



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

Ministerial Brief

January 2025



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Section 1: Programme for Government Commitments

In the area of Enterprise and Employment, the draft Programme for Government articulates that:

“Developing Ireland’s enterprise base will remain a key focus for Government over the next five years – from backing small businesses and start-ups, to scaling up indigenous firms and enhancing our attractiveness as a location for foreign direct investment. We will strive to reduce costs for business, cut through unnecessary bureaucracy, ensure access to finance and invest in vital infrastructure to help businesses succeed. If we are to sustain economic prosperity and continue to grow jobs, we must keep a laser focus on competitiveness and innovation over the next five years”.

There is a commitment within to target the creation of 300,000 extra jobs by 2030, supported by strategic investments, supportive enterprise policies, and a focus on fostering a vibrant economy.

More detailed commitments are set out under the subheadings below.

1. Competitiveness and Productivity

- 1.1. Publish an Action Plan for Competitiveness and Productivity within 12 months, which will target making Ireland the most supportive environment for indigenous businesses and the most attractive location for startups and foreign investment. This action plan will include tax and wage policy, access to finance, education and training, energy and utility policy, infrastructure and digitisation.
- 1.2. Publish Enterprise 2035 as a long-term ambition for enterprise growth and job creation over the coming decade. Engage with Irish SMEs, startups and exporters to review the supports available from our enterprise agencies.
- 1.3. Assess all elements of labour market policy that impact on the viability of SMEs.
- 1.4. Work with likeminded EU member states to ensure the fair application of state aid rules.
- 1.5. Boost participation in Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI) to increase competitiveness and productivity for Irish companies and create more jobs.
- 1.6. Develop a new National Life Sciences Strategy to ensure that this important sector remains competitive and ensure Government adopts a coherent and ambitious approach to future opportunities.
- 1.7. Shape the EU’s competitiveness challenge in a manner that benefits both European and Irish citizens.
- 1.8. Support an open, multilateral, rules-based trade system, promoting free trade policies and economic growth.
- 1.9. Support an ambitious EU trade agenda, promoting new Free Trade Agreements, with proper assurances regarding sustainability, human rights and the protection of our agricultural sector.
- 1.10. Ratify the CETA trade agreement, benefitting Irish SMEs.
- 1.11. Work with other EU countries to protect the principles of EU economic policy centred on competitiveness, innovation, and a level playing field.
- 1.12. Work to deepen the EU Single Market and create a genuine digital single market.
- 1.13. Work with EU partners to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy in EU Directives and Regulations to facilitate business operations.

- 1.14. Publish and resource new regional enterprise plans and ensure detailed consultation with local authorities, regional assemblies, enterprise agencies, higher education bodies, industry and others.
- 1.15. Reform the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme to ensure it is responsive in meeting local needs.
- 1.16. Bring forward an updated legal framework for the co-operative model.
- 1.17. Consider the development of economic Strategic Development Zones in the regions.
- 1.18. Set up a MMC Innovation Fund via the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF), to directly fund new housing factories, and the expansion of existed factories.
- 1.19. Leverage state capital investment to promote MMC and set binding targets for MMC use in at least 25% of all State-backed housing.
- 1.20. Overhaul and resource the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) to ensure all-encompassing regulatory certs are issued in a timely manner, harmonising Irish regulations with EU regulations to open up new market opportunities.
- 1.21. Promote the use of timber in new buildings and ensure multi storey timber frame residential units can be built.
- 1.22. Continue to advance a balanced approach to regional development, cognisant that the European Commission has identified the North West as requiring additional support.
- 1.23. Establish five new cluster organisations to facilitate collaboration and collective action among related companies, as well as partnerships with higher education institutions and public sector bodies under a new National Clustering Programme.
- 1.24. Continue to progress membership of CERN, ESA and other international collaborations.

2. Supporting Small Business, Hospitality and Retail

- 2.1. The Government will bring forward measures to support SMEs, in particular the retail and hospitality sectors, acknowledging the increased cost pressures on these sectors and this will entail changes to VAT, PRSI and other measures. These measures will be implemented as part of the normal budget process.
- 2.2. Establish a new Small Business Unit in the Department to back small business, ensuring they have support and a dedicated focus in government. Set up a Cost of Business Advisory Forum. This Forum will include a review of all business taxes and costs and ensure businesses are consulted before new legislation or policies are introduced that impact small businesses.
- 2.3. Rigorously implement the SME test to scrutinise every new piece of legislation and regulation for its impact on SMEs, ensuring that any obligations that increase business costs are phased in and that there is consideration of the broader implications of any decisions affecting businesses across government.
- 2.4. Undertake a look-back exercise to identify regulations that are now redundant to reduce unnecessary red tape, asking each government department and regulatory agency to submit a list of such regulations.
- 2.5. Conduct a comprehensive review to assess the cost structures for SME and family-owned businesses to identify areas where costs can be reduced.
- 2.6. Ensure Local Enterprise Offices are resourced to help local businesses and adjust Enterprise Ireland's mandate to better support small indigenous exporters and enhance its funding model. Further consider the role of local authorities in supporting local SMEs.
- 2.7. Review the operation of Local Enterprise Offices and publish a new National Strategy within 12 months.

- 2.8. Promote awareness of the Small Companies Administrative Rescue Process (SCARP) to protect viable jobs and businesses.
- 2.9. Continue to support InterTrade Ireland in helping SME businesses to identify and pursue public procurement opportunities across the island of Ireland.
- 2.10. Efficiently implement the ICOB scheme of 2024.

3. Supporting Ireland's Entrepreneurs and Start-Ups

- 3.1. Consider the development of a national start-up hub for entrepreneurs to engage with all government departments and agencies, fast-track the start-up process, and collaborate with fellow entrepreneurs.
- 3.2. Support the National Enterprise Hub and ensure seamless access for SMEs.
- 3.3. Consider the development of a new fund structure to de-risk investment in start-ups and scale-ups.
- 3.4. Promote the uptake of the new Enterprise Ireland €250m Seed and Venture Capital Scheme.
- 3.5. Explore options to further incentivise venture capitalists to invest in local companies. This aims to attract more international capital, positioning Ireland as a prime location for venture capital investment.
- 3.6. Develop an all-island innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem.
- 3.7. Continue to review and simplify the current Business and Enterprise Tax system to promote innovation and economic growth.
- 3.8. Scale up Enterprise Ireland's global presence to support Irish businesses in key markets.
- 3.9. Examine the regularity of SME reporting and filing requirements.

4. Helping Irish Companies Scale Globally and attracting more inward investment

- 4.1. Work closely with IDA Ireland to publish a new five-year strategy to 2030, planning for global changes and opportunities, with a particular focus on digitalisation and sustainability.
- 4.2. Work with IDA Ireland to target at least half of IDA investments outside of Dublin and expand our network of advanced manufacturing facilities.
- 4.3. Facilitate collaboration between larger FDI companies and indigenous firms, particularly focusing on digitisation and the green transition.
- 4.4. Support new clusters to facilitate collaboration and collective action among related companies, as well as partnerships with higher education institutions and public sector bodies.
- 4.5. Support efforts to help domestic Irish businesses scale up, enabling more Irish companies to grow internationally while retaining a substantial workforce in Ireland and abroad.
- 4.6. Examine options to enhance the Research and Development Tax Credit, reward innovation and digitalisation and ensure Ireland has the global best in class incentive to encourage innovation by domestic and international companies.
- 4.7. Progress and prioritise the Irish National Semiconductor Strategy to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the European Chips Act.
- 4.8. Target a 50% increase in large Irish exporters and 2,500 additional Irish-owned exporters by 2030.
- 4.9. Launch new calls under the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) to promote collaboration between Ireland's world-class research base and industry to pioneer new technologies and support the emergence of innovative start-ups.

- 4.10. Review and consider expansion of the IDA land bank, including consideration of new advanced manufacturing facilities in strategic, regional locations, and developing next generation, strategic sites.
- 4.11. Support Irish SMEs to access the supply chains of large Multi-National Companies that are based in Ireland.
- 4.12. Support intellectual property rights for medicines to drive innovation and competitiveness.
- 4.13. Boost our Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland staffing levels to complement our diplomatic presence in the USA, while ensuring a specific expertise in digital and life sciences to maximise opportunities in these areas.
- 4.14. Create more pathways for companies to invest in the USA as Ireland is already amongst the highest inward investors in the USA.
- 4.15. Work with our European partners to ensure a coordinated approach to the Transatlantic Relationship and boost intra-EU collaboration on competitiveness and productivity projects of common interest.
- 4.16. Work with IDA Ireland to spread foreign direct investment across the country ensuring that at least half of IDA investments are located outside of Dublin.
- 4.17. Enhance the availability of advanced manufacturing facilities to attract more foreign direct investment to regional locations and ensure that IDA Ireland intensively markets these facilities.

5. Protecting Consumers

- 5.1. Commence an independent review examining the role of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission in protecting and enhancing consumer protection. This will examine the further strengthening of legislation and the creation of two separate agencies to better deliver against these mandates of competition and consumer protection.
- 5.2. Ensure a future structure better delivers the advocacy, information and advice needs of consumers.
- 5.3. Ensure that legislation and guidelines regarding the disclosure of commercial content by online influencers are up-to-date and effective.
- 5.4. Strengthen competition by promoting price transparency in all sectors.
- 5.5. Publish a new Action Plan for Insurance Reform with a focus on encouraging further competition in the market and working with stakeholders to enhance transparency and affordability across all types of insurance.
- 5.6. Maintain the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Insurance Reform to ensure that insurance issues continue to receive a high level of focus and cross-government coordination
- 5.7. Proactively engage with the international insurance market, including through trade missions, to continue to attract more competition.

6. Supporting Workers

- 6.1. Recognise the work of the independent Low Pay Commission, ensuring fair wages whilst also supporting the viability of small and medium-sized enterprises.
- 6.2. Support the central role of the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court in industrial relations and employment rights.
- 6.3. Work to promote a diverse and equal workforce for all sections of society, including from minority or disadvantaged communities.

- 6.4.** Develop a Code of Practice to support the hiring of workers with a disability.
- 6.5.** Work with employers and across Government to improve employment of people with disabilities and ensure that supports for entrepreneurs and enterprise are accessible to all, including people with disabilities with a goal of reaching at least the EU average.
- 6.6.** Continue to promote the target of at least 40% for representation of each gender on boards to ensure Ireland remains aligned with international gender balance norms.
- 6.7.** Promote flexible working arrangements that benefit both workers and employers, ensuring a balanced approach.
- 6.8.** Publish an Action Plan for collective bargaining in 2025 in line with our commitments under the EU Directive.
- 6.9.** Support the Women in Finance initiative, the Balance for Better Business and other mechanisms to enhance the number of women in executive and nonexecutive positions. Encourage mentorship opportunities in both public and private sectors, aimed at greater gender balance on company and state boards and enhanced women's leadership roles.
- 6.10.** Back the Action Plan for Women in Business.
- 6.11.** Implement, fully fund and expand Enterprise Ireland's Action Plan for Women in Business and other venture capital funding and ensure a specific focus on women in rural areas across all regions

7. Digital and Climate

- 7.1.** Invest to make Ireland an EU centre of expertise for digital and data regulation and being a regulatory hub for companies operating across the EU Digital Single Market.
- 7.2.** Realise the full benefits of digitalisation, including AI, to increase productivity of Irish businesses.
- 7.3.** Work with our EU partners to ensure that Ireland and the EU is well-placed to benefit from the innovation and investment potential of new technologies like AI, while also protecting privacy and other fundamental rights.
- 7.4.** Ensure that small businesses are helped to achieve basic digital intensity, towards the target of 90% by 2030.
- 7.5.** Reform funding eligibility for digital grants and consultancy to ensure it is simplified and accessible.
- 7.6.** Promote the new Grow Digital Portal, which will help businesses self-assess their digital needs.
- 7.7.** Prioritise the publication of Wind Energy Development guidelines, having regard to international best practice and standards.
- 7.8.** Support Irish Companies to integrate into the offshore wind supply chain.
- 7.9.** Expand the Offshore Wind Energy Taskforce to include IDA Ireland and focus on attracting and retaining capital investment to drive offshore wind development.
- 7.10.** Ensure quarterly reports from the Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE) Taskforce to the relevant cabinet committee.
- 7.11.** Develop Green Energy Industrial Parks to attract large-scale investments in regional locations, co-located with renewable generation.
- 7.12.** Work to progress recommendations of the Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce central to renewable energy planning, recognising the region's potential.
- 7.13.** Encourage State agencies to service large parcels of land near sources of renewable electricity to add economic value.
- 7.14.** Allow data centres that contribute to economic growth and efficient grid usage, such as prioritising waste heat capture for district heating systems and other local uses.

- 7.15.** Enhance data centres' use of renewable energy sources, energy efficient technology and effective solutions, such as waste heat capture to reduce their carbon footprint.
- 7.16.** Launch a Roadmap for Industrial Heat Decarbonisation.
- 7.17.** Develop a targeted roadmap to help manufacturers transition to low-carbon heating solutions in their production processes
- 7.18.** Work with heavy industry to reduce emissions, including commissioning research on delivering zero carbon cement and look at international best practice.
- 7.19.** Increase take-up of grants to support small businesses in adopting energyefficient technologies, cutting costs, and reducing their environmental footprint.
- 7.20.** Work to ensure that Ireland is the most secure location for data storage, management, and services within the EU.
- 7.21.** Recognise the importance of digital infrastructure to the current and future growth of the Irish economy.
- 7.22.** Recognise the central role data centres play in contributing to economic growth and the enterprise economy, and ensure efficient grid usage, and that waste heat capture for district heating systems and other uses is prioritised.
- 7.23.** Support the National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) and transfer responsibility to the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment.
- 7.24.** Assist businesses in adopting sustainable practices and digital technologies and work to support policies that increase retail digitalisation.
- 7.25.** Support SMEs to adopt and implement best practice for Cyber Security.

Section 2: Overview of Department

2.1 DETE at a Glance

DETE Role	The Department plays a key role in stimulating the productive capacity of the economy and creating an environment which supports job-creation, ensuring fair competition, protecting consumers and safeguarding employment rights.
Performance data	2.8m in employment. Unemployment rate 4.2%. Exports +28%. Inflation (CPI) 1.4%. Employment in EI companies 234,454 in 2024, the highest ever recorded. 64% of new jobs created were located outside the Dublin region with all nine regions recording jobs growth. Local Enterprise Offices portfolio of over 7,000 small businesses accounts for 39,541 jobs across the country. In 2024, LEO supported companies created 7,104 new jobs. Over 1,800 IDA client companies directly employ more than 300,000 in Ireland. 234 investments won in 2024, projected to create 13,500 jobs over coming years.
Budget	For 2025 the Department has an allocation of €1.061 broken down as €425.4 million in current funding and €636.2 million in capital funding.
Infrastructure	A key challenge is securing cross Government support for the enterprise agenda. Critical need to address infrastructure capacity constraints in planning, energy, grid, water services and transport.
Supporting SMEs	In addition to the work of Enterprise Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices, recent SME supports include PowerUp, ICOB reopening and second payment, doubling the value of innovation vouchers, increasing the lending limit for MFI loans, enhancing the SME Test.
Regions	9 Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) in place. €145m under the European Regional Development Fund to support projects aligned to the REPs.
Climate change	Target to reduce Industry on-site emissions (manufacturing, including cement and alumina) by 20% by 2025 and 35% by 2030. DETE is working with DECC on a range of industry abatement actions. €300m of EI and IDA funding is ringfenced to support companies using the Environmental Aid scheme.
Digital	DETE leads the Enterprise Pillar of the National Digital Strategy to develop the optimal digital ecosystem for SMEs, increase Ireland's digital competitiveness and drive the digitalisation of enterprises in Ireland. Range of digital transition funding schemes available through IDA, EI and the LEOs. Growing AI agenda.
EU & Trade	Promote free, open trade in support of Ireland's economic model. Work with EU and international partners to build/strengthen alliances, shape emerging policies, standards, regulation and agreements that impact Ireland's economic environment. Economic security a growing important agenda for Ireland.
FDI, Innovation & standards	Continue to attract and retain foreign direct investment. Oversight of, IDA, the innovation programmes of Enterprise Ireland, the National Standards Authority of Ireland, Intellectual Property Office of Ireland (IPOI).
Workplace relations	Deliver positive workplace relations, enforcement of employment rights, a safe working environment and a responsive economic migration policy aligned with the needs of the economy, along with an efficient employment permits process. WRC, Labour Court, Health & Safety Authority under aegis of DETE.
Commerce, Competition Consumers	Legislative proposals to ensure Ireland remains an attractive place to start and run a business. Corporate Enforcement Authority, Competition Consumer Protection Commission, Irish Auditing and Accounting standards Authority & Injuries Resolution Board. Companies Registration Office under the aegis of DETE.

2.2 Work of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

The Department plays a key role in implementing the Government's policies of stimulating the productive capacity of the economy and creating an environment which supports job-creation. Through its agencies and offices, and supported by its teams based in Beijing, Brussels, Geneva, London and Washington DC, the Department's remit covers a wide range of activity including:

- Facilitating the start-up and growth of indigenous enterprises
- Attracting Foreign Direct Investment
- Growing and deepening export opportunities, improving competitiveness and productivity
- Promoting innovation and growth through investment in enterprise research and development
- Promoting fair competition for businesses and consumers
- Promoting and supporting regional enterprise development
- Ensuring fit for purpose, modern company law
- Safeguarding workers' rights including their entitlement to occupational safety and health
- Supporting and facilitating a positive industrial relations environment
- Making evidence-based policy, informed by research, analysis and robust evaluations
- Identifying the future skills needs of enterprise
- Providing appropriate and independent regulatory and enforcement capability in respect of businesses and consumers, and;
- Representing Ireland's interests in relevant EU and international fora, including the Competitiveness Council (incorporating Internal Market and Industry), the Foreign Affairs Council (meeting in its Trade formation) and international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), International Labour Organisation (ILO), OECD and World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

Several existing strategies, developed by DETE, also currently inform priorities for the Department and its agencies. These are set out below.

2.3 Statement of Strategy 2024-2025

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's mission, as set out in our Statement of Strategy 2024-2025, is to:

“Lead on sustainable economic development through the creation and maintenance of high-quality employment across all parts of our country by:

- *championing enterprise,*
- *supporting SMEs and microenterprises, ensuring a competitive business base for sustainable enterprise, enabling innovation and investment;*
- *strengthening global connections and trade;*
- *promoting fair and competitive markets, and responsible business practice;*
- *incentivising work as well as safe, flexible and decent workplaces through the regulatory and enforcement work of the Department, its offices and its agencies.”*

The Department's Statement of Strategy 2024 – 2025 builds on the priorities set out in the Programme for Government, Our Shared Future, and reflects the objective of Government's White Paper on Enterprise to ensure that Ireland continues to build on its strengths, as an open economy with strong trade and foreign direct investment, a vibrant innovation ecosystem, and a resilient labour market.

