



An Roinn Fiontar,
Trádála agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise,
Trade and Employment

Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum

6 December 2023

Attendees (in-person)

Barry O'Brien - IBM
Erik O'Donovan - IBEC
Kathryn O'Donovan – Google Ireland
Mike Conroy - ITAG
Stephanie Anderson – Meta
David Kilbride – Stripe

Attendees (on-line)

Tanya Thompson – Keystone Procurement/ISME
Eoin Costello – Digital HQ
Becky Garrard - FactoryxChange

Officials

Minister of State for Trade Promotion and Digital Transformation, Dara Calleary TD
Jean Carberry, Ciara Bartley, Nóirín Ní Earcáin, Sarah Bealin, Helena Keleher (DETE)
Ciara O'Sullivan, staff of Minister Calleary
Claire Hayes Curtin (Department of the Taoiseach)
Barry Lowry, Government Chief information Officer (OGCIO)
Philip McGrath, Claire Cummings (DPENDR)
Ruairí Ó hAilín (Enterprise Ireland)
Gerry O'Grady (Local Enterprise Offices)
James Farrell, Donal Flavin (IDA Ireland)

Introductory discussion

Minister Calleary opened by welcoming new and reappointed members, thanking IDA Ireland for hosting this meeting, and setting out the agenda for this meeting of the forum:

1. Approval of minutes of the last meeting of the EDAF (13 June)
2. Presentation from DPENDR on Innovation Challenge and GovTech
3. Update on EU Digital files and regulation
4. Update on the second Progress Report on the National Digital Strategy
5. Update on the State of the Digital Decade Report
6. AOB

Approval of minutes of last meeting of the EDAF

Minutes of the previous meeting of the EDAF were approved.

Presentation from DPENDR on Innovation Challenge & GovTech

Barry Lowry introduced the topic as an initiative underway in 2019 following [GovTech Day](#). Now returning to this following COVID, with the first initiative planned for 2024.

Philip McGath outlined policy drivers including [Better Public Services](#), [Connecting Government 2030](#) and [Making Innovation Real](#), which has a public-service wide reach. Gov Tech or Innovation Procurement is based on harnessing the innovation potential of SMEs and high potential startups to address challenges faced by the public sector in an iterative way without predetermining the outcome. The global GovTech market is estimated to be valued at €411 billion, of which €116 billion is in the EU, which represents an opportunity for Irish enterprises. Traditionally Ireland has relied on grant-based approaches, and often these can be challenging for SMEs to access (time and investment) but this approach, embraced by other countries, has yielded great results that Ireland can follow.

Previously, DPENDR worked on three challenge projects with big tech (on Bovine TB, connectivity on Clare Island, and local authority platform MyCoCo). Also lessons can be drawn from good examples of innovation in the health and smart cities sectors. One major obstacle with innovation procurement is the risk aversion of public buyers, which DPENDER's support and oversight can mitigate.

In 2024, DPENDR are proposing to launch a GovTech challenge. The proposed process was presented, with a first step being to establish an Oversight Group, to refine this process, identify challenges, and then advertise challenges. The proposed timing is for the project to run end-to-end within 12 months.

Responses/Proposals from forum members:

- The proposal was welcomed by EDAF members as having a two-fold benefit: boosting innovative SMEs and driving public sector transformation.
- A number EDAF members offered assistance in reaching SMEs/start-ups within their membership. EI has expertise in this area, and offered to feed into the process.

- Good projects, once proven, must be able to scale up and there should be a willingness to contract.
- Encourage engagement like-minded EU partners, such as the D9+ for knowledge-sharing on their experiences.

Update on EU Digital files and regulation

Jean Carberry, Assistant Secretary General, provided an overview of current EU digital files:

A bill enacting the **Digital Services Act** was published on 5 December, and will go to the Oireachtas, aiming for completion in advance of the 17 February implementation deadline. In parallel, Comisiún na Meán is working to ensure it is fully staffed and prepared, with actions already taken in the context of the riots in Dublin.

AI Act – the fifth trilogue (negotiation between the European Parliament, Council and European Commission) will take place today. After long and complex negotiations, the file may be agreed politically, but technical work will remain to be done. The AI Liability Directive which was paused while the AI Act was being negotiated, will be resumed.

The **Digital Markets Act** is also systemically important, in terms of competition and market access, and full compliance is required by March 2024. It will be implemented by secondary legislation. Awareness raising is needed, which Ibec and Scale Ireland are actively supporting.

The **Data Act and Data Governance Act**, are two complementary EU files now completed which lay the legislative foundations for the Data Economy. Work on implementing legislation will soon commence to grant the competent authorities enforcement powers, and work with DECC is ongoing to map this.

Responses/Proposals from forum members:

None

Update on the second Progress Report on the National Digital Strategy

Update on the State of the Digital Decade Report

The two agenda items were taken together due to their complementarity.

Claire Hayes Curtin, Department of the Taoiseach, provided an overview of the forthcoming 2nd annual Progress Report of the National Digital Strategy, *Harnessing Digital*, shared in advance of the meeting. Led by the Dept. of the Taoiseach, the strategy takes a Whole of Government approach to digital policy, supporting Ireland's ambition to remain a digital leader at EU level and beyond, and aligns with the EU Digital Decade. The report identifies progress across five areas: the four dimensions of the EU Digital Decade (Enterprise, Infrastructure, Skills, Public Services) and the regulatory framework. She highlighted Ireland's results in the DESI 2023 in relation to the digitalisation of enterprise where results are near the EU average mark, with higher scores for eCommerce and a lower score on invoicing. Minister Calleary noted that while there are many areas where Ireland is doing well, there are other areas where are

performance is stagnating or falling back, and we have scored poorly on eHealth, although a new policy roadmap and legislation are in progress in that area. Feedback and inputs from EDAF are welcome.

Responses/Proposals from forum members:

- CSO will soon publish updated figures for 2023 for their bi-annual survey. Expect there will be a big leap on uptake of AI.
- Welcomed €10m state investment in EU joint undertaking on Quantum Communication Infrastructure, EuroQCI which Ireland is part of. This multi-year piece of work, to employ quantum safe encryption for public and private sector data. Good academic work going on, get industry involved in use cases in finance, logistics etc.
- Importance of comparing Ireland to the leading EU countries rather than EU average and ensuring technology results all sectors of the economy.
- While Ireland performs well on skills, more work is needed on upskilling as lifelong learning figures in Ireland are far behind Nordics. Ireland has fallen back on enterprise-funded training, which could be still recovering post-Covid. Minister Calleary noted that work is underway to facilitate access to the National Training Fund.
- Importance of selling technology like AI, through use practical cases linked to specific sectors, which helps to demystify it.

AOB

- Minister Calleary noted that a call for expressions of interest for membership of a new AI Advisory Council had received a significant response. This independent body will soon be established, and it will have a broader mandate relating to AI, which will complement the focus of the EDAF on uptake of AI by enterprise.
- Minister Calleary announced that Ireland will assume the Chairmanship of the D9+, an informal alliance of like-minded digitally advanced EU countries, in January. The Digital Ireland Conference will be held on 18 April in conjunction with the D9+ ministerial meeting on 19 April 2024.
- A request was made to add to discussion of the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme to a future meeting agenda.
- Dates for the EDAF meetings in 2024 will be circulated by email by year end.

EDAF Secretariat

December 2023