exporting Enterprises, 2017

Enterprise size	Imports			Exports		
	Number of enterprises	% of total enterprises	% of total value	Number of enterprises	% of total enterprises	% of total value
Micro	22,200	70	20.45	5,081	59	6.2
Small	7,030	22	16.41	2,384	28	4.3
Medium	1,817	6	28.00	835	10	19.0
SMEs	31,047	98	64.86	8,300	96	29.5
Large	538	2	32.82	289	3	68.1
Unknown	76	0	2.32	25	0	2.3
Total	31,661	100	100	8,614	100	100.0

of which

Two-way Trader	6,442	20%	78%	6,442	75%	98%
Importer Only	25,219	80%	22%			
Exporter Only				2,172	25%	2%

Excluded from above

Trade value <€5,000	11,400			2,900		
Overall Total	43,061			11,514		

Micro (0-9 employees), Small (10-49 employees), Medium (50-249 employees), Large (over 250 employees).

Source: CSO Trade by Enterprise Characteristics 2017

It is also important to note that, in 2017, there were 8,614 enterprises registered as exporters, three-quarters of which also imported goods (i.e. two-way traders). In contrast, only 6,442 importers were two-way traders.

In 2017, the total value of exports was €121 billion and two-way traders accounted for the majority, 98% of the value of all goods exported as set out in Table 3. In contrast on the imports side two-way traders accounted for 78% of all goods imported.

In terms of importing and exporting and exposure to Brexit-related changes to customs requirements, Revenue data indicate that while large businesses are preparing well, smaller traders have yet to complete the essential requirements of having an EORI number, which will be needed to trade with the UK after Brexit.

The most recent data from the CSO indicates that exporting and importing is highly concentrated. The top 500 exporters account for 93% of goods exports and the top 500 importers account for 78% of imports.

Table 3. Concentration of value of traders, 2017

Enterprises	Imports €million		Exports €million	
	Value	% of total	Value	% of total
Top 5	12,893	16	31,471	26
Top 10	19,064	23	48,889	40
Top 50	38,979	47	87,413	72
Top 100	47,331	57	97,808	80
Top 500	64,224	78	112,868	93
Total	82,595	100	121,759	100

2.4 Trade with the UK

According to the CSO there were 6,719 enterprises who exported goods to the UK in 2017, 78% of the total number of exporters. Almost half of the enterprises who exported to the UK, 3,214 traded with the UK only. The value of this export trade was €2.4 billion, or 15% of total UK exports.

Exports to the UK in 2017 were €16 billion in total. The biggest exporting sector, by value, was the Agri/Food sector, which exported €3.7 billion of goods to the UK in 2017. 27,152 enterprises imported goods from the UK in 2017, which is 86% of the total of 31,661 importing firms.

Approximately one third of all importers had the UK as their sole trading partner (11,049 enterprises).

The total value of goods imports from the UK was €22.5 billion, based on country of consignment. Companies who import only from the UK accounted for €3.9 billion, or 18% of UK imports in 2017.

According to the CSO, the Retail and wholesale sector was the biggest economic sector importing from the UK in 2017. There were 12,761 enterprises from this sector importing goods, which is almost half of all companies importing from the UK. The value of imports was €12.5 billion, representing 57% of total imports from the UK.

Exports to the UK in 2017 were €16 billion in total. The biggest exporting sector, by value, was the Agri/Food sector, which exported €3.7 billion of goods to the UK in 2017.



2.5 SME Performance and Access to Credit

The Department of Finance has commissioned the SME Credit Demand Survey biannually since 2011, undertaken by Fitzpatrick Associates and Behaviour and Attitudes, with 1,500 SMEs. The Survey provides a helpful barometer of the Irish SME landscape and the availability of, and demand for, credit that exists for SMEs. Some of the Survey's key findings for 2018 include:

- the proportion of SMEs recording an increase in turnover was 86%, most notable increases in construction and hospitality sectors. The number of firms recording an increase in employment was 26% and the number of companies making a profit increased to 72% of all SMEs surveyed;
- demand for credit had decreased to 20% of SMEs, down from 23% in 2017 and a high of 39% in 2012. Of those SMEs that did not access credit 89% cited lack of credit requirements as their reasoning;
- the survey registers little change in expected future demand for credit, with only 19% of SMEs expecting to apply for finance in the next six months, compared to 20% during the corresponding period in 2017;
- while 51% of SME owners/part owners in Ireland are female, this decreases to 29% for female management of SMEs.

The hotel and restaurant sector, along with the construction, business services and manufacturing sectors, have experienced the most pronounced improvements in turnover. Growth has however moderated amongst exporting businesses, where 53% report increased turnover in the six months to September 2018, down from 58% in 2017. The proportion of credit applications that were declined stands at 13% in the 2018 Survey, down marginally from 14% in September 2017.

In terms of awareness of government supports, most SMEs are aware of Enterprise Ireland (86%), and Local Enterprise Offices (77%) support initiatives. 41% of SMEs are aware of the Credit Guarantee Scheme. Some 85% of those surveyed indicated that internal funds/retained earnings represent the primary source of working capital finance, an increase of four percentage points since 2017.

3 | Supports to Develop and Grow Indigenous Businesses



Overview

This chapter sets out the Government agencies and bodies that provide grants, advice and other supports to indigenous businesses and guide them through their developmental journey from start-up, growth, scaling to internationalisation, where relevant.

Typically, where individuals and entrepreneurs seek information or guidance on starting or growing a business, they begin their journey with the Local Enterprise offices or Business Innovation Centres - of the 250,000 businesses in Ireland, just under 230,000 have less than 10 employees¹, and these are the cohort that are served by the LEOs and Innovation Centres.

As businesses build capacity they may progress to Enterprise Ireland, which supports established businesses with more than 10 employees. There are also some additional supports for businesses in certain regions and these are set out in Chapter 4.

¹ Table 1 Chapter 2

3.1 Local Enterprise Offices

The network of Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), was established in 2014 and has become an important and effective channel to provide information and advisory support to indigenous local businesses. There are 31 LEOs located in the Local Authorities nationwide, which serve as a 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and 'soft' supports in the form of training and mentoring to anyone wishing to **start or grow a business in each local area**. The LEOs are supporting over 36,000 jobs in 7,000 small Irish businesses. Since the LEOs were established they have supported the creation of 18,000 jobs in small businesses across the country. Significantly, in 2018, 171 LEO clients were transferred to Enterprise Ireland for further growth and investment.

The Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation increased funding for the LEOs by 22% in 2019, and this increase is being used to assist micro-enterprises in becoming more competitive and better able to cope with the changing economy in which they are operating. The suite of supports available from the LEOs includes tailored mentoring to address the specific Brexit challenges facing businesses, as well as targeted training on Brexit-related issues and a new customs training programme.

Local Enterprise Offices offer **Mentor Programmes** through which businesses can access mentors including those on the Enterprise Ireland Mentor Network. Mentors provide tailored advice, guidance and support, to help accelerate growth, build management capability.

The Mentor Programme is designed to match up the knowledge, skills, insights and entrepreneurial capability of experienced business practitioners with small business owner/ managers who need practical and strategic one to one advice and guidance. The mentor contributes independent, informed observation and advice to aid decision making.

The Mentor Programme is open to both new and existing businesses located within a LEO area. Areas of involvement typically include: business strategy, financial planning, market research, marketing & promotion, production planning, distribution, corporate organisation, website planning & design.

The LEO Management Development

Programmes provide the owner-manager with the management, leadership, business skills and knowledge to achieve sustainability and growth in their business. This programme is designed to integrate learning and mentorship to make an impact on the owner-manager and their business. The programme helps participants to effectively address their business challenges and to develop and grow their business.

At a personal level, the programme impacts the leadership, management and personal skills and behaviours of the participant while at a business level, the programme impacts on the business results, for example, the introduction of new products or services, reducing debtor days or increasing net profit. The mentor assigned to each participating business is drawn from a panel of highly skilled and experienced mentors with expertise in assisting the growth and development of small businesses.

The LEOs are supporting over 36,000 jobs in 7,000 small Irish businesses.



The range of developmental programmes available at local LEO offices is illustrated in Box 1 below:

Box 1 LEO Developmental Programmes



The LEOs also provide a wide range of high-quality training supports which are tailored to meet specific business requirements. Training initiatives designed to support owner-managers to address the impacts on currency, pricing, cashflow and funding are being currently rolled out. These cover a broad range of topics in the areas of business, legal, e-commerce/technology networking and management.

In addition, the LEOs provide a confidential advisory service open to those operating a business. Businesses can access information, advice and guidance from Business Advisors and will be signposted to the supports most relevant to them.

Grant Support available from LEOs

The Local Enterprise Offices provide a number of grants to support start up and expanding businesses:

- **LEO Feasibility Study Grants:** Feasibility Study Grants are designed to assist the promoter with researching market demand for a product or service and examining its sustainability. The grant includes assistance with innovation, hiring of expertise from third level colleges, private specialists, design and prototype development. The maximum Feasibility Study Grant payable is between 50% - 60%, depending on region, of the investment or €15,000 whichever is the lesser.
- **LEO Priming Grants:** A priming grant is a business start-up grant and is available to micro enterprises within the first 18 months of start-up. The maximum Priming Grant payable shall be 50% of the investment or €150,000 whichever is the lesser.
- **LEO Business Expansion Grants:** The Business Expansion Grant is designed to assist a business in its growth phase after the initial 18 months start-up period. The maximum Business Expansion Grant payable shall be 50% of the investment or €150,000 whichever is the lesser.
- **Agile Innovation Fund:** The Agile Innovation Fund was developed by Enterprise Ireland to support product, service and process innovation to build competitive advantage and is geared towards clients in sectors with rapid design cycles or who have not previously applied for RD&I support. The Agile Innovation Fund is also open to eligible Local Enterprise Office clients and it allows companies to access up to 50% in support towards innovation projects with a total cost of up to €300,000.
- **LEAN for Micro:** LEAN for Micro is adapted by Enterprise Ireland for LEO clients to help small businesses boost competitiveness, increase performance and profitability as well as building resilience within their companies. Under this programme, clients can avail of five days of consultancy with a Lean Expert (a qualified practitioner), who will work with the company to introduce lean principles, undertake a specific cost reduction project and assist the company in benchmarking its performance.
- **Enterprise Europe Network:** The Enterprise Europe Network is the world's largest support network for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. In Ireland, services are delivered in a partnership between Enterprise Ireland, the 31 Local Enterprise Offices and the Chambers of Commerce in Dublin and Cork. Through the network Irish companies have free access to Europe's largest database listing up to 10,000 new business and technology opportunities in the EU and other major global markets. Businesses are assisted to grow through tailored support, new business and technology partnerships, commercial opportunities, licensing deals, and partner searches for EU funded research and development. Companies can get advice on EU funding and support to bring their innovative products and technologies to a global audience.
- **Trading Online Voucher Scheme:** This scheme is an initiative under the Government's National Digital Strategy, the Trading Online Voucher Scheme (TOVs) is actively promoted by the Local Enterprise Office on behalf of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The TOVs offers matched financial assistance of up to €2,500, along with training and advice, to all micro companies (10 or less employees) with a turnover of less than €2 million who want to establish an online presence for the first time, or who wish to expand a basic existing website to incorporate a more substantive online trading capacity.
- **Innovation vouchers:** The Local Enterprise Offices, working in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland, have identified innovation as a central theme for micro enterprise development, the provision of which will be facilitated by access to EI Supports such as Agile RD&I, Innovation Partnerships Innovation Vouchers Innovation Mentors/Advocates.