New Statement of Strategy

In accordance with the Public Service Management Act 1997, each Secretary General is required to prepare and submit a strategy statement to the Minister within six months of the appointment of a new Minister. Work will commence shortly on the preparation of the Department's new statement of strategy to cover the period 2025- 2028. The new Programme for Government will be the cornerstone of the new strategy, but it will also take account of overarching national strategies and plans, including Project Ireland 2040 - National Planning Framework, and the Climate Action Plan.

2.4 Current DETE Strategies

White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030

Published in December 2022, the *White Paper on Enterprise* sets out an ambitious vision for Ireland's enterprise policy, to protect Ireland's strong economic position, and respond to challenges and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the pandemic, wider economic and geo-political developments, digitalisation and an increased urgency to decarbonise industry. It provides for a sustainable, innovative and high-productivity economy, with rewarding jobs and livelihoods in the period ahead. There is a focus on seven priority enterprise policy objectives:

1. Integrating Decarbonisation and Net Zero Commitments
2. Placing Digital Transformation at the Heart of Enterprise Policy
3. Advancing Ireland's FDI and Trade Value Proposition
4. Strengthening the Irish owned export sector
5. Enabling Locally Trading Sectors to Thrive
6. Building on Strengths and opportunities
7. Stepping Up Enterprise Innovation

The White Paper is being actioned by a series of Implementation Plans. Three update reports have been delivered, with the third covering H1 2024 published in November. Work on a review of the White Paper and development of the second Implementation Plan, covering the period 2025 to 2026, will commence in early 2025.

Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026: Value for Ireland, Values for the World

Implementation of this Strategy, launched in April 2022, will see Ireland grow sustainably, diversify export markets, and support continued prosperity and higher living standards for all the people of Ireland. It articulates our plans for trade and investment, and climate and sustainability, setting out our principled and holistic approach to trade policy.

AI: Here for Good – The National AI Strategy

AI – Here for Good, the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, was launched in July 2021 and refreshed in November 2024. It sets out a vision of Ireland as an international leader in using AI to the benefit of our population, through a person-centred approach to trustworthy AI development, adoption and use. The refreshed Strategy takes account of significant developments in AI and regulation since the original strategy was published. Firstly, the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022 precipitated a massive acceleration in AI generally available. Secondly, the EU AI Act has now entered into force, so the regulatory guardrails for the use of AI in the EU are now clear. DETE's priorities in the Strategy include increasing AI adoption in businesses, fostering AI start-ups, and building public trust in AI. Notable actions in the 2024 refresh include ensuring Ireland is a leader in the effective implementation of the EU AI Act, a study on the

potential impacts of AI on key sectors, a national campaign to raise awareness among SMEs of the benefits of AI adoption and the supports available and expanding the range of digital upskilling and reskilling initiatives.

Powering Prosperity – Ireland’s Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy

Published in March 2024, *Powering Prosperity* is the first strategy of its kind for Ireland, aiming to build a successful, vibrant and impactful offshore wind energy industry. It includes 40 actions to be completed by the end of 2025 and was developed as part of close ongoing collaboration between this and other Government departments and agencies within the Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce. These actions aim to build a strong and resilient offshore wind supply chain in Ireland, as well as exploring opportunities for Irish companies to play a major role in the development of offshore wind projects in Ireland and abroad.

National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027

The *National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation (S3)*, launched in July 2022, provides a place-based and sectoral perspective on innovation policy. Development of the Strategy was an EU Commission requirement for member states under the current European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Strategy is intended to promote regional innovation-driven growth by focusing on local sectoral strengths, and also supports the green and digital transitions.

Nine Regional Enterprise Plans

The nine *Regional Enterprise Plans*, overseen by DETE, are developed by regional stakeholders using a ‘bottom-up’ approach and focus on collaborative initiatives that help strengthen the enterprise ecosystem and promote enterprise growth and job creation across Ireland. Up to €145m has been secured for the Smart Regions Innovation Scheme, co-funded under the ERDF to drive implementation of the Plans which are aligned with the National Smart Specialisation Strategy. The decision to extend the current REPs to the end of 2025 has been communicated to stakeholders. The extension includes a commitment to an external review of the REP initiative which will inform development of the next iteration.

Local Enterprise Offices Policy Statement 2024-2030

The first ever Local Enterprise Offices (LEO) Policy Statement was published in May 2024. It was developed by the Department in collaboration with Enterprise Ireland, the LEOs, and the City and County Managers Association. There is an emphasis on a consistency of approach across the network and a clear intention to show that LEOs are the first stop shop for all businesses regardless of sector. The policy statement has 12 actions for implementation to 2030.

National Space Strategy for Enterprise 2019-2025

The Government’s vision for the space-active enterprise sector is for Ireland to develop ‘*an economically sustainable and expanding space-active industry, delivering quality jobs for the economy of tomorrow*’. Launched in June 2019, the strategy focuses on harnessing new opportunities within the evolving international space sector, supporting the development of a highly skilled and adaptable workforce, encouraging awareness of space among the public and private sector, and developing and maintaining a strategic sector. The Department is considering a revised Strategy which should incorporate recent developments including the additional focus being given to Space by the EU.

2.5 Department Management Structure

Declan Hughes
Secretary General

Department Structure

The Department is comprised of eight divisions. There are six offices and eight (nine when Micro Finance Ireland legislation is enacted and commenced) agencies under the aegis of the Department, as well as one North South Body.



Management Board

The Department’s Management Board comprises the Secretary General, eight Assistant Secretaries and the Head of Management and Business Support Unit. The Management Board meets weekly, usually on Tuesday mornings.

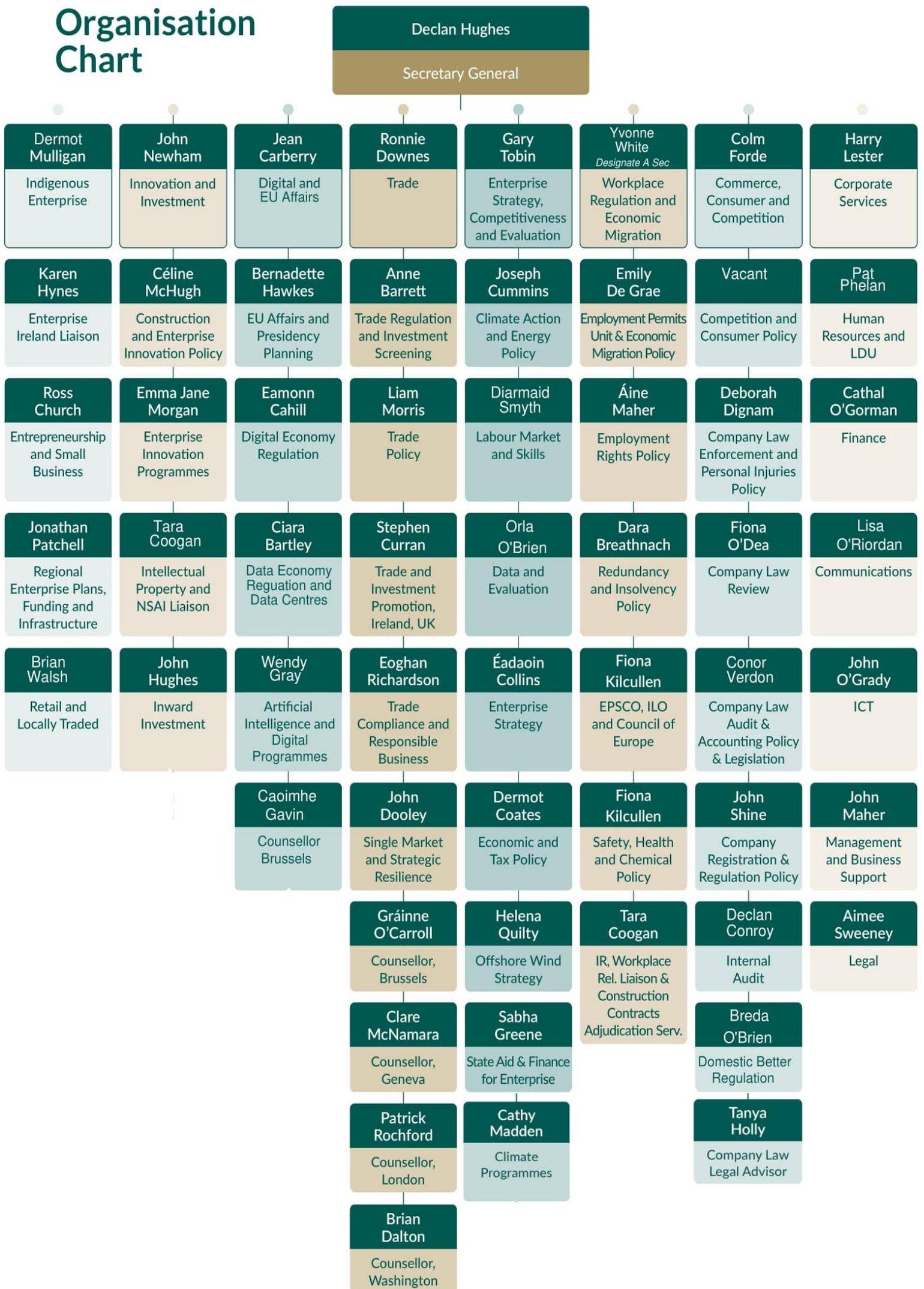
Ministerial Management Board

Meetings are held every four weeks. The Minister, Ministers of State and Special Advisors to the Minister attend these meetings, along with the members of the Management Board. The agenda is set by the Minister, who also chairs the meeting.

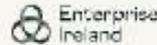
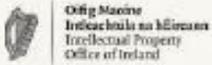
Divisions of the Department and Assistant Secretaries

			
Commerce Consumer and Competition Colm Forde	Corporate Services Harry Lester	Digital and EU Affairs Jean Carberry	Enterprise Strategy, Competiveness and Evaluation Gary Tobin
			
Indigenous Enterprise Dermot Mulligan	Innovation and Investment John Newham	Trade Ronnie Downes	Workplace Realtions and Economic Migration Yvonne White (designate)

Organisation Chart



Offices and Agencies of the Department



- EU Competitiveness Council (COMPET)
- EU Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)
- World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conferences
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Ministerial Council
- International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

2.8 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise Trade and Employment

Committees are formed when both Dáil and Seanad general elections have taken place and after a Government is formed. The Houses will at that point agree motions setting up sectoral and some thematic committees. These motions set out how many Members from each House will be on a committee, as well as their powers and remits. Membership places on a committee are typically in proportion to a party's or group's share of TDs or Senators. In addition to core business such as legislation etc., it is open to the Committee to prioritise certain matters of policy, and to report on them to the Houses. In the 33rd Dáil a Joint Committee on Enterprise was *established to examine policy issues falling within the remit of the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.*

2.9 Ministerial Responsibilities and Delegation of Functions

The role and status of Ministers with regard to Departments and their responsibility to Dáil Éireann are set out in Article 28 of the Constitution and are further elaborated in the Ministers and Secretaries Acts 1924-2020. The Public Service Management Act 1997 provides a statutory basis for the management structure of the Civil Service. This Act assigns to Secretaries General certain functions, which include managing the Department, implementing Government policies appropriate to the Department, delivering outputs as determined by the Minister of the Government having charge of the Department and providing advice to the Minister. It is important to note that the provisions of the Public Service Management Act 1997 do not change the core policy responsibility of Ministers, who remain responsible for the functions of the Department under the relevant provisions of the Constitution and the Ministers and Secretaries Act.

The ethics framework for Ministers is set out in the: -

- Ethics in Public Office Act, 1995 and the Standards in Public Office Act, 2001
- Guidelines on Compliance with the provisions of those Acts, and;
- Code of Conduct for Office Holders as drawn up by the Government

Office holders are obliged to familiarise themselves with and observe those requirements.

Personal staff and staffing of Private and Constituency Offices

Details relating to the appointment of Programme Managers/Special Advisors are set out in Section 11 of the Public Service Management Act, 1997. The terms and conditions which apply to the appointment of ministers' personal staff, including Programme Managers and Advisors, are determined by the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (PENDPR) within parameters set down by the Government. Such staff should not be appointed from outside the civil service without prior consultation with the Taoiseach and the Minister PENDPR.

Appointments terminate not later than the date on which the relevant Minister/Minister of State ceases to hold the specific office held when the appointment was made.

There are annual obligations under the Ethics Framework in relation to the staff personally appointed by Ministers (including Special Advisors, Programme Managers, Press Officers, Personal Assistants and Personal Secretaries).

The function of departments in this area is purely one of providing outline information; the legal obligation to comply with the terms of the ethics legislation lies with individual office holders and public servants. Ministers and Ministers of State and staff personally appointed by them, to whom the relevant provisions of the ethics legislation apply, should consult with the Standards in Public Office Commission in relation to any matter pertaining to their personal obligations under the Acts.

Delegation of Ministerial Functions to Ministers of State

The Ministers and Secretaries (Amendment) (No. 2) Act, 1977, provides for the delegation of a minister's powers and duties to Minister(s) of State by Order made by the Government at the request of the Minister concerned. It has been the practice for such orders to be made in cases where a Minister of State would be expected to carry out statutory functions on behalf of a Minister.

As the 1977 Act makes clear, the Minister remains responsible to Dáil Éireann for the exercise or performance of any powers or duties delegated to a Minister of State. Delegation arrangements are regularly reviewed to take account of legislation enacted subsequent to any Delegation of Functions Order being made. Delegation of non-statutory responsibilities is generally made by way of an informal letter of understanding between a Minister and Minister of State. In 2024, two Ministers of State were appointed to the Department and statutory functions and areas of responsibility were delegated as follows:

Minister for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation:

- Company law legislation including Companies Act 2014
- Competition legislation
- Registration of Business Names legislation
- Consumer protection legislation
- Personal Injuries Resolution Board legislation
- Industrial and Provident Societies and Friendly Societies legislation
- Hallmarking legislation
- Partnership legislation
- Control of Exports legislation
- Digital Services legislation.

The Minister for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation is also delegated responsibility for the following administrative functions:

- The making of S.I.s under the Control of Exports Acts 2008 and 2023
- Attendance at the COMPET Council and related Ministerial-level meetings
- National Export Control Policy
- Trade promotion with a view to maximising Irish exports by seeking to maintain existing markets and grow new markets.
- EU digital policy as related to Platforms, Digital Services Act Package and Artificial Intelligence and Data Act Proposal
- Chairing the Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum (EDAF)
- EU Policy related to accounting and audit matters

- Progressing proposed legislation in relation to co-operative societies and the registration of trade unions
- Monitoring and reviewing overall progress on implementation of priority policy areas identified from the “SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan”
- Overseeing implementation of Regional Enterprise Plans with a particular focus on the Midlands, West, North-West and South-East
- Cutting bureaucracy for SMEs and supporting the SME Test across Government to assess the potential simplification of regulatory adherence

Minister for Business, Employment and Retail:

- Intellectual Property, including copyright, trademarks, designs and patents legislation
- Standards for goods and services, including National Standards Authority of Ireland legislation
- Metrology legislation
- Employment Permits legislation
- Employment Rights legislation, including minimum wage legislation
- Industrial Relations and Trade Union legislation
- Workplace Relations legislation
- Redundancy Payments legislation – section 39
- Construction Contracts legislation
- Workplace Health and Safety legislation
- Safe use and management of chemicals legislation
- Carriage of dangerous goods by road legislation
- Dangerous Substance legislation.

The Minister for Business, Employment and Retail is also delegated responsibility for the following administrative functions:

- Responsibility at international level for EPSCO (Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council), EMCO (Employment Committee), ILO (International Labour Organisation), Council of Europe – European Social Charter
- Responsibility at international level for European Space Agency and space policy at EU COMPET Council
- The Retail Forum, including acting as chairperson of the Forum
- The Irish National Accreditation Board, the national body with responsibility for the accreditation of laboratories, certification bodies and inspection bodies
- Statutory appointments to the Labour Court, the Workplace Relations Commission and the Construction Contracts Adjudication Service.

2.10 Department Budget

Department Estimate 2025

The Revised Estimates Volume (REV) 2025 was published on the 10 December 2024. The REV provides the Department with a gross allocation of €1.061 billion for use next year, broken down between €636.2 million in current funding and €425.4m in capital funding. The 2025 allocation does not reflect any changes to the Department’s policy brief arising from changes to the Department’s functions as set out in the Programme for Government. The Table below sets out the allocations to each of the Department’s three Programmes.

PROGRAMME AREA	2025 GROSS ALLOCATION		
	Current €000	Capital	Total
		€000	€000
A: JOBS & ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT	259,233	415,470	674,973
B: ENTERPRISE INNOVATION & COMMERCIALISATION	25,932	220,439	246,371
C: REGULATION	140,309	0	140,309
Gross Total:	425,474	636,179	1,061,653
APPROPRIATIONS-IN-AID (i.e. estimated income)	82,120	5,761	87,881
Net Total:	343,354	630,418	973,772

Programme A – Jobs and Enterprise Development

The primary objective of this programme area is to maximise sustainable job creation across the enterprise base. The Department aims to position Ireland as a competitive, innovation-driven location in which to do business, to promote entrepreneurship, to develop a strong indigenous enterprise base, to target future inward investment and to grow exports in existing and fast-growing markets. This programme area covers the “White Paper” agenda as well as activities carried out by specific policy areas of the Department spanning indigenous enterprise, regional development, micro-finance, state-aid, EU affairs, trade, foreign direct investment, climate sustainability, competitiveness issues and the green economy.

Under Programme A funding is provided to the following agencies and programme lines:

- InterTrade Ireland
- IDA Ireland
- Enterprise Ireland
- Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)
- National Standards Authority of Ireland

Funding under Programme A is also provided:

- to assist North-South measures via the Enterprise Development strand of the cross-border INTERREG/Peace Plus programme,
- for the Credit Guarantee Scheme,
- for Ireland’s membership of the World Trade Organisation,
- to pay for Agency legacy pensions (for retired employees of the enterprise agencies)
- to progress the development of a National Clustering Programme meet commitments under SBCI loan schemes such as the Future Growth Loan Scheme,
- to fund projects under the Shared Island Fund as well as certain ERDF projects.

Programme B – Enterprise Innovation & Commercialisation

The primary objective of this programme is to foster and embed a world class innovation system that underpins enterprise development and drives commercialisation of research to build national competitive advantage across the economy. Funding is provided for strategic investments in research, development and innovation and the development of human capital. This Programme also funds the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund which is one of the four headline Funds established to drive the delivery of the core priorities identified in the National Development Plan.

Funding to support the Department's activities under Programme Area B – Enterprise Innovation & Commercialisation are delivered by and through:

- The Intellectual Property Office of Ireland
- The Science and Technology Development Programme including Enterprise Ireland's R&D supports and funding of projects approved under the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund.

Funding under this programme area also covers Ireland's memberships of various international research organisations such as:

- European Space Agency (ESA),
- Eureka.

Programme C – Regulation

The primary objective of this Programme is to ensure that Ireland's business regulatory system and dispute resolution mechanisms facilitate fair, efficient, and competitive markets, for businesses, employees and consumers.

Funding under Programme Area C – Regulation covers the following:

- Workplace Relations Programme, including the WRC, the Labour Court and the legacy activities of the EAT,
- Companies Registration Office (CRO) incorporating the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies (RBO)
- Competition & Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC)
- Health and Safety Authority (HSA),
- Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA),
- Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA),
- Low Pay Commission,
- Personal Injuries resolution Board (in respect of pension liabilities).

The activities of the Company Law Review Group are also included under this Programme area as are the operational costs for the Balance for Better Business initiative. Ireland's membership of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is also included.

National Development Plan

A revised National Development Plan (NDP) was published in October 2021. The Plan provided for a capital investment package of €165 billion for the ten-year period 2021 to 2030. The Plan was framed to support economic, social, environmental and cultural development across all parts of the country under Project Ireland 2040 in parallel with the National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) set out in National Planning Framework. The Summer Economic Statement 2023 committed to providing an additional €2.25 billion in capital monies in 2024, 2025 and 2026 to support critical infrastructure projects as well as to initiatives under the Climate Action Fund.

Details of the Department's NDP ceilings out to 2026 are set out below:

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
Allocations	€423m	€523m	€558m	€584m	€611m	€625m	€2.699m

The NDP allocations include the funding secured from the National Recovery and Resilience Fund to support the Department's Programme to 'Drive Digital Transformation of Enterprise in Ireland' and the 'Programme to Accelerate Decarbonisation of the Enterprise Sector', which were both approved as priority programmes under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Aside from the National Development Plan, Budget 2024 committed to establishing two discrete funds for future investment, namely the Future Ireland Fund for the purpose of supporting future state expenditure in a consistent and sustainable manner and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund for state expenditure on environmental and infrastructural projects in each of the years 2026 to 2030.

The Department has highlighted a number of strategic challenges that require increased multiannual capital resources, including reducing carbon emissions and digitalisation of the enterprise base, larger scale property solutions for foreign direct investment, establishing a scaling fund for indigenous enterprises and mechanisms to fund strategic co-funded EU initiatives like Important Projects of Common European Interests (IPCEI).

Budget 2025 confirmed the intention to allocate €3.15 billion in funding to the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund to support environmental projects over the period 2026 to 2030. The Expenditure Report which accompanied the Budget Statement advised that the process of allocating funding from the ICNF would be the subject of engagement with relevant Ministers in line with the Estimates process.

2.11 Staff Resources

Since 2017, the Department's workforce has increased by 21.6% to 1003.78 (full-time equivalents, 1032 persons), which has enabled DETE to deliver on its expanded responsibilities. For example, the Department has restructured to focus on the emerging strategic priorities of digitalisation and decarbonisation of the economy and the role for the Enterprise Sector to transition accordingly. The Department has also pivoted to engage on global economic trends impacting Irish businesses including a resurgence of industrial policy in the world's major trading blocs, threats to economic security, and the growing responsible business agenda. Business regulation, both in terms of responding to EU developments and national priorities, has also increased. The responsibilities of the Department's agencies have also expanded, and ensuring oversight of these entities continues to be a priority of the Department. The Agencies workforce has increased to 1,999 persons.

The Department is organised across 8 Divisions: Workplace Regulation and Economic Migration (WREM), Corporate Services (CS), Commerce, Consumers and Competition (CCC), Investment and Innovation (I&I), Trade, Enterprise Strategy, Competitiveness and Evaluation (ESCE), Digital and EU Affairs (until recently Digital, EU and Climate (DEUC)) and Indigenous Enterprise (IE). Staffing of the Offices of the Department is also the responsibility of HR; Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), Labour Court (LC), Companies Registration Office (CRO) and Intellectual

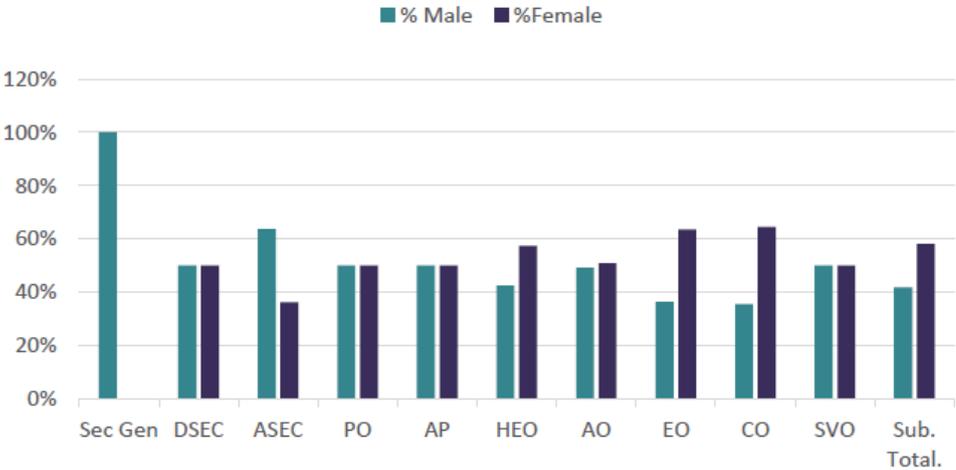
Property Office of Ireland (IPOI). The level of churn experienced across the Civil Service continues to be significant and recruitment pipelines can be very challenging with Public Jobs competing in a tight labour market. The Department has recently concluded a process of workforce planning and will be recruiting to fill priority posts. Resources continue to be in high demand to deliver on our ambitious priorities and further growth in budget and people will be needed to right size the organisation. This will be pursued as part of the Estimates process.

DETE Headcount by Divisions and Offices 31/12/2024

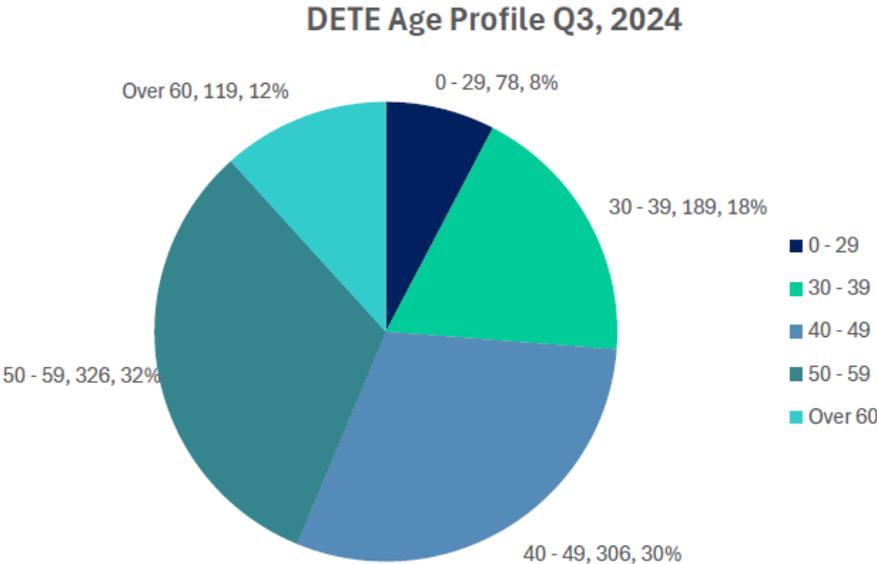


The Department’s Gender Pay Gap is 9.55% in 2024, a slight decrease from 10.86% in 2023. The Department has an action plan in place to support equal opportunities for all our staff in response to this. Positively, there is a strong pipeline of leaders across genders and balanced representation at AP and PO level.

Gender Balance Percentage Q3, 2024

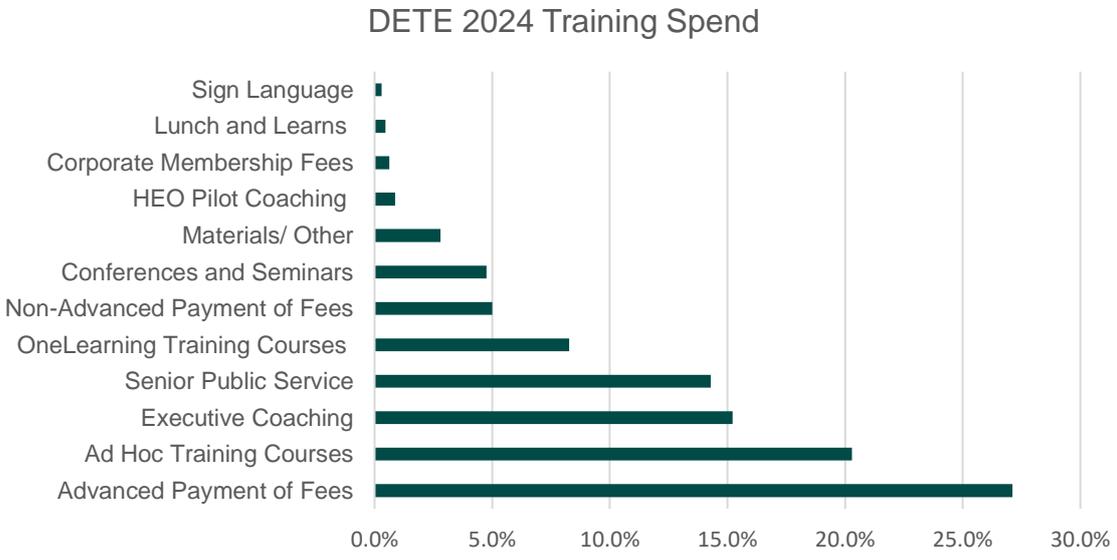


The Department’s age profile has improved over the last decade however challenges exist in terms of forthcoming retirements. Workforce Planning and succession planning is active to mitigate these risks.



The Department currently holds a silver award from the Centre of Diversity and Inclusion and is implementing a broad Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

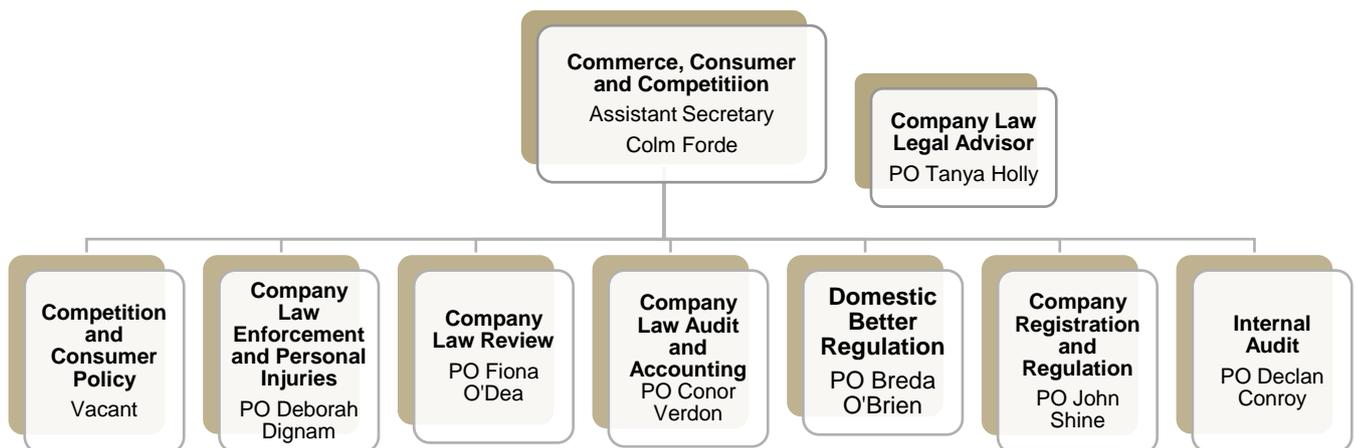
The Department invests in our people to develop the competencies required to fulfil our goals. Learning and development supports are focussed on supporting people to undertake relevant third level qualifications (advanced payment of fees), maintain continuous professional development (through attendance at conferences), complete job specific training programmes (including through One Learning training courses), executive coaching, management and leadership development programmes (including those run for the Senior Public Service), innovation workshops, grade specific programmes and bespoke / adhoc training programmes created for the Department. In 2025, the training budget is being expanded to focus more on leadership and management training and on transformation projects using design thinking skills.



Section 3: Key Issues by Division

The following sets out in summary the key policy and related issues in each division of the Department.

3.1 Commerce, Consumer and Competition Division



Offices

Companies Registrations Office (CRO)	Maureen O'Sullivan - Registrar
Central Register of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies (RBO)	
Registry of Friendly Societies (RFS)	

Agencies

Competition & Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC)	Brian McHugh - Chairperson
Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA)	Ian Drennan - Chairperson
Injuries Resolution Board	Rosalind Carroll – CEO
Irish Auditing and Accountancy Supervisory Authority (IAASA)	Kevin Prendergast - CEO

Role of the Commerce, Consumer and Competition Division

The Division is the policy arm of the Department which seeks to help make markets work more effectively for consumers and through the promotion of keen competition, high standards of compliance and corporate governance and consumer protection but without unnecessary regulatory costs. Through the work of the Department's Internal Audit function, it seeks to promote the highest standards of internal corporate governance.

The key priorities and strategic issues for the Commerce, Consumers and Competition Division include:

Ongoing review of the Companies Act 2014 and support for the Company Law Review Group (CLRG)

The CLRG is a statutory advisory body charged with advising the Minister on company law matters. It has representation from a broad range of stakeholders. The CLRG works according to a two-year work programme, agreed by the Minister, to review company law and advise the Minister accordingly. The Company Law Review Unit provides secretariat support to the Group.

Current position and next steps

The four-year term of office of the current membership commenced in 2022 and the Group has now completed its 2022 – 2024 work programme. A Work Programme for 2024-2026 has been settled and has recently commenced.

Registration of Limited Partnerships and Business Names Bill 2024

The General Scheme proposes to repeal the Limited Partnership Act 1907 and the Registration of Business Names Act 1963 and replace both with a robust regulatory framework considering concerns raised by the Council of Europe after the release of the Pandora papers in 2021. The main objective of the proposed Bill is to provide for a contemporary registration regime for limited partnerships and business names that is comparable to the Companies Act 2014 and which adheres to Anti-Money Laundering regulations. This will ensure the Irish limited partnership and business names regime remains relevant, competitive, increases investor confidence and benefits the Irish economy.

Current position and next steps

Government approval for drafting of the Bill was received on 9 July 2024. The OPC appointed a drafter on 5 September 2024, and drafting has commenced.

Company Law Developments in the European Commission

- **INSOL III**

On 7 December 2022 the European Commission published a proposal for a Directive on harmonising certain aspects of national insolvency law across EU Member States, (known as INSOL III), the primary objective of which is to make insolvency law more efficient and effective with a view to facilitating more cross border investment.

Current position and next steps

Working Party discussions on the file commenced in 2023 and given the political impetus behind the Capital Markets Union Proposal (CMU), the negotiations on INSOL III intensified during the latter half of the Hungarian Presidency. DETE officials continue to engage with the Company Law Review Group on the Proposal and established an Interdepartmental Working Group with representatives from the Department of Justice (personal insolvency/ bankruptcy), Department of Finance (anti-money laundering) and the Courts Service (role of the courts) to inform and develop Ireland's position during the negotiations on aspects that are outside of this Department's responsibility. The incoming Polish Presidency indicated that they will concentrate their efforts on trying to seek agreement in respect of the remaining elements of the proposal. Discussions are expected to commence in January 2025.

- **Multiple-vote shares (MVS) structures**

Multiple-vote shares are a class of shares that carry higher voting rights than another class of shares with voting rights. The MVS Proposal for a draft Directive is designed to provide ease of access for SMEs to publicly listed status by allowing their owners to retain control of the company.

Current position and next steps

Following agreement at EU level, a Directive of the European Parliament of the Council on Multiple-Vote Share Structures in companies that seek admission to trading of their shares on a multilateral trading facility/SME Growth Market has been finalised. The Multiple Vote Share Structure Directive was published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 14 November 2024 and came into force 20 days after the date of publication. Member States have two years to give effect to the Directive i.e. until 4th December 2026 and the Department has commenced preparations for transposition within this timeframe.

- **EU Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence**

The Directive focuses on establishing a system within company law to address adverse human rights and environmental impacts arising from companies' own operations and those of their subsidiaries and chain of activities.

Current position and next steps

The Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive was published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 5th July 2024 and came into force 20 days later. Member States have two years to give effect to the Directive i.e. until 26th July 2026 and the Department has commenced preparations for transposition within this timeframe.

- **Proposed EU Directive on Upgrading Digital Company Law**

The proposal builds on an earlier Directive on the use of digital tools and processes in company law (the "Digitalisation Directive"). It aims to create greater transparency and further the digitalisation efforts of company law processes within the EU by aligning the information held on national business registers and BRIS (European Business Registers Interconnection System) in respect of limited liability companies, partnerships, and groups of companies.

Current position and next steps

The Directive has been agreed and is expected to be published in the Official Journal before end 2024. Member States will then have 30 months to give effect to the Directive.

- **Proposed Directive on European Cross Border Associations**

The proposal seeks to introduce an additional legal form of a European cross-border association (ECBA) in Member States' national legal systems, which is specifically designed for cross-border purposes and is intended to reduce legal and administrative burdens when it comes to the recognition and establishment of non-profit associations engaging in activities in another Member State.

Current position and next steps

[REDACTED]

Ensure Ireland has an effective auditing and accounting regime

In light of the global nature of enterprise, the corporate reporting and auditing regime for companies is significantly shaped by harmonised EU rules. There are three legislative projects at different stages of maturity:

- The Disclosure of Tax Information by Certain Undertakings and Branches Directive was signed into law in June 2023 and country by country reports by large MNCs and standalone entities are due from financial years starting 22 June 2024.
- The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Regulations 2024, which arise from the European Green Deal's climate change action objectives, further enhance the disclosure by companies on climate and environmental data. The regulations came into effect July 2024, commencing for the financial year starting January 2024 for the principal cohort of companies (public interest entities), and will be phased in thereafter for other large companies (1 January 2025) and then, finally, for listed SMEs (1 January 2026). The Department has published a FAQ document on the website and a mailing list is maintained for stakeholder engagement.
- On 19 June 2024, the European Union (Adjustment of Size Criteria for Certain Companies and Groups) Regulations were signed into law, and took effect from July 2024. This S.I. transposed an EU Directive to increase the monetary thresholds of companies to account for inflation, under the Accounting Directive, for the categories of micro, small, medium and large companies. The main beneficiaries are 3,100 small companies across Ireland who are now reclassified as micro companies, with reduced reporting requirements as a consequence.

Modernise the legislation relevant to the Co-operative Sector

PfG Commitment 1.16

The Co-operative Societies Bill provides for the most far-reaching reform of the legislation governing co-operatives in the history of the State. The Bill introduces a modern legal framework which will place the co-operative model on a more favorable and clearer legal basis and encourage the consideration of the co-operative model as an attractive formation option for entrepreneurs and also for social and community activities.