Future Initiatives

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation plans to continue building on the success of the LEO model. For example, a new client portfolio management model will be rolled out in 2019 to all the LEOs by Enterprise Ireland, aimed at driving more effective client engagement, enhancing portfolio performance and increasing levels of client progression towards scale and exporting. Future Jobs Ireland also has a commitment to examine how best to strengthen the capacity of the LEOs to work with and support a broader range of ambitious and growth-oriented enterprises to improve productivity growth, innovation and resilience.

3.2 Business and innovation centres (BIC)

The Business and Innovation Centres (BICs) are regionally based organisations which provide specialist support for new and existing enterprises. BICs typically operate as private/public partnerships, combining both Government funding via Enterprise Ireland and private cash and kind contributions. BICs concentrate on supporting **new, innovative businesses, which have high growth potential**, and which can contribute to economic development in their areas. There are BICs in Dublin, Cork, Galway and the South East.

3.3 Enterprise Ireland

Direct employment in Enterprise Ireland (EI) supported firms reached a record high of more than 215,000 in 2018, and exports also reached a new record of €23.8 billion. Importantly, these EI client firms have extensive links to their local economies around the country and EI client purchases of raw material and services and wages to direct employees exceeded €27bn in 2018. Foreign-owned firms in Ireland have a similar level of expenditure into the domestic economy. Hence, in addition to providing a route to export markets through sub-supply, these linkages between exporting and non-exporting indigenous firms are important sources of transfer of innovation and technologies, regulations and standards and management practices.

Enterprise Ireland provides supports to established² SMEs in the **manufacturing and internationally traded services** sectors and to High Potential Start Ups (HPSUs).

Funding and other supports are provided by Enterprise Ireland with the objective of increasing the potential employment and sales growth of the businesses, supporting regional development, increasing the productivity and innovation in indigenous businesses, and increasing exports. Categories of support provided by Enterprise Ireland to client companies include:

Market Research and Internationalisation

- **Strategic Marketing Review Grant:** This support is targeted at established companies that have experience in selling internationally and who are interested in reviewing and developing their market development strategy. The grant supports the undertaking of an approved programme of work in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland advisers and an approved external consultant.
- **Business Development Programme:** This programme is designed to stimulate cross-border trade (between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) and develop other forms of commercial co-operation amongst SME's throughout the island of Ireland.
- **Excel at Export Selling:** A series of workshops aimed at rapidly embedding the proven tools of good international selling practice into the sales teams of Irish companies across all industry sectors.

Process or Services Development including RD&I Funding

- **In-house Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) Fund:** The Fund supports the development of new or substantially improved products, services or processes. Projects may range from solving technical challenges (R&D) to innovations in services delivery or business models (Business Innovation).
- **Agile Innovation Fund:** Agile Innovation projects supports companies in sectors with rapid design cycles to maintain their technology position. The benefits of this grant are that it allows for a very simple application process and delivers a very fast response from application to approval.
- **Business Innovation:** Supports investment in the implementation of new production, delivery or organisational methods within a company in order to increase competitiveness on global markets.
- **Innovation Voucher:** Innovation Vouchers, worth €5,000, are available to assist a company to work with a registered college or knowledge provider to explore a business opportunity or a technical problem³.

2 An established SME client is a company that is not a HPSU client, has an established trading record, employs between 10 and 250 employees, and has either an annual turnover of less than €50m or an annual balance sheet of less than €43m

3 Innovation Vouchers are available to open to all small and medium-sized limited companies registered in Ireland and are not restricted to clients of Enterprise Ireland

- **Innovation Partnership Grant Programme:** The grant offers financial support to companies who engage in collaborative research projects with Irish universities and Institutes of Technology. The proposal process and administration of the project is managed by the participating third level research institution.
- **Horizon 2020 and other EU Research Funding Programme:** If a company is interested in working on collaborative research projects with research partners across Europe, there are a range of international research programmes designed to foster collaborative cross-border research between companies in different member states.
- **Innovation 4 Growth Programme:** Targeted at ambitious companies seeking to drive growth through innovation, this programme supports companies through an end-to-end innovation learning and practice journey to deliver on one or more innovation initiatives.

Management Development

- **Mentor grants:** These grants can be used to investigate the feasibility of developing a new product, process, technology or service offering.
- **Strategic Consultancy grants:** These grants are used to support the cost of planning or implementing a new strategic development initiative in your company and cannot be used to support routine consultancy costs.
- **Key Manager grants:** These grants are used to support the cost of hiring a new Key Manager. Must be critical to the company's future development and introduce key skills and expertise to the company's senior management team.

Productivity and Business Process Improvement Supports

- **GradStart:** The GradStart initiative offers support to Enterprise Ireland client companies to hire up to three graduates at any one time, for a graduate contract duration of two years. It is a broad-based graduate placement across all disciplines and sectors.
- **LeanStart/GreenStart:** Grants are used to support the costs of undertaking a "Lean Start Assignment". This is a short assignment undertaken by a Lean consultant/trainer or environmental consultant/trainer.
- **GreenStart:** Grants are used to support the costs of undertaking a GreenStart Assignment. This is a short assignment undertaken by an Environmental consultant/trainer. Eligible Expenditure is limited to the cost of hiring a consultant/trainer for a maximum of seven days.
- **Lean transform Grants:** are used to support a "Lean Transform Project". This is a large scale, extensive and holistic company transformation programme delivered by an external consultancy team of international reputation.
- **Job expansion fund:** This is funding to support companies to achieve enhanced growth through increased employment.
- **Capital Investment Initiative:** Funding to support client companies improve productivity and competitiveness through the acquisition of new capital equipment and technology.

4 | Supports for Regional Enterprise Development



4.1 InterTradeIreland

InterTradeIreland (ITI) is one of the six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement. Its mission is to support businesses, through innovation and trade initiatives, to take advantage of North South co-operative opportunities to improve capability and drive competitiveness, jobs and growth. ITI offers a range of programmes, business information and advisory services which help small businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland to explore the cross-border market, develop new products, processes and services and become investor ready.

ITI is funded by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation in (DBEI) and the Department for the Economy (DFE) in Northern Ireland.

ITI offers a range of programmes, business information and advisory services which help small businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland to explore the cross-border market, develop new products, processes and services and become investor ready.

4.2 Údarás na Gaeltachta

Established in 1980, Údarás na Gaeltachta is the regional authority responsible for the economic, social and cultural development of the Gaeltacht. The overall objective of Údarás na Gaeltachta is to ensure that Irish remains the main communal language of the Gaeltacht and is passed on to future generations.

Údarás encourages investment in the Gaeltacht through a range of generous financial and non-financial incentives for new and existing enterprises in the Gaeltacht.

The organisation supports businesses in developing new markets, technologies, products and strategic alliances through research and development. Gaeltacht companies span a range of commercial sectors, including life sciences, ICT, tourism, fish processing and aquaculture, renewable energy, food, niche manufacturing, audio visual and digital media, arts and crafts.

Over 7,000 people are currently employed full time in Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies in Gaeltacht areas and these companies have a significant economic impact and make a substantial contribution to their local economies.

4.3 Western Development Commission

The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body that was set up to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare) by ensuring that Government policy is directed at improving the social and economic situation in the region and that the interests of the West are always considered at the highest levels of Government. The WDC manages the Western Investment Fund (WIF), established to fill a “funding gap” adversely affecting businesses and community groups in the region. The most recent WDC analysis indicates that to date over 134 enterprises have benefitted from the Fund, with total investment by the Fund of €48m leveraging total additional investment of €208m.

4.4 Regional Enterprise Development Fund

The Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) is a competitive fund introduced by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in 2017 with the overarching aim of driving enterprise development and job creation in each region throughout Ireland. The Fund is administered for DBEI by Enterprise Ireland and it is aimed at supporting collaborative and innovative projects that can have a significant impact on enterprise development and help to sustain and add to employment at a national, regional and county level.

To date, 42 projects have been awarded funding over two completed Calls for Proposals worth a total of almost €60m, with collaborative projects supported in every region.

The Scheme has supported projects in the following development areas:

Stream One: to support major regional, multi-regional or national sectoral initiative grants of €2m up to €5m per project in funding towards capital and current costs. These initiatives must be focused on achieving defined enterprise development outputs and impacts.

Stream Two: to support significant county, regional or multi-regional sectoral and or enterprise initiative grants of €250k up to €2m per project in funding towards capital and current costs. These projects must be focused on delivery of defined enterprise development outputs and impacts.

Stream Three: for local and community enterprise initiative grants of €50k up to €250k per project in funding towards capital and current costs. These projects must be focused on local, county or regional initiatives that have defined metrics for enterprise development in the area.

Stream Four: to support significant Industry Clustering initiatives with grants of €50k up to €250k per project in funding towards current costs. These projects must support industry-led groups to maximise the benefits of collaborative opportunities where the results of the activity will have some identifiable and measurable impact on their business.

The REDF complements the Regional Enterprise Plans (and the previous Regional Action Plan for Jobs 2015-2017/8) where it has served as an enabler for projects emerging from that regional collaborative process.

The 42 projects announced by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation in December 2017 and December 2018 respectively, and supported under the Fund to date, demonstrate its ability to bring regional stakeholders together with a focus on enterprise development in the regions. The Fund has showcased the contribution of indigenous enterprises in the regions and demonstrated their potential for productive collaboration.

Creating added value for enterprises and addressing gaps in provision are at the core of the REDF, where projects integrate enterprise infrastructure developments (i.e. space for the project) with enterprise support elements (e.g. key personnel, equipment, hot desk facilities etc.).

With two REDF rounds complete, DBEI with Enterprise Ireland are reviewing the REDF in the context of the full range of funds now available under Project Ireland 2040 and new policy developments such as Future Jobs Ireland, with a view to identifying where there may be remaining gaps in funding provision in support of regional enterprise development, and how best to focus further REDF calls. It is intended that a third REDF competitive call will commence in the coming months.

In addition, the Government has made a significant commitment under Project Ireland 2040 to target €4 billion to support the key priorities of rural renewal, urban regeneration, the achievement of climate action objectives, and the development and adoption of new disruptive technologies. Complementary to the REDF, these funds also act as key enablers for regional economic growth over the coming years.

4.5 Irish Local Development Network

The Irish Local Development Network (ILDN) was established in 2010 to represent all Local Development Companies throughout Ireland. ILDN is the representative body for Ireland's 49 Local Development Companies who deliver RDP LEADER, Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, Rural Social Scheme, Tús, Local Employment Service, Jobs Clubs, Rural Recreation Programme, The Walks Scheme, Back to Work Enterprise Allowance and social enterprise programmes across rural and urban Ireland.

While these programmes are the core programmes of ILDN's members, they also deliver a range of other initiatives at national and European level that enhance the development of communities through enterprise, training, activation, educational, health and community supports.

Local Development Companies (LDCs) operate in urban, rural and island communities of all population profiles and densities across the entire country.