Current position and next steps

This is a large and complex Bill with drafting ongoing since Q2 2023 in the Office of Parliamentary Counsel. Drafting is nearing completion, and it is envisaged that the Bill will be brought to Government for approval to publish in Quarter 1 of 2025.

Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024

The Companies (Corporate Governance, Enforcement and Regulatory Provisions) Act 2024 was signed by the President on 12 November 2024. Sixty-four of its ninety sections were commenced on 3 December 2024. Twenty-six remain to be commenced including the provision which removes the automatic loss of audit exemption for a first instance of late filing, replacing it with for a graduated and more proportionate approach.

Next steps

The Companies Registration Office (CRO) will continue to make preparations to enable all remaining provisions of the Act to be commenced in 2025. This includes updating of the ICT system and the development of fees and form orders.

Ensure that Ireland's insurance sector becomes more competitive and consumer friendly

PfG Commitment 5.5, 5.6

DETE leads on policy regarding personal injuries resolution and has policy responsibility for the legislation underpinning the Injuries Resolution Board. DETE has worked with D/Finance to lead

on the development and implementation of the Action Plan for Insurance Reform. The Sub-Group on Insurance Reform was established in 2021 under the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery & Investment and is chaired by the Tánaiste. The Minister for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation is a member of this Group.

Current position

All but one of the actions in the Action Plan for Insurance Reform are now complete. Recent CSO data shows that motor insurance prices are now 37 per cent lower than their peak in July 2016 but are showing a 10 per cent increase year-on-year. It is vital that all savings from the reform package should be used to offset current inflationary pressures, so that the full benefits of the Action Plan are realised and consumers are protected to the maximum extent possible. The Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022 was commenced in December 2023. The Act transforms the Injuries Resolution Board by enabling it to offer mediation, retain more cases, address the possibility of fraudulent claims and gives it a data gathering and reporting role. The measures are intended to facilitate an increase in the number of personal injury claims that may be resolved through the Board's cost-efficient process and without recourse to litigation. Mediation is being introduced on a phased basis with mediation for employer liability claims introduced in December 2023 and for public liability claims in May 2024.

Next steps

Mediation for motor liability claims commenced on the 12th December 2024. Agreement was reached at the sub-group for D/Justice, D/Finance, DETE to co-host a data workshop and to invite Injuries Resolution Board, Central Bank Ireland and the Courts Service. The aim of the workshop is to review how insurance data is gathered and to assess how best to inform the narrative of the benefits of the reform package.

On 11th December, the Judicial Council published draft amendments to the Personal Injuries Guidelines pursuant to section 11(d) of the Judicial Council Act 2019. The revised guidelines increase the average award by 16.7%. These are likely to come into effect in the first half of 2025.

Help make markets work effectively for consumers

PfG Commitment 5.3, 5.4

This work falls under two main headings – firstly, national and EU policy on competition and consumer rights: and secondly monitoring, supporting and liaising with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC), along with engagement with other relevant stakeholders.

Competition policy refers to ensuring that businesses compete fairly, and that competition law is enforced. Competition law is a fundamental prerequisite to an effective EU single market. The work of DETE in this area is legislatively heavy and is influenced by EU law.

Consumer policy relates to consumer rights i.e., the protections given to consumers to enable them to seek refunds/remediation/compensation. While this touches on consumer 'affairs' DETE and the CCPC are not solely responsible for these broader issues. The consumer rights laws the Department is responsible for set a floor across sectors in terms of rights. Some sectors are regulated and the regulators themselves have functions to protect customers in those sectors. This is particularly important in the current cost of living context where sectoral regulators such as ComReg, CRU etc. have the lead on the consumer angle for their sectors. Consumer rights legislation affects the common law area of 'contract law'. As a result, caution always needs to be exercised in legislating in an area which intersects with the (constitutionally recognised) role of the judiciary and the status of common law in our legal system. A further cautionary factor is that

such interventions affect commerce and the workings of the marketplace and therefore require a clear evidenced based policy goal which corrects market failures, and which does not create unintended consequences.

Current position

A key development was the commencement of the Competition (Amendment) Act in September 2023. This Act represented a sea change in competition enforcement in Ireland and ensures a coherent single regime to deal with breaches of EU and national competition law. The Act amended existing legislation to further empower the competition authorities, CCPC and ComReg, to challenge anti-competitive behaviour in the marketplace. For the first time in Irish law, breaches of competition law can be penalised through administrative sanctions taken by these authorities, with maximum fines of up to €10 million or 10% of turnover, whichever is greater. The CCPC ran a recruitment campaign to hire the new positions required for this legislation.



The Representative Actions for the Protection of the Collective Interests of Consumers Act 2023 was commenced in April 2024. This legislation is the first of its kind in Ireland as it will allow for a group of consumers to take an action against a trader to the High Court, through the services of a Qualified Entity for an alleged infringement of their consumer rights. It represents a change in consumer rights to bring both collective and cross-border actions. Two organisations have successfully applied to be designed as Qualified Entities. To date no representative actions have been presented to the High Court. In addition during 2024, the Department engaged on two new EU Commission proposals concerning the amendment of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Directive and the repeal of the Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) Regulation. The proposals are linked. Amendments to the ADR Directive will make it fit better to modern consumer markets and the repeal of the ODR Regulation will remove some administrative burdens from online businesses. Proposed dates for Trilogues stage of the negotiations are awaited.

Two proposals for Directives in the consumer rights area were negotiated during 2022/23. The first is a Directive on Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition through Better Protection Against Unfair Commercial Practices and Better Information. This concerns greenwashing and misleading claims of producers concerning the environmental and social impacts, durability and reparability of products. This Directive is required to be transposed by 27 March 2026. The second is the Directive on Common Rules Promoting the Repair of Goods which seeks to promote the repair of goods purchased by consumers within and beyond the legal guarantee. This Directive is due to be transposed by 31 July 2026.

Next steps

Assessment has begun on the transposition requirements of Directive 2024/825 and 2024/1799 and it is expected that the transposition deadlines will be met.

Product Safety and Market Surveillance

In this regard there were two proposals for Directives and two proposals for Regulations negotiated during 2023/24.

Current position

The Product Liability Directive (PLD) proposal reached provisional political agreement between the Council and the European Parliament in December 2023. The general objective of this Directive is to continue to ensure the functioning of the internal market, free movement of goods and undistorted competition between market operators and to continue to ensure a high level of protection of consumers' health and property. A public consultation process was undertaken by the department in 2023, and the department engaged extensively with stakeholders. The Product Liability Directive was published in the Official Journal of the European Union in October 2024 and must be transposed by October 2026.

Directive (EU) 2024/2749 is part of the Internal Market Emergency and Resilience Act Omnibus (IMERA Omnibus) package. It includes updates to emergency procedures for conformity assessment, adoption of common specifications, and market surveillance in mid-2024, DETE concluded negotiations on this proposal, which shall apply from May 2026.

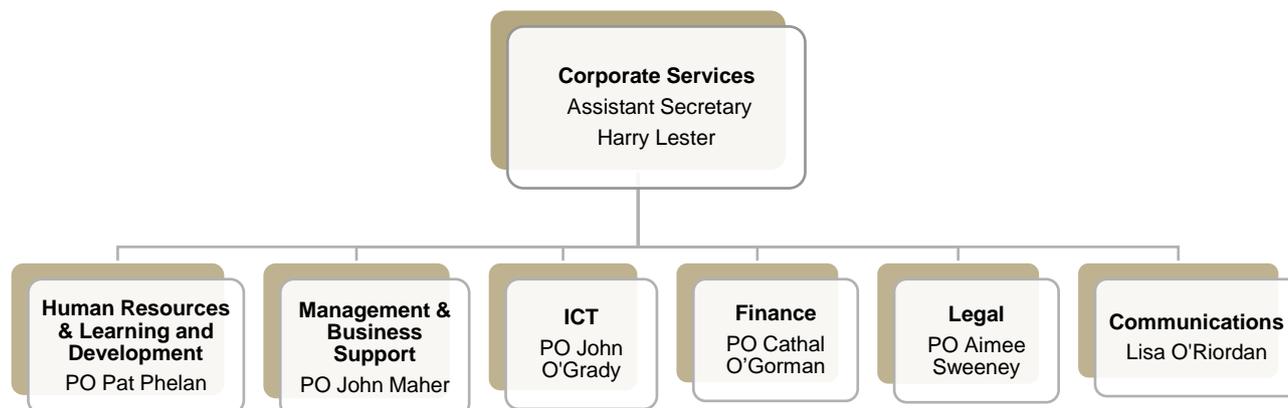
The Department is also working on the EU Commission proposal for the Regulation on the Safety of Toys and repealing Directive 2009/48/EC. The general objective of this Regulation is to ensure the highest level of safety for children, and to enable the free circulation of toys in the EU. A public consultation on the proposal was undertaken in early 2024 and stakeholder engagement is ongoing. In May 2024 the Council adopted its negotiating mandate. The trilogue negotiations between the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission commenced on 20th November 2024.

The General Product Safety Regulation was transposed on time in December 2024. The GPSR lays down essential rules on the safety of consumer products placed/made available on the EU market. The GPSR applies to all consumer products for which no specific safety provisions are provided in other EU legislation. The Department hosted several information sessions on the GPSR to both industry and market surveillance authorities.

Next steps

Assessment has begun on the transposition requirements of the PLD and IMERA Omnibus and it is expected that the transposition deadlines will be met.

3.2 Corporate Services Division



Role of Corporate Services Division:

The role of Corporate Services Division is to support the Department to deliver on its strategic goals. This is done through providing people supports, budget and accounting, technology solutions, legal advice, internal and external communications services, governance frameworks, management support to the Secretary General and Ministerial Offices, and facilities management. Many of the functions within corporate services are underpinned by various national and EU rules and legislative requirements and feature in annual audits by the Comptroller and Auditor General as part of the Department's Appropriation Account. The Division is also highly integrated with wider shared services provided for the Civil Service (Public Jobs, National Shared Services Office, Office of Government Chief Information Officer, Government Information Services, Office of Public Works, Office of Government Procurement).

The key priorities and strategic issues for Corporate Services Division include:

Development of a three-year Corporate Services Plan

A three-year strategic plan will be developed in Q1, 2025. It will set out high-level objectives to be delivered over the coming years to support and enable the Department and our Offices to fulfil their mandate within a rapidly evolving workplace environment. It will be a partner document to the Department's Statement of Strategy and will be aimed at enabling the organisation to deliver on this. Set out below are a range of areas that the plan and Division will focus on.

Strategic financial management

The Department developed a five-year capital plan in 2024 and will develop this further in 2025 as a basis for planning, monitoring and further engagement with DPENDR on additional funding needed for strategic multi-annual projects. The Finance Unit works closely with the Minister and Ministerial Advisors on preparing for the annual Estimates process, to secure a positive Budget settlement. It also prepares the Minister for meetings of the Oireachtas Select Committee on Enterprise where the Estimate is discussed.

The Department is scheduled to migrate to Financial Management Shared Services as part of Wave 4. This is currently scheduled for 2026 and will impact on how the Department presents its appropriation account.

Embed excellent blended working practices

The Department is currently undertaking a second in-depth review of our Blended Working Policy. At present, the Department maintains a working pattern of at least 2 days per week working in the office, and more where business needs require it. CSD will continue to work with managers and staff to ensure that best practice is developed and implemented consistently. The Department has done significant work in this regard publishing a National Remote Work Strategy, a report developed during COVID called Connected Teams which focussed on excellent remote working practices, and more recently our Blended Working Policy which introduced the practice of using Anchor Days and Team Charters.

Further develop management and leadership capabilities

Blended working requires good leadership and management practices. DETE have invested in this for many years as one of the main keys to organisational performance. Ongoing supports and development programmes will continue, and a specific programme will be developed and rolled out in 2025. Areas of focus will be:

- Mandatory training for new managers
- Performance Management
- Team coaching
- Management styles
- Policies and procedures
- Mentoring
- Leadership skills and development

Integrate the new Capability Framework into our learning and development programmes

We will roll out the new Capability Framework that has recently been rolled out by Public Jobs. The Framework provides an excellent framework for developing and targeting learning and development training programmes to particular grades.

Programme of staff engagement, collaboration and innovation

The Department convenes staff throughout the year in various configurations (everyone, grade-based fora, senior leaders) at events to discuss and work through various issues. These in-person events have become even more crucial in a blended working environment. In 2025, there will be a focus on the Organisation Capability Review and the project to relocate staff located in Earlsfort Terrace into Kildare St. The Department will also put in place an Innovation Partnership with an academic partner to build on UCD innovation workshops that took place throughout 2024. This partnership will focus on applying design thinking and innovative methodologies to build capabilities and find solutions to problems facing businesses.

Governance

The Corporate Services Division supports colleagues across the Department in fulfilling their statutory requirements including in terms of data protection, freedom of information, ethics in public office, protected disclosures, the code of practice for the governance of State Bodies, procurement, health and safety and records management.

Management of buildings and project to consolidate our staff into Kildare St

The Department and our Offices are located over several different buildings:

Department/Office	Location	Other tenants	Indicative DETE Staff Numbers per location
Department	23 Kildare Street, D2	D/TCAGSM	c. 344
Department	Block C, Earlsfort Centre, D2	Private sector	c. 219
Department	59 Dawson Street, D2	n/a	c. 28
Workplace Relations Commission Labour Court	Lansdowne House, Lansdowne Road, D4	Revenue Commissioners	c.132 combined (WRC & Labour Court)
Companies Registration Office	Bloom House, Gloucester Street, D1	Various (public & private)	c. 82
Companies Registration Office Workplace Relations Commission	O'Brien Road, Carlow	CRO & WRC share location	c.114 combined
Intellectual Property Office of Ireland	Government Buildings, Lower Hebron Road, Kilkenny	Various public sector bodies	c. 55
Workplace Relations Commission (small regional offices with c 11-12 staff per location)	(i) Elysian Building, Eglington Street, Cork (ii) Marino House, Finisklin Business Park, Sligo (iii) Clare Technology Park, Gort Road, Ennis, Co Clare.	Various public and private sector tenants	C. 31 in total

In terms of the Department itself, it is spread over three buildings, Kildare St, Earlsfort Terrace and Dawson St. In February 2026, the lease on Earlsfort Terrace comes to an end and the landlord has confirmed to OPW that it will not be extended. The Department is working with OPW to relocate staff from Earlsfort Terrace into Kildare St. This will be possible due to staff from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, the Gaeltacht, Sport and Media moving out of Kildare St by February 2025. The space vacated will provide room for most staff. The Department may also need to occupy additional space in Lansdowne Road (which the WRC occupies part of).

This represents a significant opportunity to reduce costs for the exchequer, consolidate our footprint, reduce carbon emissions, increase energy efficiency and provide for closer collaboration across Divisions of the Department that are currently geographically separated. It will require significant planning and implementation to ensure that Kildare St is reconfigured and all records, furniture and ICT is moved safely and within the deadline of February 2026.

Climate Action Roadmap 2024

The Climate Action Plan set out a Public Service Mandate under which public bodies are required to adhere to and report under four headings; our targets, our people, our way of working and our buildings & vehicles. DETE's second Climate Action Roadmap was published in July 2024 and sets out how the Department (excluding Offices and Agencies) is delivering this Mandate. Led by

our Climate and Sustainability Champion, (Assistant Secretary Corporate Services) the Department is committed to realising the ambitious targets for emissions reduction by 2030. Our Climate Action Roadmap sets out how we are reducing emissions and our commitment to meeting our decarbonisation and sustainability targets and will be reviewed annually in line with the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate.

The Department has a proven track record in climate action. Our overall emissions have fallen from approximately 749 tCO₂ in the baseline year to 369 tCO₂ in 2023, representing a 49% total decrease. The Department has also maintained an overall improving trajectory against baseline figures with a reduction in overall energy consumption and improved energy efficiency. We have a long standing internal green team which over the past four years has facilitated the delivery of many significant decarbonisation initiatives, several in collaboration with partners in the OPW and SEAI. We are currently on track to meet our targets in respect of energy efficiency but will need to consolidate our building footprint and make certain changes to meet our carbon emissions target.

Development of AI and Cyber Security Plans

As supporting pillars to the overarching Corporate Services Strategy, work has commenced on the development of discrete plans in relation to cyber security and AI. The Department is further strengthening our security posture and aligning this to best practice frameworks such as the National Cyber Security Centre's Public Sector Cyber Security Baseline Standard and the NIS2 Directive. Amongst other things this will also situate the Management Board in a strong governance function in relation to cyber security.

We also aim to position DETE as an exemplar in the use of AI across the public service aligned to Here for Good, the National AI strategy. A series of immediate and longer-term actions and initiatives are being designed to broaden the use of AI across the Department as well as developing an ethical and governance framework.

ICT Unit will continue to develop the Department's services to end-users and work with colleagues across Government on simplifying the 'life event' of 'starting a business'. The Department has recently launched a new online application for Export Authorisations for dual use goods and will launch a new system for Inward Investment Screening in the new year. Significant progress has been made during 2024 on a new public-facing system for Employment Permits which will go live in early 2025 and the Department is working bilaterally with Dept. of Justice on a project to converge immigration and employment permit processing to support Ireland's future implementation of the EU Single Permit Directive.

Risk, Business Continuity Planning and Emergency Planning

The Department actively manages risk and has governance structures to ensure that this is considered by the management board on a quarterly basis and more regularly when merited. A new framework to strengthen Business Continuity Planning has been developed and will be rolled out in 2025 to ensure that risks are identified and mitigated around the delivery of critical business functions within the Department and its Offices.

In addition to this, a greater level of support is being provided by the Department to the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning with more frequent weather events requiring the activation of the Flood Relief scheme administered by the Red Cross in response to flood damage in insured nondomestic properties (businesses, voluntary organisations etc.). We also input to the Department's position on potential emergency scenarios which are documented in the

National Risk Assessment. The Department is becoming more centrally involved in this process in light of geo-political shifts to a more interventionist industrial policy.

Communicate impactfully the work of the Department to stakeholders

The Corporate Communications Unit actively promotes the work of the Minister and the Department in close co-operation with Ministerial advisors and other Departmental units. Collaboration, transparency and unity across the Department, including all offices and agencies, is a key objective to deliver coherent and impactful messaging and effectively engage with the Department's broad range of stakeholders. With one of Government's most followed social media accounts (LinkedIn), proactive digital communications are a crucial focus, evidenced in promotion of the Department's priority areas such as sustainability, digitisation and business supports.

In 2025, the recently established events team will be operationalised and will provide a consistent, professional service to the delivery of Departmental events. The Department is also committed to expanding our digital offering and using storytelling and testimonials to engage our stakeholders and create greater accreditation for the work of the Department through proactive branding applications.