LDCs are known by many different names throughout Ireland including: Local Area Partnerships, LEADER Partnerships, Integrated Development Companies as well as the more obvious Local Development Company. There are a number of key features which all LDCs share:

- **Bottom-up approach – working with communities to develop local solutions to local issues;**
- **Focus on promoting local economic development;**
- **Focus on addressing inequality and social exclusion;**
- **Governed by a multi-sectoral partnership structure;**
- **Voluntary Board;**
- **Not-for-profit companies limited by guarantee.**

Currently, ILDN members oversee €330 million worth of economic activity each year supporting labour market access measures, rural development, social inclusion, community development and enterprise activity. The network is the largest non-governmental provider of local development supports and services in the state.

4.6 LEADER Programme 2014-2020

As part of the LEADER Programme 2014-2020, grant aid is available for economic development, enterprise development and job creation. This can include specific support for rural tourism, enterprise development, rural towns and broadband, all of which contribute to supporting local businesses.

Since its launch in 1991, LEADER has provided rural communities across the European Union with the resources to enable local partners to actively engage and direct the local development of their area, through community-led local development. In Ireland, under the LEADER Programme for 2014-2020, a budget of €250 million in grant aid is being provided to support rural communities and local businesses.

As programme manager, the Department of Rural and Community Development is responsible for managing the LEADER Programme.

The LEADER Programme is administered at a local level by 29 Local Action Groups (LAGs) who operate on administrative or county boundaries and are made up of local representatives from the community, public and private sector. Pobal supports the Department of Rural and Community Development in the administration of a number of elements of the LEADER Programme.

4.7 Social Enterprise Strategy

A social enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social impact rather than making a profit for its owners or shareholders.

The government has given a commitment to developing and publishing a national policy on social enterprise (see Action Plan for Rural Development – Action 99). The development of this policy, the first of its kind in Ireland, is being led by the Department of Rural and Community Development and is underpinned by research, workshops and consultations with many stakeholders over a period of 18 months.

Mr. Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development, published a draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland for public consultation in April 2019, seeking the views of stakeholders and the public to inform the policy. The proposed draft policy is focused on three objectives:

- building awareness of social enterprise;
- growing and strengthening social enterprise; and,
- achieving better policy alignment.

Responses will inform the preparation of the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland.

The Draft National Social Enterprise Policy is part of a suite of policy initiatives which will complement the Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sectors in Ireland, and the forthcoming National Volunteering Strategy, which are also being developed by the department.

5 | Sector Specific Supports

Many of the supports described in this section are delivered through agencies and bodies under the respective aegis's of the relevant Government departments.

These include the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation; the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; the Department of Finance; the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; and the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, with each providing supports to businesses operating in the appropriate sectors.



5.1 Supports for the AgriFood and fisheries Sector

5.1.1 Bord Bia

Bord Bia was established in 1994 to promote, assist and develop the marketing of Irish Food, Drink and Horticulture. Bord Bia's supports are provided in the domestic and overseas markets to help businesses in the Irish food, drink and horticulture industry grow. Supports include:

- **Brand Forum:** Bord Bia's Brand Forum is a membership programme designed for manufacturers interested in "the branded route" to market. It provides opportunities to network with peers. The Brand Forum focuses on brand issues encountered in the marketplace and draws on world-class expertise to demonstrate how to build better brands.

- **FoodService Academy:** Bord Bia's FoodService Academy is run in partnership with Musgrave MarketPlace and seeks to help participating producers grow sales within the foodservice, or out-of-home market. The initiative also offers the opportunity to achieve growth within Musgrave MarketPlace's foodservice business, supplying over 6,000 customers each week.
- **Organic Business Mentoring:** Bord Bia offers business development mentoring to producers of Organic Food and Drink in Ireland. This mentoring is intended to assist businesses with their individual plans for growth and is tailored to their stage of development and specific needs. Mentoring can assist businesses in route to market strategy, marketing activities and advising suitable strategic and tactical options to contribute to sustained growth in the domestic market.
- **SuperBrands:** SuperBrands is a Bord Bia programme that aims to help smaller Irish food and drink companies operate in a fast-changing and highly competitive marketplace. The programme aims to help these businesses to grow and thrive against bigger competitors by understanding the consumer context of their brand, the category in which they compete, and finding a relevant and compelling proposition for their brand with consumers.
- **Food Works:** is a cross-agency supported accelerator programme that helps develop the next generation of scaleable and export driven Irish food businesses. Food Works is run by three government agencies, Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland and Teagasc, who have worked together since 2012 to support innovative food businesses in Ireland. So far, Food Works has helped more than 70 Irish food entrepreneurs scale their businesses. The Programme is eager to build on that success. The Food Works Programme is made up of ten, day-long workshops, an overseas market study trip, and a further six business adviser sessions, over six months. Each of the three agencies involved with Food Works plays a specific role in taking Irish food to global markets, with Bord Bia helping to identify consumer need, Teagasc providing technical support, and Enterprise Ireland advising on the commercial issues.

5.1.2 Bord Iascaigh Mhara

Bord Iascaigh Mhara (BIM) supports the growth of the Irish seafood industry, with a particular emphasis on increasing profitability and employment in the sector. It provides a variety of supports to businesses operating in the fisheries, seafood processing and aquaculture sector, depending on their business needs. Examples of supports available are listed below:

- **European Maritime Fisheries Fund Seafood Processing Capital Investment Scheme:** The Scheme provides grants of up to 30% of costs for investment by SMEs in seafood processing enterprises in value-adding processing equipment and processing premises. The Scheme is cofounded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union.
- **Regional Officers:** BIM's regional officers, located around the coast, offer hands-on professional mentoring in business planning, identifying new market opportunities and branding, as well as advice on funding, all of which enable businesses to grow more rapidly than they could alone.
- **Retail & Food Service Support:** BIM offers specific Retail and Food Service Support, to assist the retail and food service sectors to increase seafood sales and ensure best practice is followed by outlets nationwide. It provides access to specialist knowledge on seafood handling, labelling, presentation, supply chain and cold chain management.



- **Business Development for Aquaculture Producers:** The Business Development for Aquaculture Producers programme seeks to help grow aquaculture production businesses through the provision of assistance with business plans and strategies, improved access to markets, up to date intelligence on markets and in finding investors for your business.

BIM also provides specialist innovation advisory services to seafood processing enterprises through its Seafood Innovation Hub in Clonakilty, County Cork.

In addition, BIM directly provides a broad range of training courses specific to the seafood sector at its training colleges and via its mobile training units.

5.1.3 Teagasc

Teagasc – the Agriculture and Food Development Authority – is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. It was established in September 1988 under the Agriculture (Research, Training and Advice) Act, 1988.

The primary function of Teagasc is to support science-based innovation in the Agri-food sector and the broader bio-economy. Teagasc is the leading organisation in the fields of agriculture and food research in Ireland, undertaking innovative research in:

- Animal and grassland research and innovation;
- Crops, environment and land use;
- Food; and
- Rural Economy and development.

Teagasc provides a comprehensive range of services to companies across all sectors of the food industry. These services include new product development, pilot-processing, product testing and sensory analysis. Additionally, they deliver in-company and public training programmes addressed to specific industry needs and skills gaps. Teagasc works with food companies providing consultancy services to ensure the highest standards of food safety and quality assurance are achieved.

5.2 Supports for the Hospitality and Tourism Sector

5.2.1 Fáilte Ireland

Fáilte Ireland operates a suite of supports to ensure that businesses in the **tourism and hospitality** sector can maintain a focus on improving performance and introducing better revenue and cost management practices, while maintaining a focus on service delivery.

- **Training Programmes:** Fáilte Ireland offers a range of training programmes to businesses in the appropriate sectors, including support for executive development, service excellence, revenue management, as well as pricing and cost management. There are also more specific training programmes available for individual areas, including a tourism-focussed Get GDPR Ready programme and a programme on The Financials of Extending Your Season, which is aimed at small business owners considering extending a season.
- **Online Knowledge Hub:** Fáilte Ireland also provides online resources in the form of a digital “knowledge bank” including information, tools, templates and checklists to help businesses in the sector better understand the routes to market and provide useful information to maximise sales opportunities. This digital resource also includes a Get Brexit Ready page, through which Fáilte Ireland offers a Brexit Readiness Check to help businesses understand the extent of their exposure to Brexit, a Brexit Research Library, and further information on training and supports available.

In addition to providing support for more than 1,000 businesses around the country, the Tourism Development Authority is also delivering a targeted programme of training and mentoring for more 100 businesses in border counties.

5.2.2 Tourism Ireland

Tourism Ireland is the marketing body responsible for the promotion of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourist destination. Tourism Ireland, as an all-island body, provides a wide range of opportunities to island of Ireland tourism industry partners to promote their businesses overseas.

- **Knowledge and networking supports:** Tourism Ireland’s Co-operative Marketing Activities offer cooperative online and offline campaigns to its clients. These activities are funded on a 50:50 basis between Tourism Ireland and participating industry partners.

- Tourism Ireland offers clients access to cooperative campaigns on TV, radio, online, in print media and “out-of-home” locations (such as subway stations, buses, and trams).
- **Trade supports:** Tourism Ireland also participates in trade shows, customer fairs, trade missions, workshops, familiarisation visits, and trade e-marketing activities, as well as collaborating with online tour operators. These events provide clients with access to potential buyers and visitors.
 - **Collaborative promotion supports:** For direct and e-marketing, Tourism Ireland collates targeted trade, media and consumer databases to whom it forwards a range of weekly, fortnightly and monthly e-zines. Tourism Ireland also offers clients access to an audience of over 4 million followers across its various social media presences (including Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts).

Tourism Ireland offers a range of **digital marketing packages** that allow its clients to tailor their marketing campaigns across relevant digital and social media platforms. It also offers free product listing on its Ireland.com website, which focuses on 23 key overseas markets and received over 20 million visitors in 2018. The website also features a community section, through which businesses can connect with potential customers.

5.3 Supports for the Arts, Crafts and Culture Sector

In addition to the supports outlined above, there are also numerous supports specifically available to those engaged in creative and cultural projects. Depending on the activities involved, these supports may be provided by different bodies. These include:

5.3.1 Design & Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCOI)

The Design & Crafts Council of Ireland is the national agency for the commercial development of Irish designers and makers. It provides a range of programmes, supports and services for designers and craftspeople learners and teachers, retailers and gallerists, media and partner organisations in order to raise the standard and profile of Irish design and craft.

5.3.2 The Arts Council

The Arts Council provides support as part of its remit to stimulate public interest in the arts, promote knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts, and assist in improving standards in the arts. This support takes the form of financial assistance to artists and arts organisations, and to those who develop and promote the arts. The Arts Council also recognises the importance of supporting the arts at a local level and provides funding to the arts offices in local authorities around the country.



5.3.3 Screen Ireland

Screen Ireland provides support and promotion for Irish film, television and animation and operates a range of development funding programmes to enable writers, directors and producers to develop and prepare projects for production. The availability of Film Relief (Section 481 investment in film) support is a significant boost for the audio-visual sector in Ireland. Screen Ireland works closely with Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland on the development of the sector and on attracting new investment to Ireland, which provides a range of opportunities for Irish-based production and other businesses to tap into a rapidly growing content industry.