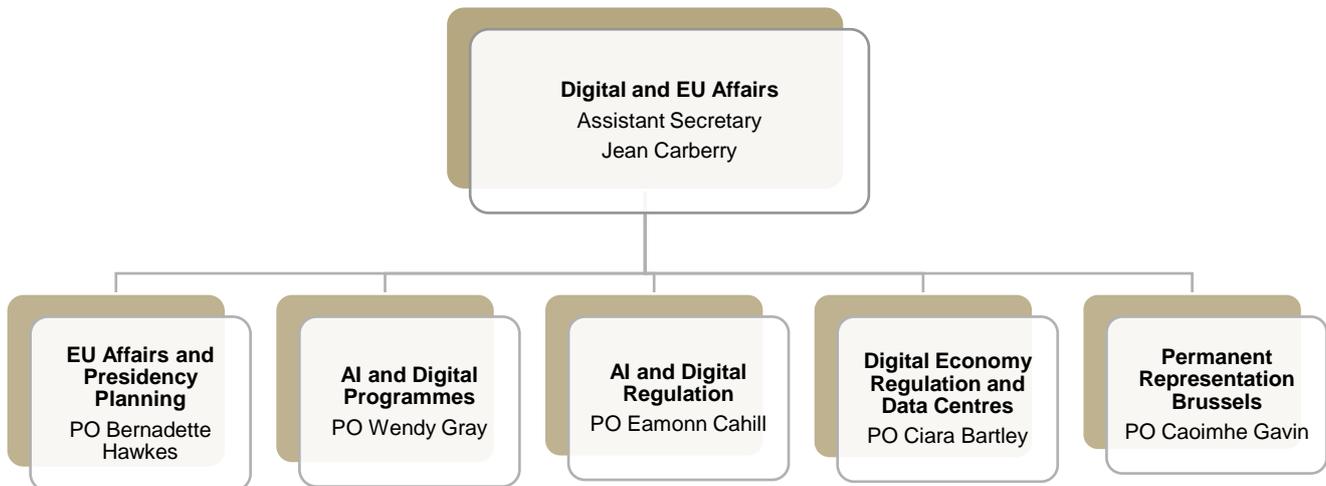
Legal support

The Legal Unit provides the Department and the Minister with independent and objective legal advice. There are four legal advisors in the Unit, three of whom are on secondment from the Office of the Attorney General. There is also a company law legal advisor embedded within the CCC Division.

The Unit provides the Department with legal advice on all General Schemes of Bills from an early stage in their development to their conclusion. For example, it advises on the Employment (Restriction of Certain Mandatory Retirement Ages) Bill, the Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill 2024 and the Industrial Development (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. It also provides technical legal advice on EU transposition measures. The EU is increasingly relying on regulations to implement European law, and these transpositions often require primary legislation.

The Unit also keeps up to date on all major litigation involving the Department, particularly where such litigation threatens the Department's operations/legislation.

3.3 Digital and EU Affairs Division



Role of the Digital and EU Affairs Division

The Digital and EU Affairs Division plays an important role in driving the Digital transition and influencing the EU agenda. The Division leads in driving domestic digital and AI programmes and policy for businesses and leading on EU and national digital strategies including the EU Digital Decade and the National AI Strategy. It also leads on negotiation and implementation of EU Digital regulations including the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Act, the Artificial Intelligence Act and the Data Act. On the EU side, the division coordinates Ireland's position at the EU Competitiveness Council, advances the Department's EU agenda across government and in Brussels, and leads on the Department's preparations for Ireland's EU Presidency in 2026.

The key priorities and strategic issues for Digital and EU Affairs Division are:

DIGITAL POLICY

Support the Digital Transition in Irish Enterprise and lead on delivery of the National AI Strategy

PfG Commitment 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, 7.24, 7.25

Digitalisation is one of the most effective levers to narrow the productivity gap between multinationals and the indigenous SME sector. Digital tools are also an important factor in competitiveness, so businesses must adopt technology if they don't want to be left behind.

DETE is leading the implementation of the Enterprise Pillar of the **National Digital Strategy** to develop a strong digital ecosystem for SMEs and drive the digitalisation of enterprises in Ireland. The strategy set targets of 90% of SMEs having at least basic digital intensity, and at least 75% take-up of AI, Cloud, and Data Analytics by 2030.

DETE coordinates and provides secretariat to the **Enterprise Digital Advisory Forum (EDAF)**, chaired at Ministerial level, which meets four times per year. The EDAF was established to provide a focused body for Government to hear the views of enterprise, representative bodies, and experts on adoption of digital technologies by industry. It supports implementation of the National Digital Strategy and provides a setting for enterprise to provide feedback to Government on the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation.

DETE has a range of digital transition funding schemes available for enterprise through IDA, EI and the LEOs. In June 2022, the Department launched the €85m **Digital Transition Fund (DTF)**, which is being funded through Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan, to drive increased digitalisation and improved productivity across enterprises. The DTF is being used to provide direct financial support to companies as well as to fund the establishment of European Digital Innovation Hubs in Ireland. It was also used to develop the **Grow Digital Portal**, a website which helps businesses self-assess their digital capability and offers information on digitalisation and state supports available to small businesses including:

- Grow Digital Voucher – to help implement recommended digital interventions from the Grow Digital Portal;
- LEOs Digital for Business – which provides expert digital consultants to help businesses on their digital journey;
- Cyber Security Review – this enables organisations to engage cyber security experts to conduct comprehensive reviews.

AI is a sector with enormous potential, and Ireland has been very successful in recent years in attracting investment from cutting edge global AI companies such as Open AI and Anthropic. The ambition for AI set out in the AI strategy, together with Ireland's commitment to a well-resourced and coherent approach to regulation are important elements of our value proposition. We also work closely with Enterprise Ireland to support innovative AI start-ups and scale ups. Wide availability of new Generative AI models, which can generate synthetic text, images, audio, video, and software, will have significant implications for the way most businesses operate and for their competitiveness. Working with the enterprise agencies and the business representative bodies, DETE will help businesses to understand the implications of AI for their business model and drive the uptake of AI technologies.

Building public trust in AI is at the heart of **Ireland's AI Strategy**. An AI Advisory Council, chaired by Dr Patricia Scanlon, was established in January 2024 following a call for expressions of interest for an initial period of two years, to provide independent expert advice to government on artificial intelligence policy. Its mandate also includes public engagement to continue to build confidence in the use of trustworthy AI. Since its establishment the members of the Council have participated in hundreds of events, panel discussions, media interviews, podcasts and other public engagements.

Next Steps

We will continue to help companies to embrace digital tools for driving efficiencies and productivity and for marketing and selling online. DETE will run a targeted online campaign to raise awareness of the Grow Digital Portal and the financial supports and advice available for adoption of digital technologies, including AI.

We will continue to implement the AI Strategy to ensure that Ireland remains an attractive location for investment, both homegrown and foreign, and to ensure that the Irish AI ecosystem works together coherently to drive AI-led new product development, innovation, productivity and growth.

The AI Advisory Council has established several subgroups in line with its Terms of Reference to examine a range of important issues, including providing advice to D/PENDR on draft guidelines on AI use in the public service and to D/Education on guidelines for school leaders on AI in schools. It is also examining the commercialisation of AI research in Ireland and how AI might impact the future of work in Ireland.

Influencing Future EU Digital Policy

PfG Commitment 7.1, 7.3

Ireland is a founder member of the **D9+**, an affiliation of 13 digitally ambitious EU Member States, which meets at Ministerial level twice per year, including in April 2024 in Ireland. Through this group Ireland is part of an influential coalition which advocates for an effective balance between innovation and regulation. The European Commission (DG CONNECT) also attends at Director General level, and meetings are held in parallel with the B9+, the business organisations (i.e. Ibec) from the D9+ Member States.

National Strategic Roadmap for the Digital Decade and DESI (Digital Economy and Society Index)

DETE coordinates the Irish plan for the Digital Decade, which is the European Commission's EU-wide digital strategy. In November 2023, Ireland submitted our National Strategic Roadmap for the Digital Decade to the Commission, detailing all policies, measures and actions being taken towards achieving the 2030 objectives. Each year (July) the Commission publishes a State of the Digital Decade Report that includes recommendations for each Member States and its annual DESI ranking MS on digital progress. This annual report is closely monitored by stakeholders, including potential investors in Ireland.

Data Centre Policy

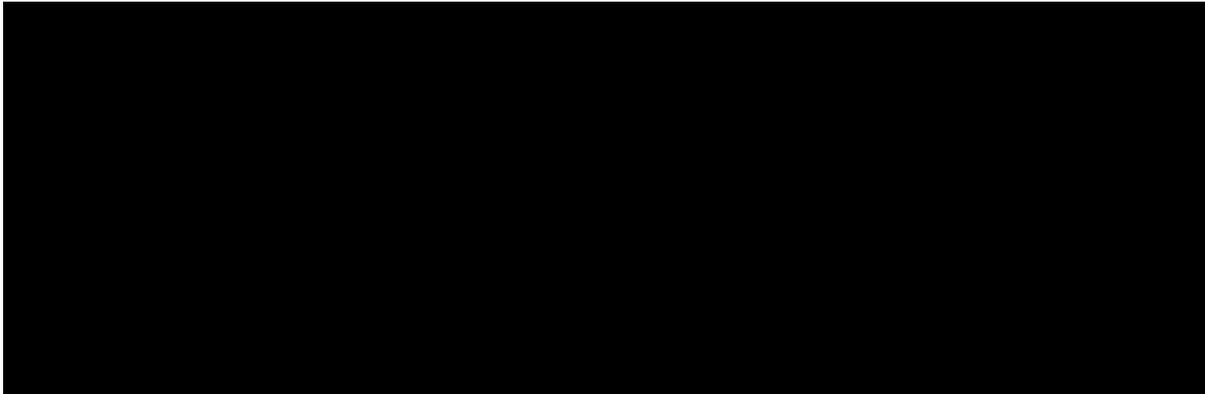
PfG Commitments 7.14, 7.15, 7.20, 7.21, 7.22

There are circa 80 data centres with a huge variety in size, energy use and ownership in Ireland. Data centres are an essential part of Ireland's digital infrastructure, with an economic impact that extends far beyond the physical assets. They also underpin other valuable investment in Ireland by the technology sector. Unlike many other EU member States, Ireland does not have much energy intensive heavy industry. However, we are the World's largest exporter of ICT services, underpinned by our data centres. Nonetheless, the economic benefit must be balanced against energy security considerations and our carbon commitments.

In recent years, Ireland's energy infrastructure, which is undergoing a transformative decarbonisation process, has been constrained, and this has negatively impacted energy connections for data centres in the near to medium term.

A revised Government policy statement on data centres was published in July 2022 and sets a direction for sustainable Data Centre development – taking account of the need for decarbonisation of our energy system, the current constraints on the electricity system in the short-to-medium term, and the need to move towards a digital economy. Work is ongoing to provide clarity to inform future investment in data centre assets.

Current Position



DIGITAL REGULATION

EU AI Act Implementation

PfG Commitment 7.2, 7.3

The EU Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act is designed to protect people's health, safety and fundamental rights and to simultaneously promote the adoption of human-centric, trustworthy AI. It sets out harmonised rules for placing on the market, and using, AI systems in the EU, and applies to both public and private sector uses of AI. It is a targeted, risk-based instrument, not a blanket regulation on all uses of AI.

Current Position

The Act came into effect in August 2024 and its provisions will apply, in a phased manner, over the period to August 2027. DETE has lead responsibility for national implementation of the Act and is working with other Departments and relevant State bodies to this end. Ireland fulfilled its first obligation under the Act in October 2024, when it identified nine authorities with responsibility for protecting fundamental rights under the Act.

Next Steps

- Secure Government approval for the configuration of national competent authorities to be responsible for enforcing the Act. These authorities must be designated before August 2025.
- Implement in national law the penalties for infringement of the Act – these are substantial: fines of up to €35M, or 7% global turnover. This must also be completed before August 2025.
- Raise awareness in enterprise about its obligations under the Act.

EU Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act

The EU Digital Services Act (DSA) regulates providers of online platforms, including social media and search engines, to promote online safety and expedite the removal of illegal content. The EU Digital Markets Act (DMA) is a competition instrument that regulates gatekeepers who control access to digital services such as online marketplaces.

Current Position

Ireland has a critical and high-profile role in the enforcement of the DSA - with 15 of the 25 Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines designated under the Act having their main establishment here. DETE works closely with Coimisiún na Meán, which is Ireland's Digital Services Coordinator, and the lead regulator for the DSA. Five of the seven designated gatekeepers under the DMA are established in Ireland. The DMA is enforced by the European Commission, but it can seek the assistance of Ireland's CCPC

Transposition of the EU Data Act

PfG Commitment 7.1

The EU Data Act aims to enhance the EU's data economy and foster a competitive data market by making data (in particular industrial data) more accessible and usable, encouraging data-driven innovation and increasing data availability. To achieve this, the Data Act ensures fairness in the allocation of the value of data amongst the actors in the data economy. It clarifies *who* can use *what* data and under *which* conditions.

Current Position

The Data Act entered into force on 11 January 2024 and will be applicable from 12 September 2025.

Next Steps

- Determine the best configuration of the remaining national competent authorities for the effective and efficient implementation of the Act.
- Progress the necessary domestic legislation in accordance with legal advice, ensuring that the regulatory authorities have appropriate powers for their enforcement obligations by Q3 2025.

Future EU digital regulation

A large body of EU digital regulation has been enacted over the past eight years, and there have been calls from almost all member States for a pause while we take stock and focus on bedding in the existing corpus. Notwithstanding that, it is likely that the new Commission will bring forward some new digital regulation – with digital fairness, for example, an issue that has been flagged by President Von der Leyen.

EU POLICY

Leading Ireland's engagement and influence at the EU Competitiveness Council (COMPET), especially on Single Market and industry issues

PfG Commitment 1.7, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13

DETE takes the lead role at COMPET Council, with DETE's Minister representing Ireland at Council meetings. The Council normally meets in a formal session four times a year in Brussels, with an informal session once during each Presidency in the country of the member state hosting the Presidency. Many important legislative files and initiatives that affect Irish businesses and consumers are discussed and approved by COMPET Council. These cut across: company law and consumer issues, SME and state aid policy, better regulation, internal market and intellectual property.





Next Steps

Following the European elections in mid-2024, the new Commission introduced its work programme in December 2024. This will direct the European legislative programme for the next five years. Competitiveness has been clearly flagged as a priority for the EU, with European Competitiveness under threat in the current geopolitical climate. This focus will see COMPET Council play a key role in promoting legislative changes in the coming five years. Many of these competitiveness challenges are mirrored in the Irish economy.



Furthering the Department's agenda in Brussels

The Division has a team in the Permanent Representation in Brussels, which leads on the Department's Coreper 2 (COMPET etc.) agenda. The team act as our eyes and ears in Brussels, building and maintaining strong networks with other member States and relevant Commission officials. They are embedded in the policy ecosystem of the working parties and Councils they serve - understanding the content and political issues at play, with effective cooperation and collaboration with DETE HQ. They also play an important role in horizon scanning and providing early warning of likely policy shifts in the EU. The team will play a key role in our Presidency, including chairing all Brussels based committees.

Progress the Department's planning for the EU Presidency in 2026

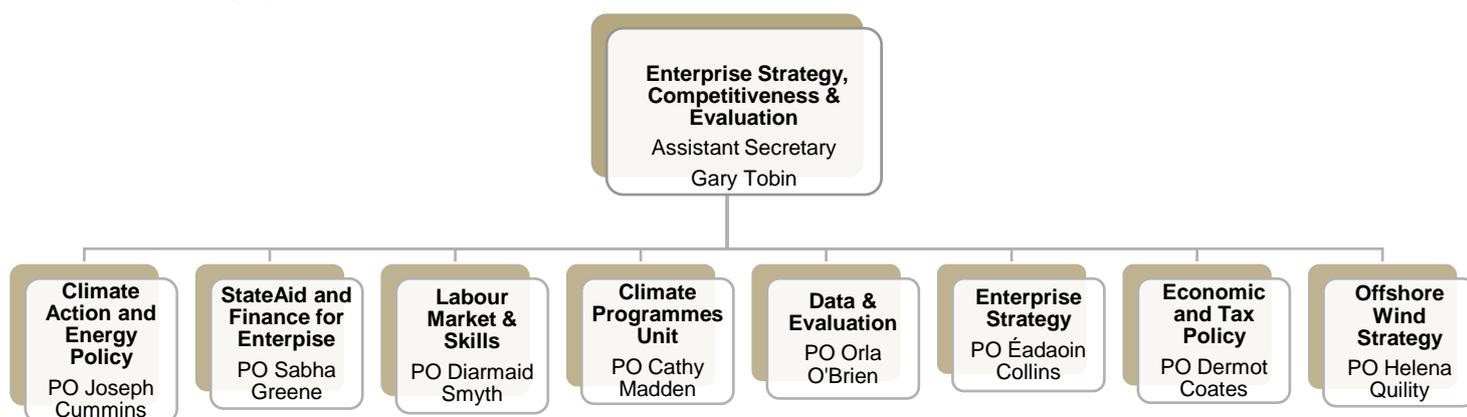
Ireland will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2026. As part of the Presidency, DETE Ministers will chair various configurations of COMPET, FAC and EPSCO Councils. This is an opportunity for Ireland to influence policy and legislation and be recognised as a leader among Member States. The reputation gained while holding the Presidency will stand to Ireland's credit in influencing future policy and legislation long after the term of the Presidency.

A successful Presidency will be measured in terms of legislative files and policy initiatives advanced and in the positive perception of events held in Ireland over the six months. DETE is currently planning for over twenty Presidency events.

Current Position and next steps

The EU Affairs and Presidency Planning Unit is engaging with the Departments of Foreign Affairs and An Taoiseach, and across the Department, on Presidency Planning Preparation. A sub-committee of the Management Board has been set up to guide policy priorities. Work is well progressed on mapping DETE policy priorities, planning for events and putting the necessary resources in place. Ireland and its trio partners, Lithuania and Greece will step up their engagements and preparatory activities from January 2025 onwards when the immediate trio partner predecessors (Poland, Denmark and Cyprus) commence their term. As part of this, Ministerial engagement with Member States and EU Institutions will also increase.

3.4 Enterprise Strategy, Competitiveness & Evaluation Division



ASSOCIATED BODIES:

Microfinance Ireland	Des McCarthy – CEO
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Role of the Enterprise Strategy, Competitiveness & Evaluation Division:

The Enterprise Strategy, Competitiveness and Evaluation Division works closely with other Divisions in the Department and with other Government departments with the aim of ensuring that policy supports a strong, competitive enterprise sector. The Division provides evidence-based support to the work of the Department and works with other Government departments to enhance the business environment in areas such as skills, climate action, taxation, energy policy and infrastructure, competitiveness and productivity. The Division supports the work of, and provides the Secretariat for, three independent bodies that operate under the aegis of the Department: the Low Pay Commission, the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPD) and the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). The Division leads on the overall Irish position in EU State Aid policy matters. It also has responsibility for policy on financing business, including public investment, in innovative companies from start-up/seed through to scaling up, and debt in the form of State backed loan schemes. The Division has oversight of several financing programmes, such as credit guarantee and loan schemes, engagement with Microfinance Ireland, and the investment funds of the Seed & Venture Capital Scheme and the Irish Innovation Seed Fund.

The key priorities and strategic issues for the Enterprise Strategy, Competitiveness & Evaluation Division are:

Accelerating the Green Transition in Irish Enterprise

PfG Commitment 7.16, 7.17, 7.18

The Minister for ETE has responsibility under the *Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021* to reduce Industry on-site emissions (manufacturing, inc. cement and alumina) by 20% by 2025 and 35% by 2030, while on-site emissions from the heating of commercial buildings must be reduced by 20% by 2025 and 45% by 2030.

Current Position

DETE is working with DECC on a range of industry abatement actions under the Climate Action Plan 2024, including through the Heat and Built Environment Taskforce. To achieve the required abatement and the associated levels of investment, businesses require clear, long-term policy signals about the pathway Government has chosen to achieve decarbonisation. Delivery of this Department's emissions reductions targets is further dependent on infrastructure, planning, licensing and energy policy changes to be delivered elsewhere in the Government system. In June 2024, the *Roadmap for the Decarbonisation of Industrial Heat* was published and outlines the necessary trajectory to meet industry decarbonisation targets. Additional ringfenced funding of €300m was provided alongside the publication to drive the decarbonisation of our industrial sector. It is expected that the *Roadmap for the Decarbonisation of Commercial Buildings* will be published very shortly.

Next Steps

Under the Heat and Built Environment Taskforce, the Unit is progressing:

- Publication of a *Roadmap for the Decarbonisation of Commercial Buildings*
- Measures to enable the electrification of heat, ensuring that it is a competitive decarbonisation pathway.
- The promotion of biomass as a decarbonised heat source, with case studies signalling to industry the viability and opportunities to switch to biomass.
- Work with DAFM and DECC to support the growth of a biomethane ecosystem in Ireland in line with the National Biomethane Strategy, so that decarbonised gas available to suitable industrial sites.
- Engaging with businesses, through the Climate Programmes Unit and enterprise agencies, to better inform policy landscape to accelerate and incentivise investment by manufacturers that removes emissions and facilitates net zero output growth.

Drive the uptake and implementation of a comprehensive suite of climate programmes to incentivise and accelerate decarbonisation of enterprise.

PfG Commitment 7.19

The Climate Programmes Unit was established to accelerate the decarbonisation of Irish industry. Under the Government's Climate Action Plan, industry is required to reduce emissions by 20% by 2025 and 35% by 2030, on 2018 levels.

Current Position

Large emitters

In 2022, industrial emissions accounted for 9.7% of Ireland's total emissions, the vast majority of which (93%) are accounted for in the client base of Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. They are highly concentrated in a group of manufacturing companies in the cement, alumina, food & beverage, pharmaceutical and chemicals sectors. As it stands the EPA is projecting that the industry sector will exceed its 2026-2030 sectoral ceiling by 39%. Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland are working with the top emitters in their client portfolios (around 30 companies in total) to develop impactful decarbonisation plans. These plans are at a mature stage.

Recognising that these plans would not happen without State Aid however, it was announced in June 2024 that €300 million in funding was available for the decarbonisation of Ireland's large industrial emitters between now and 2030. This announcement has had a positive impact on the agencies' pipeline of projects, and as at the end of 2024, EI and IDA approvals under the scheme stood at approx. €54m, [REDACTED]

European funding is also available to industry to decarbonise. The **€55 million Green Transition Fund** is aimed at helping businesses to move away from fossil fuels towards more sustainable, cheaper alternatives. From its launch in June 2022 up to end September 2024, €14.7m in funding was approved for 443 projects, with €2.1m paid out to companies.

SMEs and Micro companies

While not large emitters, it is crucial that our SMEs also become more sustainable. This can mean businesses taking steps to reduce water, electricity and gas bills, or simply their waste. Sustainability is good for businesses as it reduces costs, thereby increasing competitiveness. Over the past year, DETE has been working closely with SME representative bodies around how to increase sustainability levels in businesses. This includes agreeing coherent and simple messaging, commissioning research on what motivates businesses to become sustainable, and working with the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and the SEAI to drive the uptake of their energy related financial supports.

- LEOs offer the [Energy Efficiency Grant](#), which supports the investment in technologies and equipment of enterprises grants of between €750 to €10,000 to cover 75% of eligible costs. Grant terms were improved in 2024, and since then the number of grant approvals has significantly increased. As of November 2024, 136 grants have been approved to a value of nearly €1m.
- The SEAI meanwhile recently announced the [Building Energy Upgrade Scheme](#), which provides a range of supports to assist the business, agricultural, public body, or non-profit sector to introduce energy efficient and renewable measures into their buildings.

Next Steps

Large Emitters

- Continue to actively work with the Department's large industry decarbonisation group (made up of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland and the SEAI) to address barriers and identify incentives which will further accelerate the decarbonisation of Irish industry.
- Hold a roundtable with slow to abate sectors, focusing on the importance of decarbonisation for improving their business's competitiveness.
- Work with the large emitters group and the CSO to ensure that the data used to capture Ireland's industrial emissions, and any reductions in same, is robust.

SMEs

- Act on the findings of research currently underway and use it to shape the Department's 'Sustainability is good for business campaign'.
- Assess the effectiveness of the Department's pilot webinar with Dublin Chamber and Dublin City LEO to 'workshop' the grant application process for the Energy Efficiency Grant, with a view to replicating the event nationwide.

Progress Decarbonisation of Ireland's Cement sector

PfG Commitment 7.18

The cement sector accounts for c. 43% of Ireland's total industry emissions, of which approximately one third is combustion emissions from burning fuel to heat the cement kiln, with the two thirds are 'industrial process' emissions.

Current Position

The cement sector is understood globally as a 'hard to abate' sector. In the short-to-medium-term, shifting over 90% of fuel inputs away from fossil fuels to lower carbon fuel sources is a key objective. Significant R&D is also underway on 'alternative cementitious materials'. Carbon capture and storage technology is scientifically established, but not yet deployed at commercial scale internationally. Decarbonisation investments in this sector are likely to be capital intensive and require significant incentivisation. In May 2024 DETE published an independent report '*Reducing Embodied Carbon in Cement and Concrete Through Public Procurement in Ireland*'. The Unit has since developed a set of public procurement guidance, and an action plan, through the cross-Departmental Cement and Construction Decarbonisation Working Group chaired by DETE.

This guidance was issued to all government departments and Local Authorities and came into effect from September 2024, with some aspects to come into effect in 2025 and 2026.

Next Steps

M/ETE should meet with representatives of the cement sector to drive ambition, and officials will continue with their bilateral engagement with stakeholders on the public sector guidance. Actions agreed by the Working Group include a cross-Departmental working group on Carbon Capture and Storage (jointly chaired by DECC and DETE), and engagement on new product standards with NSAI.

Advocating for Enterprise-friendly Energy Policy

PfG commitment 7.22

Ireland's economic resilience now depends on access to affordable, renewable energy for enterprise customers small and large. The Department engages with DECC on energy policy matters with a focus both on the cost and the speed of transition in our energy system and its impact on enterprises.

Current Position

Ireland is one of the most expensive energy markets in the EU and is already feeling the impact of this competitiveness deficit in Ireland's ability to attract new investment in energy intensive sectors. While Ireland's wholesale prices are only marginally higher than other jurisdictions, our cost of grid is multiples of peer locations and looks only set to rise as we undergo a very large investment in energy infrastructure and connection of renewables. The electricity grid needs huge levels of investment to integrate renewables, but we also must be aware of its impact on the economy's competitiveness. To deliver price competitiveness over the medium-term, Government needs to deliver a diversified energy system, with significant support for energy efficiency, alongside independent regulation that protects consumers and delivers efficient, competitive energy retail and wholesale markets. Certainty is needed to enable investment, and we cannot allow energy concerns and costs make Ireland a less attractive location for businesses to invest in compared to other EU jurisdictions.

Next Steps

Progress actions for all enterprises, and particularly Large Energy Users (LEUs), arising out of the CRU National Energy Demand Strategy

- Engagement with DECC on the *Security of Supply Review* and policy option choices.
- Advocate for and facilitate better data and reporting of LEU electricity emissions carbon intensity through SEAI led research programme

- Continue to develop the Large Energy Users Action Plan post 2030/2035 (LEAP 2035) - key areas for cross-Government attention are an update on spatial planning and energy market regulation to allow for offshore wind and adjacent industrial development, progress on private wire legislation, delivery of significant investment in our electricity grid, and prioritising measures that enhance the commercial attractiveness of electrification versus a continued use of fossil fuel.

Implement the Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy

PfG Commitment 7.7, 7.8, 7.9, 7.10, 7.11

The Government set a target in CAP 2023 to provide 80% of Ireland's electricity from renewable sources by 2030. At least 5GW of this is to come from offshore wind energy (OWE). Ireland's total Offshore Renewable Energy capacity is expected to increase to at least 37GW by 2050, with the majority of this expected to be delivered from OWE. To enable the rollout of vast quantities of OWE generation capacity in Ireland over the coming years, DETE published *Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy* in March 2024. This strategy will ensure that Ireland captures the value of the supply chain to deliver an OWE sector of scale and maximises the economic impact of the future end-uses of this renewable energy. It includes 40 actions to be completed by end 2025.

Current Position

The implementation phase for the Strategy began upon publication in March 2024. Of these 40 actions, were due for delivery in 2024, with four actions having been completed already. A further 27 actions are in progress with all but one of the remaining actions to be initiated in 2025. One action to "*Develop a plan to promote engagement with and use of existing marine test sites*" will not be progressed due to a judicial review on the SmartBay site in Galway and delays to the AMETS site in Mayo. Two notable actions underway are: 37 '*Commission a sectoral assessment of energy park concepts*', and 25 '*Progressing the development of an Offshore Wind Centre of Excellence (OWCE)*'. Funding for the OWCE was allocated in Budget 2025, and Steering Groups have been established to progress both actions.

Next Steps

DETE will oversee the implementation of the industrial strategy's actions, maintaining close contact with action owners across departments and agencies through its Interdepartmental Group, RD&I Working Group and through membership of the Offshore Wind Delivery Taskforce.

Progress the economic development potential of the Shannon Estuary region

PfG Commitment 7.12

The independent Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce was established in response to a Programme for Government commitment to support the region in devising an economic development plan. The Taskforce published its final report in July 2023 which included national policy proposals and recommendations for regional initiatives covering offshore and onshore renewable energy, security of energy supply and energy cost competitiveness, and targeted initiatives across the transport, logistics, and tourism sectors. The work of the Taskforce concluded upon the publication of its report. The Taskforce recommended that DETE coordinate the response to its Report with DETE publishing implementation updates in December 2023 and July 2024.

Current Position

Of the 89 recommended actions contained in the Report, 21 are completed, 40 are in progress, 13 are under consideration, and 15 will not be progressed as recommended.

Next Steps

The Taskforce recommended that a regional implementation group be established, comprised of relevant statutory bodies in the region and supported by a small project management team funded initially through central or local government. Establishment of such a group would be beneficial for the delivery of the targeted regional actions proposed by the Taskforce which fall outside the remit of central government.

Oversee the implementation of existing and future Ecodesign regulations

DETE is also responsible for the implementation of existing Ecodesign legislation and ensuring that appropriate institutional arrangements are in place for the implementation of the expanded Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), and that Irish industry is informed of its obligations. ESPR applies to almost all products, with the aim of changing the way we design, make and use products by reducing the negative environmental impacts throughout a product's life cycle, increase re-use, reparability and product circularity and improving functioning of internal market.

Next Steps

Work across Government to put in place appropriate institutional arrangements for the implementation of ESPR in Ireland.

Progress DETE Data and Evaluation Projects

DETE undertakes reviews and evaluations of programmes funded through the Department's budget. Two key annual enterprise surveys produced by the Unit – the *Annual Employment Survey* and the *Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact* - monitor the employment and economic performance of the clients of EI and IDA Ireland. The survey results support purposes such as policy formation, programme evaluation and academic research.

Current Position

DETE is working with the Companies Registration Office (CRO) to build a structured database of company performance for evidence-based policy analysis. In line with commitments under the Climate Action Plan and the White Paper, DETE has begun the implementation of an updated Economic Appraisal Model for the Enterprise Agencies which embeds emissions impacts into grant funding decisions.

Next Steps

- Complete a review of the IDA Regional Property Programme
- Develop and publish a package of guidelines for the evaluation of DETE funding.
- Develop a model to assess environmental aid projects in the Enterprise Agencies
- Publish the Periodic Critical Review of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, completed in October.

Progress Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) Studies

In its capacity as the Secretariat to the EGFSN, DETE undertakes research to identify the emerging skills needs of the Irish economy. The EGFSN generally undertakes 2-3 studies as part of its annual work programme.

Current Position and next steps

The *Skills for Biopharma* and *Skills for International Financial Services* reports were published in 2024. In both cases, implementation groups have been established which will meet for a two-year period to drive delivery of the recommendations. A third EGFSN study examining the skills

required to transform Ireland's construction sector through adoption of MMC was published in July 2024. The EGFSN Secretariat will oversee the implementation of these actions over the next two years. The EGFSN last met in December to discuss its future mandate and place within Ireland's skills architecture in light of the recommendations made in the OECD review of Ireland's skills strategy, and determined its work programme for 2025, with a focus on the skills needed to support the digital and green transitions of Ireland's economy. The EGFSN Secretariat is also continuing to support the implementation of previous recommendations related to SME Management, Construction, High Level ICT, Artificial Intelligence, and Logistics and Supply Chain Management.

National Remote Work Strategy Implementation

PfG Commitment 6.7

Making Remote Work, the National Remote Work Strategy, was launched in January 2021 and identified 15 actions to be taken to ensure that remote working becomes a permanent feature of the Irish workplace in a way which maximises its economic, social and environmental benefits. Implementation of these actions has been overseen by the Remote Work Interdepartmental Group (IDG), chaired by DETE.

Current Position and next steps

The Remote Work IDG oversaw the development and implementation of the Strategy, with all 15 actions having been delivered. The IDG will continue to meet in 2025.

Progress Recommendations of the Low Pay Commission

PfG Commitment 6.1

DETE provides the Secretariat to the Low Pay Commission (LPC), the body responsible for making recommendations on the National Minimum Wage (NMW).

Living Wage

The LPC and the LPC Secretariat will be responsible for giving effect to the November 2022 Government decision to progress to a living wage by January 2026. The LPC has been tasked with recommending annual increases in the NMW to ensure it reaches the living wage of 60% of median wages by January 2026. The Secretariat will ensure adequate resourcing etc. to allow the LPC monitor the effects of the progression to the living wage.

Current Position and next steps

As per the establishing legislation, the LPC is required to submit its recommendation and annual report to the Minister before the third Tuesday in July. When making its recommendation, the LPC considers several factors, including - changes in earnings; changes in income distribution; whether un/employment has been increasing or decreasing, whether productivity has been increasing or decreasing; international comparisons; the need for job creation; and the likely effect that any proposed order will have on employment, the cost of living, and national competitiveness. Government approved the recommendation of the LPC to increase the NMW to €13.50 an hour in the context of Budget 2025. The increase will come into effect 1 January 2025. This increase in the NMW can be considered the third phase of a four-year transition to 2026, at which point the Living Wage will replace the NMW.

Sub-minimum / Youth rates of the National Minimum Wage

The statutory minimum wage for those aged under 20 is less than the full minimum wage. The question of subminimum wage rates for those aged 20 and under is an issue that receives political attention.

Current Position and next steps

On March 6th, 2024, the LPC submitted their report and recommendations on youth rates. This report was accompanied by a background research report prepared by ESRI under the terms of the LPC/ESRI Research Partnership Agreement. The report, which recommends the abolition of sub-minimum youth rates of the National Minimum Wage, was published in June 2024. The Department has commissioned an economic impact assessment of the LPC's recommendations, which is due to be completed in 2025.

Transpose the minimum wage elements of the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages

The Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages in the European Union was transposed on 15th November 2024, meeting the transposition deadline. The Directive aims to ensure that workers in the Union are protected by adequate minimum wages by increasing collective bargaining coverage, outlining requirements for minimum wage setting mechanisms and improving enforcement and monitoring of minimum wage protections.

Current Position

It was necessary to amend Ireland's National Minimum Wage Act 2000 to give effect to the Directive. This was done by way of an SI, entitled *European Union (Adequate Minimum Wages) Regulations 2024*, made under the European Communities Act 1972. The LPC was already largely already in compliance with the provisions of the Directive, although there were some minor amendments required to the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 to bring the framework completely into line with the Directive. There were no legislative changes on the collective bargaining and enforcement side because (1) the relevant provisions of the Directive are already being given effect and (2) the formulation of the action plan to promote collective bargaining does not need a legislative underpinning.

Next Steps

The Department is engaging with the WREM division, DFHERIS and D/Justice in relation to the three exemptions from the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 (close family members; statutory apprentices; and certain activities undertaken by prisoners within the prison).

Access to Debt Finance for SMEs and Microenterprises

SMEs and microenterprises can experience difficulties in accessing market credit. This is a problem across the EU but is particularly acute in Ireland. Microenterprises - in particular start-ups - often lack credit history and cannot access any market credit. Even for SMEs with a credit history, it is very difficult to access unsecured loans – a significant barrier as interest rates are significantly higher than in other EU markets. DETE develops and manages schemes to help SMEs and micros to access loans at affordable rates and favourable terms.

Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme

The €500 million Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme (GSLs), launched in September 2023, is currently available from Bank of Ireland, AIB, Finance Ireland, PTSB and Close Brothers. It provides longer-term lending to SMEs, including farmers and fishers and small mid-caps. The GSLs will operate until 30 June 2026 or until the scheme has been fully subscribed (whichever is earlier). The GSLs leverages European Investment Bank funding to address financing challenges holding back business investment.

Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme

The Ukraine Credit Guarantee Scheme was launched in January 2023. The Scheme provided up to €1.2 billion in loans for low-cost working capital and energy saving measures to SMEs, primary producers and small mid-caps. The scheme is operated by the SBCI and loans were provided by approved finance providers comprising of two banks, two non-banks and 13 Credit Unions. The Scheme closed to lending on 31 December 2024 with borrowers on the scheme obliged to make repayments over a period of up to six years.

Microfinance Ireland & the Microenterprise Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill 2024

Microfinance Ireland (MFI) was established in 2012 to provide loans to microenterprises with fewer than 10 employees and with an annual turnover of less than €2m, which do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by commercial lenders. MFI has been successful in addressing a gap in the lending market and has been responsive to emergencies such as Brexit, Covid-19 and the recent extreme weather events that disrupted many businesses. Following a Government decision on 30 May for the approval of the transfer of MFI into State Ownership, it is a priority action to progress legislation to provide for ownership of MFI to transfer from Social Finance Foundation to the Minister for ETE. This will put in place the related governance structures reflecting the increasingly vital role of State supported lending to microenterprises for job creation, and assistance to start-up and existing businesses to survive and grow in uncertain economic conditions. Government approved the *Microenterprise Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill 2024* in March. Report and Final Stage [Dáil] was completed 25 September 2024 which will be further progressed through the Seanad.