5.4 Supports for Retailers

5.4.1 Retail Consultation Forum

Recognising the importance to the retail sector to the economy, the Government's 2014 Action Plan for Jobs contained a number of measures aimed at supporting the sector, including establishment of a Retail Consultation Forum. The DBEI Retail Consultation Forum provides a platform for a structured engagement between the retail sector and relevant Government departments and bodies. Its purpose is to allow key issues of relevance to the sector to be discussed with a view to identifying practical actions which can be taken by government (national or local) or by industry itself to support the sector. The Forum is chaired by the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

5.4.2 Online Retail Scheme

Arising from the work of the Retail Consultation Forum, a new pilot Online Retail Scheme administered by Enterprise Ireland was launched in September 2018 by Minister Humphreys. The Minister has recently announced the opening of a Second Call under the Scheme in early June, which will close on the 31st July 2019.

The Scheme's purpose is to support online retailers to strategically enhance their online sales capabilities to increase competitiveness and subsequently scale their businesses in international markets.

Under this second competitive call, successful Irish retailer applicants with the ambition to internationalise through a strengthened online offering can receive grants ranging from €10,000 to €25,000 on a 50 percent match fund basis. The grant will enable retailers to increase their customer base and build a more resilient business in the domestic and international marketplace both online and offline.

The Online Retail Scheme is open to applications from Irish owned retail businesses with 10 or more employees, and who have a physical retail outlet and are ready to strategically grow their online capability. Eligible expenditure under the Scheme includes activities such as research, strategy development, implementation and relevant training.

The Scheme launched with a fund of up to €625,000, which was later doubled to €1.25m as part of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation's 2019 Budget.

This new Scheme is in addition to the Trading Online Voucher available through the Local Enterprise Offices. Supports available through Skillnet and other bodies are set out in this report.

Tourism Ireland offers a range of digital marketing packages that allow its clients to tailor their marketing campaigns across relevant digital and social media platforms.

6 Financial Supports for Local Indigenous Businesses

The Government has put in place a suite of financing supports which are available to local indigenous businesses. These measures include loan and equity finance supports for start-ups and expanding businesses. As noted above, credit demand among SMEs remains subdued and for micro enterprises in particular refusal rates from the mainstream finance providers are at over 20%.



6.1 Loan Finance

A number of Government Schemes have been put in place to assist businesses who find it difficult to access bank lending in the marketplace. This can be for a variety of reasons including: no collateral; bank finance is perceived as too expensive; the business is perceived by banks as high risk etc. These schemes supported by Government to address market failures and to get finance to growth-oriented businesses include:

6.1.1 The Microenterprise Loan Fund administered by MFI

MicroFinance Ireland (MFI) was established in 2012 to provide small loans (€2,000-€25,000), for business purposes, to start up, newly established or growing micro enterprises employing less than 10 people and with turnover of less than €2m per annum. Since its establishment to the end of 2018, MFI has approved 1,699 loans totalling €28 million that have helped to create or sustain 4,808 jobs. 79% of these loans have gone to recipients outside of Dublin.

6.1.2 The Credit Guarantee Scheme

The Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) encourages additional lending to small and medium businesses by offering a partial Government guarantee (currently 80%) to banks against losses on qualifying loans to eligible SMEs. Facilities from €10,000 up to €1m are offered.

The CGS is designed to address three barriers to lending:

- Inadequate collateral;
- Novel business market, sector or technology which is perceived by finance providers as higher risk under current credit risk evaluation practices;
- Need for refinancing caused by the exit of an SME's lender from the Irish market.

In the lifetime of the Credit Guarantee Scheme to end of Q4 2018, €100.8m in credit guarantee scheme facilities were sanctioned for 636 SMEs, which have helped to create or sustain 4,708 jobs.

6.1.3 The Brexit Loan Scheme

The Brexit Loan Scheme is a €300m loan fund available to eligible Irish businesses impacted by Brexit. Finance provided under this scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced (maximum interest rate is 4%) and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses. Loan amounts are offered between €25,000 to €1.5m and unsecured loans up to €500,000. As of beginning of June 2019, 635 applications for eligibility have been received by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI), which provides an eligibility criteria checking process for applicants, and 139 have proceeded to sanction at finance provider level to a total value of over €30 million.

6.1.4 The Future Growth Loan Scheme

The Future Growth Loan Scheme is a €300m loan fund available to eligible Irish businesses and the primary agriculture and seafood sectors to support strategic long-term investment. Finance provided under this scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced, and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses. Loan amounts are offered of between €100,000 (€50,000 for agriculture) to €3m with unsecured loans up to €500,000. Loans are for terms of between 8 and 10 years – addressing a gap in the market for longer term finance. The scheme opened for eligibility application through the SBCI on 17 April 2019.

6.2 Equity Supports for Indigenous Local Businesses

6.2.1 Angel Investors

Angel investors provide equity capital to early-stage companies. Investees will also typically benefit from the angel's business expertise and experience.

There are two Government-supported Angel initiatives:

The €40m **European Angel Fund (EAF)** is a joint initiative with the European Investment Fund (EIF) designed to enhance the capacity of business angels to provide equity financing in the form of co-investments.

The **Halo Business Angel Network (HBAN)** matches investor-ready propositions with angel investors. HBAN has five Regional Business Angel networks and seven syndicate groups across the island. There are just under 250 Angels registered with HBAN.

The Brexit Loan Scheme is a €300m loan fund available to eligible Irish businesses impacted by Brexit.

6.2.2 Seed & Venture Capital

Seed and venture capital investors provide early stage risk capital and expertise to businesses with high growth potential. The Enterprise Ireland **Seed and Venture Capital Scheme**, which has been in operation since 1994, was established to increase the availability of seed and venture capital for SMEs. To date EI has committed more than €510 million to the scheme, which, using a co-investment model has raised a total of €1,190 million in Seed & Venture Capital funding.

A new round of the Seed & Venture Capital Scheme was announced by Minister Humphreys as part of Budget 2019. The new €175m six-year programme will be broadly similar to the previous schemes in terms of the spread of SMEs that benefit from investments.

6.3 Structures Established to Support Access to Finance by SMEs

In the wake of the global financial crisis, two new bodies were put in place by the Department of Finance to support access to finance by SMEs: the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) and the Credit Review Office. They both play an important structural role in reducing barriers to access to finance for SMEs.

6.3.1 The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland

The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) was established in 2014 to support all Irish SMEs to invest in and grow their businesses through access to flexible, appropriately priced credit. To the end of December 2018, €1,052 million of SBCI supported lending has been provided to 26,061 Irish SMEs operating across all sectors of the Irish economy and in all regions of the country, supporting 148,809 jobs. It is important to note that SBCI has been established as a wholesaler, so they do not do direct lending. Lending is distributed through the pillar banks or alternative finance providers.

6.3.2 The Credit Review Office

The Credit Review Office was established to help all Small Medium Enterprises or Farm borrowers who have had an application for credit of up to €3m declined or reduced, and who feel that they have a viable business proposition. The Office also looks at cases where borrowers feel that the terms and conditions of their existing loan, or a new loan offer, are unfairly onerous or have been unreasonably changed to their detriment.

Having reviewed an application, the Credit Review Office provides the bank with an opinion on whether it agrees with the lending decision or not. The bank then responds to this opinion and confirms next steps in response to the recommendations set out by the Credit Review Office. In practice where the Credit Review Office has suggested the lending should be made, to date the banks have respected the opinion and complied. Where the Credit Review Office has upheld the banks' decision not to lend, the opinion will always seek to provide alternatives and guidance to the borrower to help the business move forward.

Taxation Supports for Indigenous Enterprise

There are a number of taxation incentives and reliefs which are designed to support Irish businesses to maintain and grow employment and to support productive investment across a broad range of enterprise sectors and activities. These range from incentivisation of risk capital through schemes such as the Start Up Relief for Entrepreneurs (SURE) and the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) Scheme, to schemes designed to encourage innovation such as the Research and Development Tax Credit



7.1 Schemes to incentivise equity-based risk finance

Individuals who make qualifying investments in qualifying companies may be able to claim income tax relief on the amount invested, these incentives aim to address an acknowledged market failure in the provision of risk capital for start-up and early stage companies. Three such incentives currently exist for Irish companies:

7.1.1 The Employment Investment Incentive (EII)

EII is a tax relief which aims to encourage individuals to provide equity-based finance to trading companies. Tax relief of up to 40% of the investment made, up to a limit of €150,000 per annum may be claimed. Companies may raise up €5m per annum and a lifetime limit of €15m using the EII scheme.

The investor relief is split into two tranches:

- thirty fortieths (30/40) in the year of investment.
- ten fortieths (10/40) in the fourth year after the initial investment, if certain conditions regarding employment have been met.

7.1.2 Start-up Capital Incentive (SCI)

The SCI is designed to assist start-up companies raise equity financing. It is a tax relief available to family members of existing shareholders. Tax relief is available in a similar manner and at the same rates as that claimable under the EII. Companies may raise up to a lifetime limit of €500K under the SCI.

7.1.3 Start-Up Relief for Entrepreneurs (SURE)

SURE is a tax relief for entrepreneurs who leave an employment to set up their own company. The relief provides a refund of income tax that the entrepreneur had previously paid. Depending on the size of the investment, investors may be entitled to a refund of income tax paid over the 6 years prior to the year of investment. Companies may raise up to a lifetime limit of €4.2m using SURE.

7.2 Schemes incentivising innovation

7.2.1 Research and Development Tax Credit

In order to stimulate Research and Development (R&D), companies may claim a credit against corporation tax of 25% of qualifying expenditure. This expenditure is also deductible for taxation purposes, meaning that the company will receive an effective relief of 37.5% of qualifying expenditure. When companies do not have sufficient tax payable to set this credit off against, the balance can be claimed in cash to be paid directly to the company.

7.2.2 Knowledge Development Box

The Knowledge Development Box (KDB), introduced in Budget 2016, forms part of Ireland's competitive offering and will incentivise Irish companies to innovate. The KDB provides an effective 6.25% rate of corporation tax on profits arising from the exploitation of a qualifying asset, derived from Irish R&D activities. The KDB complements the existing suite of initiatives available to companies that undertake R&D activities in Ireland across the lifecycle of research and development – providing a competitive proposition for continued business investment.

To make the scheme more accessible for SMEs and stimulate investment in R&D activities by indigenous enterprises, the Knowledge Development Box (KDB) (Certification of Inventions) Act 2017 introduced a new certification scheme, allowing smaller companies to avail of the KDB without the need to apply for a patent.

7.2.3 Corporation Tax Relief for Start Ups

In addition to the standard rate of corporation tax, which at 12.5% provides a very competitive offering for all Irish resident companies, new companies may also be able to avail of a relief from Corporation Tax for its first three trading years. Subject to conditions, new companies can receive relief from Corporation Tax up to €40,000 per year and to partial relief if the Corporation Tax due is between €40,000 and €60,000.

The relief can be applied to trading profits or chargeable gains made on assets used in the trade.

7.3 Personal Taxation

7.3.1 Marginal Rate reductions, USC reductions and widening of the standard rate bands

The Minister for Finance has introduced a number of reductions in the personal taxation burden since 2015. These changes in successive budgets have progressively helped to make work pay for employees which reduces the need for business to engage in harmful wage inflation. The top rate of income tax has been reduced to 40%, USC rates for the majority of earners have been reduced, bringing the top rate of tax, PRSI and USC, for those earning less than €70,044, down to 48.5% from 52% in 2014.