Investment Finance for Growth

PfG Commitment 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 4.5

Innovative businesses need risk capital (i.e. equity) to fund their growth. The private equity investment market has grown significantly over the last decade, but there are sections of the market that are still in need of intervention, primarily seed/start-up and scale-up. The State, through EI and the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, is a significant player at every stage of the investment cycle. Policy action will seek to encourage entrepreneurship and ensure Ireland is a viable and attractive location in which to scale companies for global success.

The Seed and Venture Capital Scheme (SVC) has been operated by EI on behalf of DETE since 1994. During this time, EI has committed more than €700m to the venture capital industry in Ireland. This funding provided essential risk capital for Irish start-ups, served as a cornerstone for early-stage funds and attracted significant levels of domestic and international private capital into the Irish funding eco-system. The current new cycle of the SVC begins on 1st January 2025 and will expire end December 2029. It has an increased budget of €75m on previous cycles bringing the total budget to €250m over the 5-year period. Enterprise Ireland launched the latest call which will close on 28 February 2025 with up to €50 million available for both Seed and Series A+ levels of funding.

The Irish Innovation Seed Fund is a €90 million fund-of-funds, launched in 2022, which invests in specialist fund managers who target high growth innovative companies. It is made up of a €30m investment from DETE, through EI, which is matched by a €30m investment from EIF, and a €30m co-investment from Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF). As a fund-of-funds, the programme will invest in other specialist fund managers who will target early-stage investments into innovative technology companies addressing some of the biggest climate & sustainability challenges, such as technology solutions for renewable energy production and storage. The first allocation of funding was announced in June 2023 when WakeUp Capital were allocated €25 million, and a further commitment of up to €20 million has been allocated to Resolve Ventures. A

third allocation of funding, subject to positive assessment and due diligence is expected to be announced in H1 2025. The commitment amount under IISF is not yet confirmed and is subject to ongoing discussions.

Finance for Scaling:

In early 2022, following consistent feedback from the market that scale ups are having difficulty accessing finance in Ireland, DETE established the Finance for Scale Ups Working Group with the aim to develop recommendations to support high potential firms to access scaling finance. The report was published in July 2024 and made three recommendations to develop the market to deliver more efficient outcomes for Irish companies with ambitions to scale-up:

1. **State Funding** - Ensure scaling finance is available by introducing & promoting funds;
2. **Private Funding** - Investigate options for pension fund and institutional investor participation in scaling equity funds and encourage corporate venturing in Ireland;
3. **Tax Incentives** - Review the State's tax model and design instruments that incentivise investment into scaling companies.

The Department is now developing these recommendations into concrete proposals, under the direction of a High-Level Implementation Oversight Group, including ISIF, EIF and SBCI. The Department expects to have largely completed this work by the end of Q3 of 2025. The successful implementation of the recommendations is expected to result in innovative Irish companies having better access to funding needed to continue to grow and expand in Ireland and align with opportunities at EU level as part of the development of Capital Markets Union.

Contribute to the development and implementation of State Aid rules to promote a level playing field and to support policy that facilitates growth, innovation, and sustainability for Irish businesses in the EU

PfG Commitment 1.4

As part of the wider push for Open-Strategic Autonomy, liberalisation of State Aid rules has come to the fore in 2023 and 2024. While the new EU policy developments including State Aid flexibilities, opens some opportunities, the overall direction of travel is unlikely to be in Ireland's interests. DETE is working with the Commission and like-minded Member States to advocate for robust control of State Aid by the Commission to ensure a level playing field between Member States.

Current Position and next steps

DETE secured agreement from the EC to examine and revise the rules pertaining to aid for businesses in difficulty which affects eligibility for State Aid across all schemes and is of significance for supporting innovative start-ups. The Rescue and Restructuring Guidelines are being extended for two years to facilitate this. In addition, DETE continues to work with the EC and other Member States in discussing important State Aid matters such as the proposed introduction of a Transport Block Exemption Regulation and revisions to Agricultural de minimis Regulation in 2025, and the proposed restructuring of the General Block Exemption Regulation by the end of 2026.

Implement the White Paper on Enterprise

Following publication of the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030, the first Implementation Plan covering the period from 2023 - 2024 was published in May 2023. The Implementation Plan details 40 key initiatives across all seven enterprise policy priorities set out in the White Paper. Progress on the White Paper is reported to the Cabinet Committee on Economy and Investment every six months, through biannual update reports developed by DETE.

Current Position

Three update reports have been delivered to date up to H1 2024. These reports provide details on progress made against the 40 initiatives set out in the Implementation Plan, as well as details on progress towards the 15 targets identified in the White Paper.

Next Steps

The fourth and final update report of the current Implementation Plan will be developed by the Department during Q1 2025, covering the period H2 2024. The Department will prepare the second biennial Implementation Plan during 2025, covering the period 2025-2026.

National Clustering Programme**PfG Commitment 1.23, 4.4**

The White Paper on Enterprise proposes the establishment of a National Clustering Programme with a target to fund up to five national cluster organisations by 2025. The aim is to encourage the formation and strengthening of national cluster organisations with a view to maximising the scale, impact and international visibility of Irish clusters. In March 2024 DETE engaged three international experts on clustering from TCI (The Competitiveness Institute) to undertake a Peer Review of the draft National Clustering Programme which had been drawn up by DETE. The TCI Peer Review has brought international clustering expertise to bear on the Programme, to ensure it is tailored to the Irish context whilst meeting international best practice.

Current Position and next steps

Prior to the outcome of the Estimates process it had been envisaged that the National Clustering Programme would be published in Q1 2025 with an open competitive call for proposals being launched in H1 2025. However, the funding secured for clustering in 2025, in the face of many competing priorities, will only support at a maximum of two clusters in 2025. It is proposed to take a pragmatic approach and consider piloting one or two established clusters which demonstrate the key elements for a national cluster in line with best practice as identified in the TCI Report. This approach will assist in building an evidence base for securing funding for up to 5 national clusters under the Programme in 2026.

Engage with EU Industrial Policy including IPCEI, and Transition Pathways**PfG Commitment 1.5**

Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI) are large-scale, multi-country projects (usually >€50million) for global state of the art innovation to address market or systemic failures in particular sectors. For Ireland, as an open and global economy at the heart of the EU, IPCEI represent a significant contribution to economic growth, jobs, the green and digital transition and competitiveness.

In June 2023, the EC approved an IPCEI in the field of Microelectronics and Communication Technologies (IPCEI ME/CT). The IPCEI ME/CT, which is the first IPCEI in which Ireland is directly participating, is expected to result in a clear innovation advantage for Europe and a competitive advantage for Ireland. The Irish participant, Analog Devices Inc. from Limerick, together with the Irish Government, is investing €630 million in this project, which will result in 600 new jobs in Limerick over the next five years, as well as an additional 520 jobs during the construction phases.

Current position and next steps

Key priorities for 2025 include securing funding for Ireland's involvement in potential future IPCEI and participating in the design of potential future IPCEI, likely to be in the area of Digital

technologies (Advanced Semiconductor Technologies and AI). The 2025 workplan also includes progressing work on other priority areas for the EU, including biotechnologies (of interest to Ireland), critical raw materials and clean connected and autonomous vehicles.

Implementation of the Net Zero Industry Act (NZIA)

The NZIA is designed to support the scaling up of the EU's net-zero manufacturing capacities and products, helping to meet Europe's climate neutrality goals, create green jobs and maintain the EU's competitiveness. It is intended to provide greater certainty to investors and promoters of net-zero technology manufacturing projects by simplifying and fast-tracking permit procedures for construction or expansion. It also aims to enhance the skills of the European workforce in these sectors, notably through net-zero industry academies.

Current position and next steps

The NZIA came into force in June 2024. It has direct effect and the timeframe for implementation for various aspects of the Act is very ambitious, with some key provisions applicable within the first 3 months to 6 months. DETE is leading on implementation of the Act. Work is progressing with the DETE legal advisors and the Interdepartmental Working Group, led by DETE and comprising of relevant Government Departments (D/Housing, DECC, DFHERIS, DFIN and DPENDR). In addition, bilateral meetings are being held with individual Departments and Agencies to identify issues and ensure delivery of related provisions in compliance with the respective deadlines.

Improve gender balance in senior business leadership

PfG Commitment 6.6, 6.9

Balance for Better Business (B4BB) is an independent, business-led Review Group established by the Government in 2018 to improve gender balance in senior business leadership in Ireland. DETE provides policy and administrative support for this initiative including on procurement, research and secretariat for the Review Group and Advisory Group. The group has set progressive voluntary targets which it monitors and reports on annually for a range of business cohorts: ISEQ20 listed companies, Other Listed Companies, Large Irish-Owned Private Companies (LIOPCs), and MNCs. The group also makes recommendations to improve gender balance on the boards and senior management teams of business and promotes the involvement of women at the top level of business.

Current Position and next steps

Having lagged the EU average for female representation on the boards and leadership teams when B4BB launched six years ago, Ireland is now a leader amongst our EU counterparts. In May 2024, B4BB set out a new 5-year strategy and set of targets. These set the ambition for 40%+ female representation by 2028 on the boards and leadership teams of all company cohorts monitored by the initiative. The Seventh Annual Report of the B4BB Review Group, and the first under this new 5-year strategy, is to be launched in February 2025. The Minister will be invited to give the opening address at this event.

Progress the work of the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)

PfG Commitment 1.1

The Council reports to the Taoiseach and the Government, through the Minister for ETE, on key competitiveness issues facing the Irish economy and offers recommendations on policy actions required to enhance Ireland's competitive position. The competitiveness agenda has risen in prominence at EU level in the wake of the Draghi report on '*The future of European competitiveness*' and has also come under increased focus nationally.

In the context of the Programme for Government commitment to publish an Action Plan for Competitiveness and Productivity within 12 months, it is expected that the Council will provide key input to this Action Plan, based on its broad expertise in the areas of competitiveness and productivity.

Current position and next steps

The Council has 15 members and includes representatives of the employer and trade union social partnership pillars, people with relevant expertise in competitiveness and a DETE representative. Senior representatives from 12 Government Departments attend quarterly Council meetings in an advisory capacity. The Council is chaired by Dr Frances Ruane. The NCPC delivered Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2024 in May. This report makes 20 targeted recommendations to Government across five broad medium and long-term strategic challenges, that are aimed at enhancing Ireland's competitiveness and productivity performance. These strategic challenges are:

- Utilising the potential of the European Single Market to enhance growth and scaling opportunities for Irish firms;
- Addressing issues relating to the cost of doing business, which remains a long-standing challenge to Ireland's competitiveness;
- Taking action towards building and retaining a skilled and talented labour force;
- Embracing the opportunities afforded by technological change and innovation; and
- Tackling obstacles to the planning and delivery of sustainable infrastructure.

Following the publication of this report, a Competitiveness Summit was chaired by the Taoiseach in September 2024. As an outcome of this summit, it is anticipated that a similar event will be held each year. A 2025 Competitiveness Summit may act as a milestone event in the formation of an Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity.

Preparation of DETE Pre-Budget Submission Budget 2026

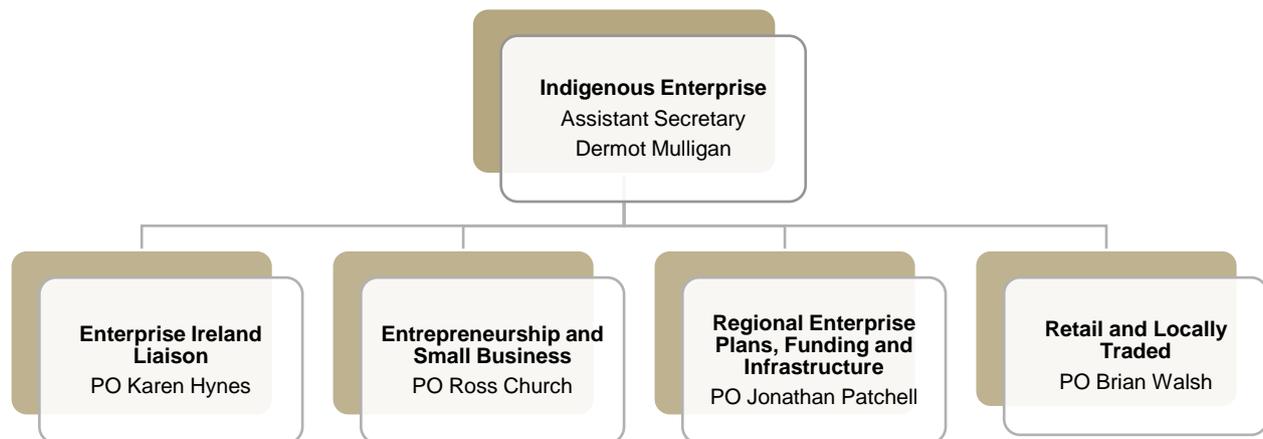
PfG Commitment 3.7

DETE provides analysis of enterprise tax measures, monitors international tax developments in the provision of advice to the Minister and liaises with the Department of Finance with a view to enhancing the taxation environment for entrepreneurs and businesses. DETE also engages with the enterprise development agencies and stakeholders to prepare a submission reflecting enterprise needs in advance of the Budget annually and ensures the submission reflects the Minister's taxation priorities.

Current position and next steps

The annual stakeholder engagement process will take place in Q1/Q2 2025, whereby DETE will meet with various business representative groups and identify each organisation's priority areas for Budget 2026. The engagement will be key in identifying emerging issues and ensuring that enterprise taxation policy in Ireland remains competitive and responsive to wider developments. Following consultation with the enterprise development agencies, DETE will commence drafting a pre-budget submission to the Department of Finance on a range of enterprise tax matters, informed by engagement with enterprise stakeholders and the agencies (EI and IDA), and subject to the Ministers considerations. It is intended that this document would be provided to the Department of Finance in early Q3 2025 and that these policy matters would be discussed at official level. It is also intended that there would be a roundtable discussion between the Minister for ETE and the Minister for Finance, with advisers and officials in attendance, in advance of the Budget. Engagement with the Department of Finance and stakeholders would continue in the post-Budget process.

3.5 Indigenous Enterprise Division



Agencies:

Enterprise Ireland	Leo Clancy - CEO
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Associated Bodies:

Design and Crafts Council of Ireland	Mary Blanchfield – Interim CEO
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Role of the Indigenous Enterprise Division

The primary role of the Indigenous Enterprise Division is to support indigenous enterprise across all regions in Ireland. The division works with relevant stakeholders to ensure that appropriate policies and necessary assistance is in place to promote and develop entrepreneurship, to help businesses start, scale, export and become more sustainable, and advocates across the wider system for a supportive business environment. Working with Enterprise Ireland, the 31 Local Enterprise Offices, the nine Regional Enterprise Plan Steering Committees the Division ensures supports are aligned to meet evolving business needs to adapt to global challenges and opportunities, in particular climate change and digitalisation.

The key priorities and strategic issues for the Indigenous Enterprise Division are:

Implementation of the Increased Cost of Business (ICOB) Scheme

PfG Commitment 2.1, 2.10

As part of Budget 2024, the Government signed off on a package of €257m for the ICOB grant as a vital measure for small and medium businesses. The grant was based on rates paid by businesses in 2023, however it was not a rates waiver. The scheme ran from 14 March to 1 May 2024 and it was re-opened from 15 May for 14 days. The extended date allowed for those who missed the original deadline to apply but also it was announced that businesses in the hospitality, retail and beauty sectors could get a second payment under the ICOB scheme. The extended dates allowed businesses to ensure they had categorised their business correctly on the ICOB portal system. The Local Authorities administered the grant scheme on behalf of the Department.

Current Position

The ICOB scheme is now closed. €244m has been paid out to 75,062 SMEs across the country. This included a double payment that went to businesses in the hospitality, retail and beauty. We are in the process of reconciling all payments to the Local Authorities. Payments to LAs for software and administrative fees will be paid by the end of the year.

The Power Up Grant

The Power Up grant scheme was announced by Government in Budget 2025 and has a Budget of €170 million. To get payments out to eligible businesses by the end of the year, the criteria for this grant are aligned with the Increased Cost of Business scheme. The purpose of the grant is to assist businesses with costs associated with doing business, in particular energy costs. The grant for businesses under the Power Up scheme is a flat-rate €4,000 payment to eligible businesses.

Eligibility and Current Position

To be eligible for the Power Up grant a business must be in the hospitality, retail or beauty sectors and have received the second ICOB payment that was targeted at those sectors. The Power Up grant registration process opened on 24 October and closed on 22 November. Businesses that were trading in 2023 from a rateable premises but were unable to apply for ICOB as they did not have a 2023 commercial rates bill, may be eligible to apply on the Power Up portal and work is ongoing in this regard. Almost €157m has been paid out to over 39,000 eligible businesses under the scheme.

The Department is currently reviewing issues that have arisen in relation to businesses that were ineligible for the grant due to incorrect classification of their business type while registering for ICOB and will consider next steps in consultation with the Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform and the local authorities.

LEO Energy Efficiency Grant

PfG Commitment 7.19, 7.24

The Energy Efficiency Grant (EEG) is administered by the Local Enterprise Offices. It supports businesses to reduce their carbon emissions and overall energy costs by accelerating the adoption of low carbon technologies or processes. Small firms can receive a grant of 75% towards eligible expenditure up to a maximum of €10,000.

Current position

An application for capital costs is conditional on completing one of either Green for Business, Green Start or SEAI Energy Audit. Since the improvements were made to the EEG in July this year, there has been a strong increase each month of applications and approvals. To the end of November 2024, there have been a total of 209 EEG applications with 184 approvals. This is a significant increase in the number of approved applications (35) in 2023. Feedback reported by LEO business advisers is that clients have indicated that the EEG had a positive impact on sustainability, profitability, employment, and turnover, and that the EEG has been paramount to their sustainability journey.

Next steps

Communications campaign through the National Enterprise Hub and State agencies will continue to encourage take up. [REDACTED]

Grow Digital Voucher PfG Commitment 7.24

The Grow Digital Voucher is administered by the Local Enterprise Offices. The objective is to help small businesses to digitalise by implementing the recommendations of a Digital for Business consultancy. Based on the consultancy, the Grow Digital Voucher can be used to boost efficiency, by streamlining operations and enhancing productivity using digital tools. The Grow Digital Voucher builds on and significantly improves the parameters of the Trading Online Voucher in terms of expenditure and eligible businesses. The Trading Online Voucher will close to new applications from 13 December 2024.