Increases to the entry point to the top rate of tax have been made in tandem with these decreases in USC and personal tax rates, meaning that the entry point to the top rate of tax is now over €35,000, representing an increase of €2,500 since 2014.

Significantly, the Government introduced an Earned Income Tax credit in Budget 2015, which is now almost at the same level as the PAYE tax credit. This is a real benefit to those self-employed citizens who run Irish businesses.

7.3.2 Key Employee Engagement Scheme (KEEP)

SMEs called for the introduction of a share option scheme which would allow them to compete better for talent with the larger employers. In Budget 2018, the Government introduced the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP). This scheme allows for the deferral of the taxation point on the award of share options until the shares are eventually disposed of. Importantly, the ultimate taxation suffered will be Capital Gains Tax as opposed to income tax.

7.4 Rewarding Entrepreneurs

7.4.1 Capital Gains Tax – Entrepreneur Relief

This relief introduced in Budget 2016 is targeted specifically at trading assets and offers a very significant reduction on the normal rate of Capital Gains Tax (CGT) applicable on capital gains in Ireland. The relief allows a broad range of qualifying entrepreneurs to avail of a reduced rate of 10% CGT on gains up to a lifetime limit of €1m as opposed to the standard rate of CGT of 33%.

8 | Skills, Technical Supports and Information

8.1 Intreo Centres

Intreo, launched in October 2012 by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, is the single point of contact for all employment and income supports throughout Ireland. It is designed to provide a more streamlined approach and offers practical, tailored employment services and supports for jobseekers and employers alike.

Intreo Centres across Ireland provide the following services and supports:

- Employment services and income supports available in one place;
- Expert assistance and advice on employment, training and personal development opportunities;
- A focus on your individual needs to assist you enter the workforce;
- Self-service facilities to provide you with information and guidance on employment and training opportunities;
- Access to information on job vacancies through www.jobsireland.ie;
- Information on the full range of income supports provided by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, for example, jobseeker's payments, back to work and back to education payments, one-parent family payments, pensions and others. Also, any queries in relation to jobseekers or one-parent family payment are dealt with by the team in Intreo Centres.

Jobseekers are also be able to access information on job vacancies, training courses and allowances by using the self-service kiosks and on information points in the Intreo Centre.

A Jobseeker pack is also available and gives information on using the job search facility on Jobs Ireland, how to fill out an application form, prepare a CV and covering letter and prepare for a job interview.

Intreo also provides a wide range of supports and services to assist with employers' needs, designed to make sure that businesses can access potential employees.

The range of services are provided at no cost to employers and include:

- Employment support and advice on a National and European level, giving access to skilled, job ready candidates. The Jobs Ireland employment service is an excellent recruiting support resource.
- JobBridge internships and work placement services
- Financial supports when creating new jobs, minimising the cashflow demands for companies. The Employer Job (PRSI) Incentive Scheme exempts employers from liability to pay their share of PRSI for certain employees. The scheme is open to employers who create new and additional jobs.
- Workplace supports to assist employees with disabilities
- Advice and access to any employment initiatives of relevance to different types of businesses

Jobseekers are also be able to access information on job vacancies, training courses and allowances by using the self-service kiosks and on information points in the Intreo Centre.



8.2 Apprenticeship Council

The Apprenticeship Council was launched by the Minister for Education and Skills in November 2014. The establishment of the Council was a key action in the implementation of recommendations from a 2014 Review of Apprenticeship Training in Ireland. The Council is tasked with the expansion of apprenticeship into new sectors of the economy and identifying sectors where new apprenticeships can make a real difference to both employers and employees.

In carrying out its role, the Council takes account of ongoing and future skills needs, including through data and reports produced by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit.

Apprenticeship is defined as a programme of structured education and training which formally combines and alternates learning in the workplace with learning in an education or training centre. It is a dual system, a blended combination of on-the-job employer-based training and off-the-job training.

Apprenticeships in Ireland are:

- Industry-led by consortia of industry and education partners;
- Lead to an award at Levels 5 to 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ);
- Between 2-4 years in duration;
- Minimum 50% on-the-job learning;
- Flexible delivery – online, blended, off-the-job learning in increments/blocks;

- Apprentices are employed under a formal contract of apprenticeship;
- The employer pays the apprentice for the duration of the apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships are currently available and are being developed across a wide range of industries and sectors such as the construction, engineering, logistics, ICT, finance and the hospitality and food sectors.

Apprenticeships are overseen by the national Apprenticeship Council. The further education and training authority SOLAS is the lead agency responsible for apprenticeship on behalf of Government, working in close partnership with the Higher Education Authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland, industry and education and training providers across further and higher education. SOLAS' responsibility includes maintenance of a national register of employers approved to take on apprentices and a national register of apprentices.

The national apprenticeship system is governed by legislation, principally the 1967 Industrial Training Act. The 2012 Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act also underpins apprenticeship, supporting validation and quality assurance arrangements for programmes nationally.

The national apprenticeship system is funded through the National Training Fund and from the Exchequer.

8.3 Regional Skills Fora

To help foster stronger links between employers and the education and training sector, the Department of Education and Skills has established a network of nine Regional Skills Fora and appointed nine Regional Skills Fora Managers. Since the establishment of the RSF there is now a greater focus on strengthening and establishing positive relationships between employers and the education and training system in the different regions.

8.4 Skillnet Ireland

Skillnet Ireland is a national agency dedicated to the promotion and facilitation of workforce learning in Ireland. The organisation was established in 1999 and works with businesses and their employees to address their current and future skills needs by providing high quality, subsidised training through a series of enterprise-led training networks which operate across a range of sectors and regions. During 2018, Skillnet Ireland operated a total of 65 networks and delivered training through a suite of programmes, including:

- **The Training Networks Programme:** the main Skillnet Ireland programme which supports training across a wide range of industry sectors and geographical regions. Training Networks are a collection of private-sector businesses that collaborate to address skills needs within their sector or region. Their focus is to identify the skills needed to make business more competitive. Over 60 training networks in a range of sectors and/or regions around Ireland are funded.
- **Employment Activation Programme:** The EAP is a 100% government funded initiative aimed solely at training unemployed people. It provides skills which are in demand by industry, combined with direct access to employers through securing a work placement.
- **Future Skills Programme:** the programme facilitates innovation and collaboration in new programme design and industry-based research on the future of work and learning. This programme also facilitates collaborations between enterprise, academic institutions and industry training providers to develop innovative new programmes that specifically address the future skills needs of businesses and emerging skills gaps within growth sectors.

Skillnet Ireland receives public funding through the National Training Fund (NTF), which was established by the National Training Fund Act, 2000, as a dedicated fund to support the training of those in employment, and those seeking employment. Skillnet Ireland operates a co-investment model where State grants are combined with contributions from employers. Companies participating with Skillnet Ireland contributed €15.91 million towards training in 2017, with Skillnet Ireland investing a further €14.30 million, a total of €30.21 million.

Skillnet Ireland currently supports over 15,000 companies nationwide and provides a wide range of valuable learning experiences to over 50,000 trainees. An indicator of Skillnet Ireland's role in involving enterprise in workforce development is the number of member companies within Skillnet Ireland networks. There has been a sustained increase in the membership base, with the number of companies expanding by 48% since 2013 to reach 15,012 in 2017.

Skillnet collaborates with over 50 enterprise groups across a broad range of sectors and regions supporting 68 learning networks in 2019. A total of six new networks were launched during 2019. These new networks cover a diversity of sectors and skill needs, including the areas of retail, health and fitness, as well as the film, TV and post-production sectors.

Regional development will continue to be supported through the establishment of two networks within the North East and Fingal regions. An important element to ensure consistency with regional policy is to ensure that Skillnet Ireland training has an appropriate regional spread. Importantly, three-quarters of Skillnet member businesses are located outside Dublin.

Skillnet Ireland currently supports over 15,000 companies nationwide and provides a wide range of valuable learning experiences to over 50,000 trainees.



8.5 Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) is the independent body tasked with advising the Irish Government on the current and future skills needs of Irish business and the Irish economy, as well as any other labour market issues that impact on the national potential for enterprise and employment growth. It is serviced by a Secretariat based in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

In June 2018 the EGFSN published a report on Addressing the Skills Needs Arising from the Potential Trade Implications of Brexit, covering a broad range of enterprise sectors and impacted businesses, including freight and transport and hospitality and manufacturing.

As part of the Government's contingency planning for the UK's departure from the European Union, the study sought to determine those trade related skillsets required by Irish based enterprise to help mitigate the impacts the UK's departure from both the EU Single Market and Customs Union on the Irish economy.

The study, which involved engagement with over 130 enterprises and stakeholders across the internationally trading and logistics/supply chain fields, focussed on two skillsets:

- those associated with the movement of trade across international borders (i.e. customs compliance, logistics, supply chain management); and

- those associated with the diversification of trade into export markets (i.e. international management, sales, marketing, customer service, design and development, foreign languages, cultural awareness)

On foot of the research and analysis undertaken for this study, and guided by a project steering group representative of key stakeholders from across government, its enterprise agencies, and the internationally trading and logistics/supply chain sectors, the EGFSN report made 8 overarching recommendations for addressing the potential trade related skills needs arising from Brexit- under these overarching recommendations were 46 related actions that could effectively contribute towards the delivery of these recommendations.

1. Launch an intensified industry awareness and outreach campaign to enhance understanding amongst internationally trading and FTDL enterprises and to proactively address the skills needs arising from Brexit.
2. Introduce additional customs awareness and higher-level customs clearance training and advice for third country trading as the implications of Brexit become clearer.
3. Enhance the provision of financial management advice, training and mentoring for internationally trading enterprises, with a particular focus on currency management, VAT for third country trading, and contract management.
4. Undertake targeted campaigns to attract skilled personnel from overseas.

5. Promote measures to enhance the ability to diversify to and trade with non-UK markets.
 - Enhance international trading and Logistics/Supply Chain content in education and training provision;
 - Build up Ireland's foreign language capability for international trade (particularly with Eurozone markets);
 - Enhance intercultural awareness and international business experience
6. Build up product design and development skills.
7. Establish a National Logistics and Supply Chain Skills Group, to manage a coordinated response from the Logistics/Supply Chain sectors to promote the sectors and their skills needs.
8. Develop a schools/communication toolkit and awareness raising campaigns for Logistics, Supply Chain and Transportation careers within all sectors, and an improved understanding of the cross sectoral skills needs, employment numbers and career opportunities in supply chain activities. Support the development and promote the rollout of and engagement with the Logistics and Service apprenticeship programmes.

Following the publication of the EGFSN report, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation committed to pursuing the implementation of its actions with the relevant stakeholders across Government, industry, and the education and training system.

To this end, the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation established and chairs the Government 'Brexit Skills Implementation Oversight Group'. The Group comprises the Departments of Education and Skills, Foreign Affairs and Trade, An Taoiseach, and Transport, Tourism and Sport, as well as the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, Bord Bia, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and InterTradeIreland.

8.6 The Employment Permits Unit

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation recognises that the right skills are critically important to growing Ireland's economy, are highly demanded, and can be in significant shortage of supply in our labour market.

The Department's Employment Permits Unit is responsible for the granting of employment permits to non-EEA nationals. Where specific skills and/or labour prove difficult to source within the State/EEA, an employer may seek an employment permit to employ a non-EEA national to fulfil the role. The employment permits legislation provides for the grant of nine different types of employment permits for different employment scenarios. Applications for employment permits may be made by either an employer or the prospective employee and may be submitted via the Employment Permits Online System (EPOS) which was introduced in 2016 to provide an intuitive, online and user-friendly forum for employers and non-EEA nationals wishing to secure an employment permit.

The Unit streamlines the permit application process and ease the administrative burden for employers applying for employment permits through the Trusted Partners initiative. This initiative aims to offer faster processing times (about two weeks) and removes the requirement that an employer replicates the same information in respect of each employment permit application made. Trusted Partner Registration is given for a period of two years after which it can be renewed. There is no fee for employers to apply for Trusted Partner Registration and generally it takes approximately one week to become registered.

8.7 National Standards Authority of Ireland

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is Ireland's official standards body supporting business across all economic sectors – there are currently 24,000 standards in operation in Ireland and the NSAI published 1,631 new standards in 2018. The NSAI improves the performance of Irish businesses and protects customers through the **setting of standards and issuing of certification in the quality and safety of goods and services**. Where a standard exists, NSAI works with businesses in the relevant sector to help them apply it.

Information and Guidance: Through its website, the NSAI provides information and resources to assist businesses in understanding the relevant standards and their application. With regard to Brexit, the NSAI has also produced a number of Brexit Factsheets, which are designed to provide concise and clear information on number of different sectors and likely potential Brexit impacts. The factsheets are dynamic documents that are updated as events unfold.

The NSAI also participates in sector-specific events and workshops to help businesses to better understand the standards that may apply to them. This is particularly relevant in the context of the UK's exit from the EU, where there may be changes in businesses' responsibilities regarding standards.

Advisory Support: The NSAI offers direct advisory support to businesses through its website, which allows businesses to submit queries around certification, standards, metrology and training. In addition, the NSAI operates a specific Brexit helpdesk, which offers direct advisory support for businesses concerned with standards and certification issues arising as a result of the UK's exit from the EU. Businesses can contact this helpdesk directly through the Brexit section of the NSAI website.

8.8 Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is responsible for promoting greater energy efficiency and use of renewable energy across all sectors of the economy. The business case for energy efficiency is strong, unlocking significant economic benefits for organisations and the Country as a whole.

SEAI has a range of programmes in place to support and assist organisations to capitalise on the opportunity energy efficiency presents. Energy management training for organisations, best practice promotion and networking facilitate companies learning from one another. Support for energy audits are available with follow up mentoring to assist implementation of recommendations.

SEAI grant supports to business include:

- **EXEED Certified Grant:** The grant supports businesses to develop assets through a certified energy efficient design process. The grant covers 30% of eligible expenditure up to €500,000 per annum.
- **Communities Grant:** The grant supports large projects spanning domestic, public and private sectors. Typical grant support of 30% is available for business projects.
- **SME Grant:** The grant is focussed on the SME sector. In 2019, a target area of dairy grants for farmers and lighting grants for SMEs have been supported through this programme.
- **Support Scheme for Renewable Heat:** The grant enables businesses to retrofit fossil fuel heating systems with renewable alternatives
- **Project Assistance Grant:** The grant offers support to businesses and public sector bodies who are seeking to develop energy saving projects. The grant covers project development activities including audits/ feasibility studies (50% funding up to max €15,000) and project delivery through an energy performance contracting approach (75% funding up to €37,500).

8.9 The Health and Safety Authority

The Health and Safety Authority was established in 1989 under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989 and reports to the Minister of State for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection in the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The Authority interacts with all sectors of the economy through its broad mandate which covers workplace health and safety, chemicals regulation, market surveillance and national accreditation.

In the delivery of this mandate, the Authority can support businesses to remain productive and competitive by preventing and reducing absences due to workplace accidents and by complying with EU product standards which enable access to the wider EU market.

Specifically, in 2018 the Authority's programme of work under occupational health and safety involved the provision of advice, guidance and support as well as inspection, investigation and prosecutions. In terms of support and advice, the Authority's customer contact centre handled approximately 16,000 inbound calls. Additional support and advice were provided through

national media campaigns on agriculture safety, construction safety and on occupational health as well as through over 40 different publications across a variety of topics and sectors.

The Authority provides targeted business and enterprise supports through the provision of online services and tools such as **BeSmart**, **eLearning** and **WorkPositive** which have continued to grow and expand. At end 2018, BeSmart, an online risk assessment tool for employers, had over 56,000 cumulative users, with almost 9000 of these new in 2018. Over 23,000 online courses were taken on subjects ranging from construction, safety representatives and chemical safety while uptake on the WorkPositive tool continued to be promoted through joint events with the State Claims Agency. The WorkPositive tool can be used by all types of organisations from large public sector bodies to SMEs and micro-businesses. It is a best practice tool for psychosocial risks and can be integrated into an organisation's existing health and safety system and is available on-line and free of charge.

Other national events which were organised included the National Farm Safety Conference and, in recognition of the Authority's three-year strategic focus on occupational health, a Managing Work Related Health Risks conference was held covering topics as diverse as ergonomics, psychosocial hazards, chemical and sun exposures.

In addition to business support activities the Health and Safety Authority carried out almost 10,000 workplace inspections and investigations in 2018 and, as part of its market surveillance role for chemicals and industrial products, assessed almost 300 products on the Irish market. The Irish National Accreditation Board, which is part of the Health and Safety Authority, issued 10 new accreditations in addition to carrying out over 400 assessments on existing accreditations.

In 2018 there were 38 workplace fatalities. One fatality is one too many, but it is worth noting that this was the lowest fatality figure since the establishment of the Authority. In addition to focusing on high risk sectors in coming years the Health and Safety Authority is also focusing on improving overall occupational ill-health. Absences from work arising from occupational ill-health not only affect the individual worker but impact on the productivity, competitiveness and overall costs of running a business in addition to long-term costs for the State's social security system.

8.10 The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) was established on 31 October 2014 from the amalgamation of the National Consumer Agency and the Competition Authority. The CCPC is an independent statutory body with a dual mandate to enforce competition and consumer protection law in Ireland.

The CCPC is responsible for enforcing competition and consumer protection law. It identifies potential breaches of the law by analysing the information it receives from consumers, businesses, other Irish agencies, as well as European and international counterparts. CCPC also undertakes its own market surveillance and information gathering. Enforcement powers enable the CCPC to identify, detect, investigate and where appropriate take enforcement action to address breaches in competition and consumer protection law. The CCPC also has regulatory functions in the areas of merger assessment, credit intermediaries, grocery goods and alternative dispute resolution.

The CCPC's advocacy and public awareness activities play an integral role in promoting the benefits of competition and consumer protection for the whole of the Irish economy. The Commission utilises knowledge and experience of markets and sectors to inform interactions with Government, public representatives and the public sector. The CCPC represents the interests of consumers through participation in groups, fora and networks at a national and European level.

The CCPC is
responsible
for enforcing
competition
and consumer
protection law.



8.11 Information Supports

8.11.1 Supporting SMEs Online Tool

SupportingSMEs.gov.ie is a cross-governmental initiative to help Irish start-ups and small businesses navigate the range of Government supports. By answering the seven quick questions in the Online Tool, a small business will, in one location be able to:

- Find out which of the **over 170 Government business supports from 27 different Government Departments, Agencies and Initiatives** are available to them;
- Obtain information on the range of Government supports for accessing credit;
- Find out the location of their nearest Local Enterprise Office to discuss the outcomes of the guide further, and;
- Download filtered results into a document for their further use.

A list of government agencies providing support to businesses is available at Annex A.

8.11.2 Information guides published by DBEI

The Department has published a number of information guides to raise awareness of supports and finance related issues among SMEs. In addition to published material, these guides are also available through the Department website, and include:

- **Government Working with Finance Providers to support SME financing:** The Government has worked successfully with the banking sector and alternative finance providers to offer a wide range of supports to businesses. This simple guide sets out the types of equity and debt financing supports and resources available to business at all stages of the business cycle - from those just starting out to those wishing to scale up.
- **Currency Risk Management for Irish SMEs:** This guide seeks to answer many of the questions that businesses may have when assessing and managing their exposure to foreign currency risk, set out in sections dealing with: the importance of currency risk management; how to assess currency exposure and develop a currency management strategy; practical guidance for companies that have not previously engaged in currency management; and a directory of support services and providers that are available in the market.
- **Quick Brexit Guide for Business:** This booklet seeks to answer many of the questions that Irish businesses may have when assessing their exposure to Brexit and determining the best course of action to mitigate their likely Brexit-related difficulties. It provides information on the practical steps businesses can take to deal with issues including: customs, tariffs and duties, currency, imports, certification, working capital, and financing.

9

Supports for Innovation

A number of supports for innovation and R&D were set out in previous sections as provided by Enterprise Ireland, the Local Enterprise Offices and InterTradeIreland, as was the R&D Tax Credit outlined in the section on taxation. There are also a number of SME specific programmes and schemes that are available to all indigenous firms at EU and national level as set out below.



9.1 EU Horizon 2020 - SME Instrument

The SME instrument, which is a measure under Horizon 2020, supports close-to-market activities, with the aim of giving a strong boost to breakthrough innovation with a market-creating potential. Highly innovative SMEs with a clear commercial ambition and a potential for high growth and internationalisation are the prime target.

The SME Instrument offers small and medium-sized businesses the following:

- Business innovation grants for feasibility assessment purposes (optional phase I) of €50,000 (lump sum) per project (70% of total cost of the project);
- Business innovation grants for innovation development & demonstration purposes (possible phase II): an amount in the indicative range of €500,000 and 2.5 million (70% of total cost of the project as a general rule);

- Free-of-charge business coaching (optional) in order to support and enhance the firm's innovation capacity and help align the project to strategic business needs;
- Access to a wide range of other business acceleration services and facilitated access to risk finance, to facilitate the commercial exploitation of the innovation.

The instrument is a support available to Irish SMEs who prepare a proposal for the funding types offered that is successful in competitive funding calls. Some of the firms who have been successful are not yet in commercial production, i.e. they are still developing their product(s) for market, so technically they would be 'non-exporting' firms for now, although in all cases their ambition and business plan would be to be an exporter of goods or services.

The total amount of funding to Irish SMEs in the SME Instrument to date since the launch in 2014 has seen 42 companies receive €70.1m in funding under Phase 2, with 71 SMEs receiving Phase 1 feasibility funding of €50,000 each.

9.2 Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF)

The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund is a €500 million fund established under Project Ireland 2040 and run by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. The fund has been designed to bring researchers and enterprises together to use innovative tools, technologies and techniques (e.g. AI and machine learning, robotics, IoT, data analytics, AR/VR, digital platforms, blockchain, advanced and smart manufacturing techniques, biorefining and innovative business processes) to develop and deploy solutions to help meet the challenges facing Ireland and to exploit opportunities.

The fund is targeted towards collaborations with a strong lead partner and a strong project management structure that will target the development and deployment of disruptive technologies innovation to deliver medium-term impact in Ireland.

The minimum funding request from the fund is €1.5 million over 3 years.

Collaborations are required to have at least 3 partners with at least one SME and one other enterprise partner.

Enterprises can claim up to 50% of their eligible costs. Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) can claim up to 100% of eligible costs. RPOs cannot receive more than 50% of the total DTIF funding in any collaboration.

The first call under the DTIF in 2018 saw 27 collaborative projects funded with over 100 partners involved. The second call will open in June 2019.

9.3 Science Foundation Ireland

Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) is the national foundation for investment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research and is the largest funder of competitive research in Ireland. The foundation is charged with supporting outstanding research that will underpin economic development and assist international and indigenous industry to grow and flourish in Ireland. It also promotes and supports the study of, education in, and engagement with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), and promotes an awareness and understanding of the value of STEM to society and to the growth of the economy.

The foundation offers several funding mechanisms, helping industry and academia build competitive advantage by enhancing their R&D capabilities; enable them to engage in projects of scale, excellence and relevance; and allow them to explore novel opportunities and priorities. These funding programmes suit industry-informed research and industry-academic interactions at a number of levels, ranging from seeding an initial engagement with an academic group to large scale collaborative research endeavours.

Partnering with academic researchers presents several opportunities for industry including: the opportunity to engage in collaborative, highly innovative, co-funded R&D; reduced time to innovation; access to expertise to address an immediate challenge or long-term need; access to collaborative European research networks and the identification of future talent.

SFI mechanisms include:

- **SFI Research Centres:** SFI Research Centres help link scientists and engineers in partnerships across academia and industry. These partnerships address crucial research questions, foster the development of new and existing companies to create innovative products leading to job creation, attract industry that could make an important contribution to Ireland and its economy, and expand educational and career opportunities in Ireland in science and engineering. SFI currently funds 17 SFI Research Centres. SFI Research Centres play a key role in building Ireland's global footprint, they link scientists and engineers in partnerships across 850 research bodies across the globe, including 8 Irish universities and 7 Institutes of Technology. All SFI Research Centres are multi-institutional and collaborate with both SMEs and MNCs throughout the Country - from Donegal to Kerry.

Companies can become partners of existing Centres through the SFI Research Centres Spokes programme. Any research-active company is eligible to apply and join a Centre, regardless of their size, scale or location. This flexible mechanism ensures that Research Centres can expand and develop in line with new priorities and opportunities. It also ensures that industry continues to have the opportunity to engage with and benefit from the world leading research taking place within the Higher Education Institutes.

- **SFI Industry Fellowship Programme:** The purpose of the Industry Fellowship Programme is to enhance industry-academia collaboration and to stimulate excellence through knowledge exchange and training of engineers and scientists. Both aims will be pursued by the Industry Fellowship Programme through the temporary placement of academic researchers in industry, and of industry researchers in academia. Fellowships can have a duration of between 1 and 12 months if full-time, and between 2 and 24 months if part-time. The maximum Industry Fellowship award amount is €100,000 direct costs.
- **SFI Partnership Programme:** The SFI Partnership Programme is a flexible mechanism for industry to engage with world-class academic researchers and have access to infrastructure and generate intellectual property. The programme supports collaborative research activities that span most areas of STEM and is open to all industry sectors. It is particularly suitable for, but not limited to, pioneering research. It is aimed at supporting stand-alone initiatives of scale with strong potential for economic and societal impact for Ireland. It is open to any company, funding agency, charity or philanthropic organization regardless of their size, scale or location. The proposed research programme co-funded by the company and Science Foundation Ireland.

9.4 The European Space Agency

Ireland has been a member of the European Space Agency (ESA) since its foundation in 1975. Irish industry is benefitting from Ireland's ESA membership through supporting in-company product development for the space market and commercial spin-out of space technologies into non-space markets. There is now an opportunity to develop an ESA Business Incubation Centre (BIC) in Ireland to provide an important opportunity to develop new companies in this economical advantageous area. The additional benefit to be offered to Irish industry by an ESA BIC would include:

- Provide access to knowledge resources within ESA, including knowledge of technical standards, system specifications as well as highly specific market knowledge of the space sector, including linkages to space system integrators.
- Provide access to finance to start-up companies.
- Allow firms exploit the profile and enhanced credibility of being associated with ESA and "space".

Enterprise Ireland co-ordinates Ireland's industrial and research participation in the programmes of the European Space Agency. ESA promotes co-operation among European States in space research, technology and applications.

Enterprise Ireland's role in relation to ESA is to assist Irish companies to successfully bid for ESA contracts. EI provides a source of expertise for Irish companies in developing and executing space strategies, as well as being a point of reference for the international space industry when they want to identify relevant sources of space-related expertise within Ireland.

SFI Research Centres play a key role in building Ireland's global footprint, they link scientists and engineers in partnerships across 850 research bodies across the globe

10 | Brexit



10.1 Brexit Awareness and Advisory

The Government has been planning for Brexit since before the UK referendum and has taken a number of key steps to support Brexit preparations by businesses as part of a whole-of-Government response to Brexit co-ordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in close co-operation with the Department of the Taoiseach. This has included the “**Getting Ireland Brexit Ready**” public information events around Ireland and campaign to inform and advise about Brexit preparedness and the range of support measures and resources that the Government has put in place.

10.1.1 Awareness Campaign

The **Getting Ireland Brexit Ready** public information and outreach campaign was launched in September 2018. It includes a comprehensive website (dfa.ie/brexit and gov.ie/brexit) bringing together information on all of the work taking place across Government on Brexit, and a dedicated social media presence.

Over 2,500 people attended the Getting Ireland Brexit Ready public outreach events held throughout October and November 2018 in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Dublin, Letterkenny and Monaghan. This campaign continues in 2019 communicating established and evolving information on all aspects of Brexit, including a no deal scenario.

Events like these have brought together over a dozen Agencies and their parent Departments, including the Department of Enterprise, Business and Innovation, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport - under one roof to inform and advise both citizens and businesses.

Further Brexit-preparedness events have been organised by the network of Local Enterprise Offices, InterTradeIreland, the National Standards Authority of Ireland and the Health Safety Authority. Enterprise Ireland has also rolled out a series of Brexit Advisory Clinics to help businesses to prepare for Brexit.

The Minister for Business, Enterprise & Innovation also convenes a Trade and Investment Stakeholder Group, roughly every six weeks, to consider the issues impacting on exporting and non-exporting businesses, in particular in relation to Brexit preparedness. The membership of this group includes leaders from Ibec, ISME, Irish Exporters Association, Chambers Ireland, Retail representative bodies among others.

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and its agencies have also put in place a series of advisory supports to aid businesses as they prepare to meet the specific challenges that Brexit is likely to present for them.

In addition to these direct advisory supports, the Department has published and distributed a 16-page booklet titled, "Quick Brexit Guide for Business: Customs, tariffs and duties, currency, imports, certification, working capital, financing." This booklet outlines potential exposures to Brexit for Irish businesses and the means by which they may be mitigated. The booklet has been distributed to the network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices around the country, as well as to regional offices of Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta. A digital edition of this booklet is also available through the Department's website.

10.1.2 Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland has established a *Prepare for Brexit* online portal and communications campaign, as well as an online *Brexit SME Scorecard* to help Irish businesses to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. This online portal also includes a *Currency Impact Calculator* for businesses evaluating the extent of their exposure to currency uncertainty.

Enterprise Ireland's online *Customs Insight* course helps businesses looking at customs for the first time to understand key customs concepts, documentation and processes. The course advises businesses on actions that they can take to prepare for Brexit and highlights the various supports available to them.

Enterprise Ireland has also introduced a number of grant supports for its client companies, including:

- **Act-On Initiative:** a programme focused on financial and currency management, strategic sourcing, customs and logistics.
- **Be-Prepared Grant:** a grant to support further research and external expertise in examining their exposure to Brexit and exploring ways of addressing this.

10.1.3 Local Enterprise Offices

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) funding has been increased by 22% in 2019, and this increase is being used to assist micro-enterprises in becoming more competitive and better able to cope with the changing environment in which they are operating. The suite of supports available from the LEOs includes tailored mentoring to address the specific Brexit challenges facing businesses, as well as targeted training on Brexit-related issues and a new customs training programme.

The Local Enterprise Office interactive one day *Prepare Your Business for Customs* workshop helps businesses understand the key customs concepts, documentation and processes required to succeed in a post Brexit environment. If the UK leaves the Customs Union and Single Market, it will become a 'Third Country' for customs purposes so this course provides knowledge about the potential impacts, formalities and procedures needed to be adopted when trading with a country which is outside the Single Market and Custom Unions. Open to businesses from all sectors, this workshop covers areas such export and import procedures apply, how tariffs work and how to correctly classify goods.

Local Enterprise Offices Technical Assistance for Micro-Exporters (TAME) Grant: The TAME grant supports clients to explore and develop new export market opportunities, such as participation in international trade fairs and development of export-related marketing materials and websites. With a focus on helping companies to diversify, this scheme is a matched-funding opportunity with up to €2,500 available

Local Enterprise Offices Trading Online Voucher Scheme: An initiative under the Government's National Digital Strategy, the Trading Online Voucher Scheme helps small businesses trade more online to boost their sales and reach new markets. This scheme is also a matched-funding opportunity with up to €2,500 available, with training and further supports provided by Local Enterprise Offices. Funding can be used towards eligible costs such as digital marketing strategies, e-commerce websites or App development.

10.1.4 InterTradeIreland

InterTradeIreland launched its Brexit Advisory Service in May 2017 to provide a suite of advice and supports to businesses to assist them to prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. DBEI provided an additional €1 million in funding in 2019 to support ITI's Brexit Advisory Service.

This service now includes:

- The first voucher – the **Planning Voucher** – provides 100% financial support up to €2,250 towards professional advice to help businesses to identify Brexit exposure and to plan. This includes issues such as customs requirements and supply chain exposure, VAT and financial implications, as well as understanding complex tariff codes.
- The second voucher – the **Brexit Implementation Voucher** – provides financial support up to €5,625 with InterTradeIreland paying 50%. This will allow businesses to implement critical changes making them better prepared to deal with a new trading relationship
- **Online Learning:** InterTradeIreland provides resources for free, accurate and independent online learning to help SMEs prepare for Brexit. This includes information on customs duties, cross-border sales, cross-border buying, applying for an EORI number, determining if you will require an import license and managing customs payments.
- **Tariff Checker:** InterTradeIreland's Tariff Checker allows SMEs to view, filter and print the cross-border tariffs and charges related to their business. This enables businesses to evaluate the potential impacts that Brexit may have on their supply chain.
- **Information and Awareness Events:** InterTradeIreland also organises dedicated events focussing on Brexit where SMEs can meet specialist advisors and industry experts. These events are free to attend and have so far taken place in Dundalk, Cookstown, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Cavan, Athlone, Mayo, Waterford and Donegal.
- **Brexit Research:** InterTradeIreland has developed a multifaceted research programme to better understand the implications of Brexit on existing trade structures and to identify the sectors and business types which are most likely to need support in preparation for the changes in the trading relationship post-Brexit.

10.1.5 Fáilte Ireland

In January of 2019, Fáilte Ireland's Tourism Industry Barometer indicated that Brexit was the most pressing concern for 69% of Irish businesses surveyed in the tourism sector. This rises to 80% among accommodation providers in northern counties and 90% in the restaurant sector.

Fáilte Ireland operates a Brexit response programme to help businesses asses Brexit-related

risk and respond to changes in the business environment. This programme focuses on four key issues:

- GB and NI market retention;
- Market diversification;
- Performance and competitiveness; and
- People capability.

10.2 Financing Supports

10.2.1 The Brexit Loan Scheme

The Brexit Loan Scheme is a €300m loan fund available to eligible Irish businesses impacted by Brexit. Finance provided under this scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced (maximum interest rate is 4%) and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses. The scheme was developed to provide working capital support to businesses impacted by Brexit and was launched in March 2018 as set out in Section 6.1.3.

10.2.2 The Future Growth Loan Scheme

The Future Growth Loan Scheme is a €300m loan fund available to eligible Irish businesses and the primary agriculture and seafood sectors to support strategic long-term investment in a post Brexit environment. Finance provided under this scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced, and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses. Loan amounts are offered of between €100,000 (€50,000 for agriculture) to €3m with unsecured loans up to €500,000. Loans are for terms of between 8 and 10 years – addressing a gap in the market for longer term finance. The scheme opened for eligibility application through the SBCI on 17th April 2019.

10.3 Brexit – Measurement of Impacts

Brexit: The view of Irish SMEs is an ongoing series of surveys conducted on behalf of the Department by Behaviour & Attitudes, which works to evaluate the extent of current and future Brexit impacts on Irish SMEs, as well as their practical measures and plans to mitigate the impact of the UK's exit from the EU on their business.

The first survey was published in May 2017 with subsequent surveys in September 2017 and June 2018. The latest survey was conducted in March 2019.

11 | Sustaining a Focus on SME Growth



Government supports for indigenous enterprises will continue to evolve and adapt, in accordance with International developments, challenges and best practices, and within the Government's overarching long-term strategy, Project Ireland 2014, which prioritises investment in enterprise, innovation and skills. Future Jobs Ireland, launched in 2019, is a multi-annual plan which sets out ambitious targets and actions to drive a transformation of our enterprise base.

These include funds, policies and initiatives that; enhance productivity, especially among SMEs; promote indigenous entrepreneurship, especially in the regions; encourage clustering and stronger links between domestic and foreign owned firms; and assist businesses to move up the value chain, to protect jobs and to build resilience for the future. The Department also plans to put in place a new SME and Entrepreneurship Policies based on the recommendations of an OECD review which is ongoing and will conclude later this year.

11.1 Project Ireland 2040

In 2018 the Government launched Project Ireland 2040, a long-term overarching strategy for National Planning and National Development. Project Ireland 2040 seeks to achieve ten strategic outcomes, building around the overarching themes of wellbeing, equality and opportunity.

Under Priority 5 *A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills*, Project Ireland 2040 recognises that a competitive, innovative and resilient enterprise base is essential to provide the jobs and employment opportunities for

people to live and prosper in all regions. An extra 660,000 people are expected to be employed in Ireland by 2040. The goal is to achieve sustainable full employment, to bring unemployment rates in all regions down to within 1% of the national average, and to achieve regional productivity convergence.

The Strategy states that Ireland has been outstandingly successful in attracting major foreign investment, generating high quality, large-scale employment. While aiming to retain competitiveness for mobile international investment that can locate in any part of the country, the Government will give equal priority to a local enterprise economy. Investment in enterprise will focus on boosting regional growth potential, increasing research, development and innovation, and investment in higher education and further education and training.

A new €500m Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund will drive collaboration between the research, education and enterprise sectors. Our rural resources are among our most important assets.

The agriculture, food, forestry, tourism and renewable energy sectors can sustain local employment and contribute substantially to the national economy. As digital links and opportunities for remote working and new forms of enterprise continue to grow, rural areas will increasingly have the capacity to accommodate employment focused on ICT based industries, multimedia and creative sectors.

The Box below details the Strategic Investment Priorities 2018–2027 to support *A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills* priority of Project Ireland 2040:

Box 2. Project Ireland 2040 – Strong Economy Priorities

Business Enterprise	Innovation	
New Regional Sectoral Clusters to scale and internationalise enterprise in all regions	New cycles of the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, benefiting Higher Education in all regions Upgrading of the Tyndall National Institute in Cork	
Expanding Enterprise Ireland budget for research and development	Strengthened SFI Research Centres and EI Technology Centres in higher education in all regions	
New regional 'Technology and Innovation Poles', led through the Institutes of Technologies	Participation in EU High Performance Computing Programme	
Seed and Venture Capital Funding to support regional start-ups and growth	Supports, linking centres and capacity across all regions	
Expansion of Advanced Manufacturing Supports, linking centres and capacity across all regions	Upgrading of the Tyndall National Institute in Cork	
Brexit Business Transformation through firm level supports	Membership of CERN	
Expanding IDA Regional Property Programme, to attract investment to regions		
A National Design Centre	Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund	
eHubs for entrepreneurship and start-ups in every county		
Investments in Enterprise, Innovation and Skills		
Public Private Partnership Investments in 11 Institutes of Technology Consolidation of the DIT campus at Grangegorman Enabling emergence of technological universities Consolidation of further education and training in modern, fit-for-purpose facilities Refurbishment and expansion of higher education facilities Capital supports for new apprenticeship syllabi and courses Support for research, guided by Innovation 2020: Ireland's Strategy for Research and Development, Science and Technology		

11.2 Future Jobs Ireland

On 10 March 2019, the Government launched Future Jobs Ireland 2019, the first in a series of annual reports as part of a new multi-annual framework to ensure our enterprises and workers are resilient and prepared for future challenges and opportunities. This is a whole of Government approach, which will form a key part of Ireland's economic agenda over the medium term.

Future Jobs Ireland focuses on five Pillars namely:

- Embracing Innovation and Technological Change;
- Improving SME Productivity;
- Enhancing Skills and Developing and Attracting Talent;
- Increasing Participation in the Labour Force; and
- Transitioning to a Low Carbon Economy.

Each Pillar sets high-level targets for 2025. Overall, Future Jobs Ireland 2019 includes 26 meaningful and impactful medium-term ambitions supported by 127 deliverables for completion in 2019.

Future Jobs Ireland will ensure our enterprises and workers are well positioned to adapt to the technological and other transformational changes our economy and society will face in the years ahead.

Ireland's economic success in the past relied on our ability to transform and adapt. The transition to a digital and low carbon economy requires investment by enterprises to innovate and by our people to learn new skills. We must prepare now so that our enterprises and people are ready to exploit opportunities. This means encouraging greater investment by enterprises in research, development and innovation.

Future Jobs Ireland calls for continuous targeted and seamless support for indigenous SMEs and start-ups, especially in emerging sectors, provided by the enterprise agencies that will help to ensure a more diverse enterprise base.

With regard to the provision of supports to non-exporting indigenous businesses, in Future Jobs Ireland 2019 some of the deliverables are around:

- developing new and existing demonstrator sites and test beds to trial new technologies and business solutions;
- driving collaboration between the health service and the enterprise sector through the Health Innovation Hub Ireland;
- strengthening the capacity of LEOs to provide a comprehensive suite of supports for indigenous Irish businesses and entrepreneurs;
- increasing take-up of supports through LEOs' Making it Happen campaign;

- removing any disproportionate burden on SMEs by applying the SME Test across Government Departments to any relevant new legislation or regulation(s);
- providing long term debt financing for strategic investments through the Future Growth Loan Scheme;
- supporting digital skills development within micro and SME management teams through e-marketing supports;
- expanding provision in management and leadership skills programmes for SMEs and targeted promotion of these programmes;
- delivering a new six-year strategy for female entrepreneurship; and
- introducing a National Policy on Social Enterprise which will support the development of social enterprise as part of the wider entrepreneurship ecosystem.

There are also a number of commitments in Future Jobs Ireland 2019 that could lead to the development of additional deliverables in Future Jobs Ireland 2020 and beyond that will support non-exporting indigenous businesses. These cover areas such as:

- developing a plan to support the performance of Irish SMEs, start-ups and firms in emerging sectors;
- considering how the existing R&D tax credit meets the needs of SMEs and how it could be tailored to address their needs;
- considering the feasibility of introducing a financial incentive to stimulate investment in SMEs' digital back office systems;
- examining whether LEO clients could be included in the EI/IDA Global Sourcing Initiative; and
- developing a roadmap for the support and enhancement of the wider creative industries.

11.3 OECD Review of SME and Entrepreneurship Policies in Ireland

The Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation commissioned a wide-ranging review by the OECD on SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Ireland in March 2018. Part of this extensive review is examining the provision of supports for indigenous businesses and how they are assisted by Government, Departments and agencies to grow. The report will examine the strategic framework and delivery system for SME and entrepreneurship policy in Ireland and it is expected to be published in Q3 2019.

Appendix A - Government bodies and agencies providing supports to SMEs

Agency	Sector	Website
Arts Council	Arts, Crafts and Design	www.artscouncil.ie
Bord Bia	Food, Hospitality, Food supply, Marine, Fishing, Tourism	www.bordbia.ie
Bord Iascaigh Mhara	Marine, Fishing, Tourism	www.bim.ie
Cork Business Innovation Centre (CorkBIC)	All (except agriculture and Hospitality, hotels, restaurants, food supply)	www.corkbic.com
Credit Review Office	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.creditreview.ie
Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine	Agriculture, Food, Marine	www.agriculture.gov.ie
Department of Business, Enterprise & Innovation	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.dbei.gov.ie
Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.dccae.gov.ie
Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.welfare.ie
Department of Finance	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.finance.gov.ie
Department of Rural and Community Development	Manufacturing, Food, Arts, Energy, Tourism, Health	www.drcd.gov.ie
Design & Crafts Council of Ireland	Arts, Crafts and Design	www.dccoi.ie
Dublin Business Innovation Centre	Food, Transport, Energy, Financial, Professional/admin, health/beauty, ICT	www.dublinbic.ie
Enterprise Ireland	Manufacturing and internationally traded services	www.enterprise-ireland.com
Fáilte Ireland	Hospitality, Tourism, Arts, Crafts and Design	www.failteireland.ie
Food Safety Authority of Ireland	Food	www.fsai.ie
Foodworks	Agriculture/Forestry, Marine/Fishing, Food	www.foodworksireland.ie
Health and Safety Authority	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.hsa.ie
InterTradeIreland	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.intertradeireland.com
Irish Research Council	Research across all disciplines	www.research.ie
Local Authorities	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	https://www.housing.gov.ie/local-government/administration/local-authorities/local-authorities

Agency	Sector	Website
Local Development Companies	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.ildn.ie
Local Enterprise Office	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.localenterprise.ie
National Standards Authority of Ireland	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.nsai.ie
Microfinance Ireland	Financial assistant for micro businesses	www.microfinanceireland.ie
Office of Government Procurement	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.ogp.gov.ie
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.revenue.ie
Screen Ireland	Arts	www.screenireland.ie
Skillnet Ireland	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.skillnetireland.ie
South East Business Innovation Centre	Manufacturing - Financial - ICT - Agriculture - Marine - Food - Arts - Energy - Tourism - Hospitality	www.southeastbic.ie
Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.sbsci.gov.ie
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.seai.ie
Teagasc	Manufacturing - Agriculture - Marine -Food - Arts- Energy - Tourism - Hospitality - Construction - Wholesale - retail	www.teagasc.ie
Tourism Ireland	Tourism - Hospitality	www.ireland.com www.tourismireland.com
Údarás na Gaeltachta	All except Hospitality - Construction - Wholesale - Retail - Transport -real estate	www.udaras.ie
WestBIC (Business Innovation Centre)	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.westbic.ie
Western Development Commission	Open to all (subject to eligibility)	www.wdc.ie

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