Next steps

While Grow Digital will take time to gain traction, the number of Digital for Business approvals provides a strong pipeline for 2025, as the Digital for Business scheme is a prerequisite to Grow Digital.

Oversight of the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Network PfG Commitments 2.6, 2.7

DETE oversees the policy and governance of the LEO network and manages the exchequer allocation. Over the last 10 years, and in particular since 2020, the LEOs have developed new services to support the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector and its mandate has been expanded to support firms in those sectors with up to 50 employees. They have also broadened their engagement with the locally traded enterprise sector of the economy, which has been in response to Government policies to grow the overall productivity of the economy and meet the challenges of a digital, low carbon economy.

Current position

The **LEO Policy Statement**, published in May 2024, outlines how the work of the LEOs will need to adapt to contribute to the implementation of five of the priorities of the White Paper on Enterprise – decarbonisation, digitalisation, increasing exporters, innovation, and enabling the locally traded sector to thrive. There is an emphasis on a consistency of approach across the LEO network and intention to show that the LEOs are, and remain, the first stop shop for all businesses regardless of sector. The actions set out in the Policy Statement will enhance the resilience and sustainability of small businesses and speak to the challenges they face in doing business, in particular in saving time, money and energy.

Next steps

Progress has been achieved across each of the actions, most notably in the improvements made to the LEO green and digital supports, which are already showing tangible benefits to small businesses. Implementation of the LEO Policy Statement is monitored through the LEO Steering Group. The Service Level Agreement between the Local Authorities and Enterprise Ireland is due to be revised in the coming months.

SME Test PfG Commitment 2.3

The SME Test is a tool to ensure policymakers “Think Small First” and consider the impact that any new regulations, laws or policy measures will have on SMEs, and to mitigate against those impacts where appropriate. A cross-Government network to support application of the SME Test within Government Departments meets throughout the year. The network discusses implementation of the test on relevant legislation and policy initiatives across Government and helped to develop a new template and guidelines for application of the SME Test.

Current position

In May 2024, Government agreed to a commitment to ensure an enhanced SME Test will be applied to all major new measures. In September 2024, Government further agreed to rigorously implement the new Test across Departments, to seek to extend application of the Test to the wider public service and regulatory bodies, and to examining other ways how regulatory burdens can be reduced. The enhanced SME Test and guidelines were agreed by Government in October 2024. In 2024, 26 SME Tests were applied by 8 Government Departments. This compares to 8 SME Tests applied by 6 Government Departments in 2023.

Next Steps

DETE and D/Taoiseach are engaging in a series of bilateral meetings with business representatives to gather their feedback on the most problematic areas of administrative and regulatory burdens currently faced by their members. Training material is being developed by DETE and shared across Government Departments.

National Enterprise Hub**PfG Commitment 2.8, 3.2**

The National Enterprise Hub (NEH) is an all-of-government service, staffed by expertly trained advisors and is focused on helping businesses access a range of government supports. It brings together information and resources on over 230 government supports from 23 different departments and state agencies which can be accessed through the online hub or by speaking to a member of the team of advisors by phone or via live chat. Policy responsibility for the NEH sits with DETE. Enterprise Ireland are responsible for developing and supporting the website.

Current position

The National Enterprise Hub was launched on 10 July 2024. DETE chairs a coordination group with representatives from Government Departments and agencies to ensure the NEH includes comprehensive and up to date information on business supports available across Government departments and agencies. Since launching in July, the NEH has attracted 4,400 Monthly Active Users to its site and engaged with over 2,300 companies

Next Steps

Work to improve data collection is ongoing. Service mapping is being examined to ensure the referral process is delivering consistent and measurable results. The Irish language version of the site is under development. An interagency communication strategy is being considered through the operational group.

EU and International SME matters

DETE represents Ireland on several EU and international committees including the EU SME Envoy Network, the Committee on SME Competitiveness and Sustainability (COSME), the OECD Committee on SMEs, and the Europe Startup Nations Alliance (ESNA).

Current Position

At the ESNA Forum in November 2024 Ireland participated as a full member for the first time. In the most recent ESNA scoreboard Ireland performed above the overall average. Ireland will host the SME Assembly and the SME Envoy Network during our EU presidency in 2026. DETE recently published a report on incubation and acceleration in Ireland which was produced by the OECD at our request. This report will support the development of a national strategy on incubators and accelerators.

Innovation Hub Ireland & National Incubator & Accelerator Policy

PfG Commitment 4.5

While Ireland has several notable indigenous MNCs, there is potential to create more enterprises that are internationally impactful. The White Paper on Enterprise notes the central role of incubation and acceleration programmes in promoting the scaling of start-ups. International evidence identifies the presence of a supportive landscape for start-ups including a coherent and navigable accelerator and incubator ecosystem as an important feature of the most successful nations in this regard. A feature common to many successful start-up ecosystems worldwide is often a central hub and/or governing body which can act as a centre of excellence, co-ordinate and monitor programmes and provide a focal point for start-ups and investors, both domestic and international.

Current position

The OECD recently completed a review of the Irish accelerator and incubator ecosystem and provided a number of recommendations including endorsing a national hub of scale. The OECD recommendations along with findings from EI and DETE on the viability of a national innovation hub will feed into a new national policy on accelerators and incubators.

Next steps

DETE and EI are progressing this proposal and work is ongoing on developing a preliminary business case for the project. DETE will publish the new national policy for incubation and acceleration by Q1 2025.

SME & Entrepreneurship Taskforce

The previous Programme for Government committed to delivering a national SME Growth Plan to map out an ambitious long-term strategic blueprint for SMEs and Entrepreneurs. The *SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan* was published in 2021. The SME & Entrepreneurship Taskforce has continued to meet regularly on implementation of priority actions identified annually from the Growth Plan. The main objectives of the Taskforce and Growth Plan have largely been achieved as reflected in the annual Memoranda for Information of the Government.

National Design Centre

The National Design Centre (NDC) was identified as a key part of bringing the policy framework for design in enterprise to life, and its development was included as part of Project Ireland 2040.

Current position and next steps

With the launch of the Digital Creative Industries Roadmap in January 2024, an agreed Programme for Government commitment coordinated by colleagues in DTCAGSM and this Department, DETE has agreed to a renewed focus on the establishment of a National Design Centre. Subject to resources being available, DETE will develop a business case to include objectives, functions, resources, SME engagement model, funding and governance based on international best practice and in consultation with stakeholders.

National Hub Strategy

DRCD is leading work to develop the first Strategy for the National Hub Network, in close cooperation with DETE and the Western Development Commission (which hosts ConnectedHubs.ie).

Current position and next steps

Consultation has informed the content of the draft Strategy, which will focus on the areas of community, remote-working and enterprise. The development of the Strategy is at final draft stage and should be finalised in the coming weeks. The draft Strategy will be finalised by the National Hub Interdepartmental Group and brought to Government for approval in the coming months. The Strategy is expected to be published shortly afterwards.

Implementation of Regional Enterprise Plans**PfG Commitment 1.14, 1.22**

Implementation of the nine Regional Enterprise Plans (REPs) is continuing across all regions. The decision was made in early 2024 to extend the current REPs to the end of 2025. The extension not only supports the continued implementation of the REPs but also includes a commitment to commission an external review of the REP initiative which will inform development of the next iteration of Plans.

Current Position

Seven Steering Committee Chairpersons will stay on for the extended period of the REPs and two Chairpersons will not continue. Officials have engaged with stakeholders for recommendations regarding interim Chairs and will bring these to the Minister for consideration. The successful tenderer for the Provision of Consultancy Services for a review of the Regional Enterprise Plan initiative has been notified, with the contract to be signed imminently and the review on track to commence by end of January 2025. The Service Level Agreement for permanent REP Programme Manager positions between Enterprise Ireland and the Local Authorities has been signed by all parties (i.e. EI and all 'host' Local Authorities) and the recruitment approach for the permanent positions is to be progressed with the CCMA in Q1 2025. At this time, the West and Mid-West Regions have Programme Manager vacancies with an active competition underway in the Mid-West to fill the temporary PM role.

Next Steps

Further to the REP Review, 2025 will see the drafting of a Regional Enterprise Development Policy Statement along with a significant consultation exercise across the REP regions with the intention to develop new plans for launch in early 2026.

Regional Enterprise Funding**PfG Commitment 1.15, 1.22**

Balanced regional development is a priority for Government. Regional enterprise funding is required to drive implementation of the Regional Enterprise Plans and support Smart Specialisation across the regions.

Current position

€145m has been secured, co-funded under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), for the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme (SREIS) to support regional enterprise development to 2027. The Scheme is administered by Enterprise Ireland and the first call of €35 million is currently open for applications. The Scheme supports innovative clusters, local infrastructure projects, programmatic supports to business and feasibility and priming funding for early-stage project development. There will be further calls in the coming years. The SREIS is intended to build on previous funding schemes including the Regional Enterprise Development Fund, Border Enterprise Development Fund and Regional Enterprise Innovation Scoping Scheme.

Next steps

Enterprise Ireland is evaluating project applications under the first call and has approved 25 applications with total funding of over €8 million to year end 2024. Announcements for these projects, both regional and national, are currently in planning stages and will likely take place in Q1 following government formation. The second call is currently on-hold awaiting the completion of ex-ante appraisal around call one, which remains open.

Economic Infrastructure

The Department's work in the area of economic infrastructure involves the mapping of infrastructure investment needs and policy issues, primarily across the areas of energy, water services and transport, to inform engagement with relevant Government Departments and agencies, and to support the delivery of priority infrastructure for enterprise in the context of Project Ireland 2040. This includes contributing to the ongoing First Revision of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

Current position and next steps

Work is under way on the first of a series of updates to the Department's identified infrastructure priorities. DETE will continue to engage with D/HLGH on the NPF revision. It has also initiated engagement with D/HLGH in relation to the increasing tariff rates faced by non-domestic water users. DETE will continue to work on identifying the key infrastructure priorities of enterprise and to engage with relevant stakeholders to advance these priorities.

Humanitarian Flooding Scheme

The Humanitarian Flooding Scheme is an emergency humanitarian contribution towards the costs of returning business premises and community, voluntary, and sporting bodies to their pre-flood condition, including the replacement of flooring, fixtures and fittings and damaged stock. The scheme is available to organisations with up to 20 employees that cannot secure flood insurance. It is instigated on an ad hoc basis by a Memo for Government on the occasion of each severe weather event that causes flooding. Because of the increasing frequency of such severe weather events, the issue of devising a more efficient administrative process for instigating the Scheme has arisen.

Current position and next steps

Over 450 entities have received support under the scheme since the Government Decision to transfer it to DETE in 2018. As of December 2024, DETE, through the Red Cross, has paid over €9.5m to organisations. Funding for the Scheme is provided from the supplementary estimate each year. The latest scheme, which closed to applications on 9 January 2025, was approved by Government on 27 November 2024 for those impacted by flooding in counties Cork, Donegal, Galway and Kerry and any other counties affected by Storm Bert between 22-25 November 2024.

Oversight of Enterprise Ireland (EI)**PfG commitment 3.8, 4.13**

Oversight and monitoring of EI's performance is strategically important to ensure that the agency delivers programmes and services that support delivery of the government's enterprise policy objectives, as set out in the White Paper on Enterprise.

Current position and next steps

A 2025 Oversight and Performance Delivery Agreement (OPDA) between DETE and EI will be agreed and signed in Q1 2025. EI's work programme and performance metrics for 2025 will be aligned with the strategic priorities and key targets set out in its new Strategy for the 2025-2029 period.

New Enterprise Ireland Strategy 2025-2029

PfG commitment 3.8, 4.5, 4.8, 4.11, 4.14

Enterprise Ireland has completed a final draft of its 2025-2029 strategy and this will shortly be submitted to the Minister for approval. The draft strategy has been finalised following an extensive consultation process with stakeholders and a series of bilateral meetings with the Department. The strategy outlines that Enterprise Ireland's role is to *accelerate sustainable Irish business* across four key areas:

- Start: Ensure that there is an increasingly strong pipeline of innovative start-ups to drive long-term sustainable growth, development and job creation.
- Compete: Strengthen the productivity, competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of Irish enterprise.
- Scale: Increase the number of internationally successful, Irish-owned companies of scale.
- Connect: Support an enhanced, internationally competitive and connected enterprise and innovation ecosystem.

Current Position and next steps

The draft strategy has been approved for submission to the Minister by the Board of Enterprise Ireland. The submission will seek the Minister's agreement to the strategic approach outlined in the strategy and permission to publish the strategy.

Developing data to help improve the locally traded sector

DETE engaged with the CSO to obtain data to provide a more informed understanding of the locally traded sector business landscape with particular regard to the priorities of digitalisation and decarbonisation.

Current position and next steps

Analysis of the data from CSO is currently ongoing and the Department is currently considering a policy response to the productivity challenge in the locally traded sector which may include an external research study. A paper will be brought to Management Board Q1 2025 for discussion.

Engage directly with stakeholders from the business community on priorities

There are several Fora which meet regularly and provide valuable opportunities for Ministerial engagement on a range of issues. In 2024 three meetings of the **Retail Forum** took place. The next meeting of the Forum will be convened on agreement with the new Minister. The Forum has three Working Groups to progress its Work Programme:

1. Green Transition Working Group
2. Digitalisation and Skills Working Group.
3. Town Centre First/Night-Time Economy Working Group (work has now concluded).

The **Enterprise Forum** has met three times in 2024 focussing on the following items:

- 6 March – Cost of Doing Business, Insurance reform including new mediation functions of Injuries Resolution Board and update on Responsible Business.
- 12 June – Pre-budget submissions and labour market and skills issues, Artificial Intelligence (opportunities/threats) and Enhanced Revenue Reporting Requirements.
- 16 October – SME Burden, Responsible Business, Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive.

The next Enterprise Forum meeting will be convened with the agreement of the new Minister.

The **Hospitality & Tourism Forum** (in collaboration with D/TCAGSM) met twice in 2024, future dates of the Forum are to be agreed with new Ministers.

DETE and employment of people with a disability

PfG Commitment 6.5

Supporting individual jobseekers into employment, whether they live with a disability or not, belongs within the remit of the Department of Social Protection. DSP has recently reviewed many of its supports for disabled individuals who wish to take up employment.

DETE does not operate any specific support schemes in relation to employment for people with a disability.

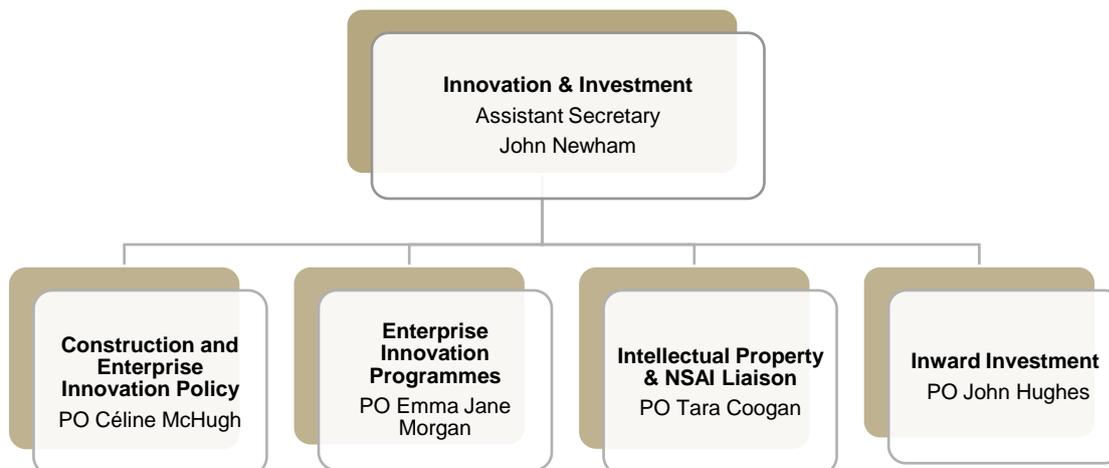
DETE oversees the development of employment law, including law which protects members of marginalised groups from discrimination, to enforce these laws in some cases, and to provide the machinery for the vindication of workers rights in others, through the offices of the WRC. The provisions of the Employment Equality Acts as they pertain to disability status are used by complainants to vindicate their rights. Figures from the WRC Annual Report for 2023 show that 21% of all complaints in 2022 had a disability component and 23% in 2023.

The definition of disability in both the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts is considerably wider than the definition in EU legislation. This means that a very wide range of disabilities and health conditions attracts protection from workplace discrimination in Ireland.

These legal provisions are the Department's main contribution to the employment of people with disabilities.

DETE has been fully engaged in the development of the upcoming National Disability Strategy with an employer-focused approach to promote employment for people with a disability.

3.6 Innovation and Investment Division



Offices:

Intellectual Property Office of Ireland	James Kelly - Controller of Intellectual Property
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Agencies

IDA Ireland	Michael Lohan - CEO
National Standards Authority of Ireland	Geraldine Larkin - CEO

Role of the Innovation & Investment Division

The Innovation and Investment Division has policy and delivery management responsibility for the attraction of foreign direct investment to Ireland, enterprise innovation policy and programmes, standards policy and certification, and intellectual property policy and protection. This mandate includes responsibility for, and oversight of, IDA Ireland, the innovation programmes of Enterprise Ireland, the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) and Intellectual Property Office of Ireland (IPOI), once known as the Patents Office. The Division also leads DETE engagement on construction sector innovation to help deliver on Housing for All.

The key priorities and strategic issues for the Innovation & Investment Division are:

Promote and facilitate FDI to attract jobs and investment to Ireland

PfG Commitment 1.6, 4.1, 4.13, 4.16, 4.17

At the end of 2024, IDA Ireland had 1,830 client companies within its portfolio, with total employment now standing at 302,566, c 11% of national employment, up 601 (0.2%) on 2023 and above 300,000 for the third consecutive year. Balanced regional development is a priority for IDA Ireland, with 137 of the 234 (59%) of investments secured during 2024 being in regional locations. The total number of regional jobs was 165,484, 55% of total IDA client employment. IDA Ireland achieved excellent results in 2024 with 234 investments won, projected to create 13,500 jobs over coming years. 69 investments were from new name or first-time investors, strongly indicating Ireland's ongoing attractiveness as an FDI location. These included cutting-edge companies such as Calypso AI, Evernorth, Sirius XM and UKG. IDA has exceeded its

targets relating to the total number of investments, job approvals, regional investment and number of sustainability projects supported by the agency as it comes to the end of its 2021-2024 Strategy.

New investments secured by IDA since January 2024 include:

- Automotive fleet manager, Element Fleet Management that is to set up a global leasing centre in Dublin creating 70 jobs.
- Evernorth Health Services, which is to locate a new innovation hub in Galway that will create 100 jobs; and
- Motorola Solutions, which announced its new global R&D Centre in Cork with plans to recruit 200 highly skilled staff to design technologies vital to the company's global footprint of customers.

In addition to companies newly investing in Ireland, IDA also announced several significant investments of scale from *existing* clients, such as IBM Ireland's announcement in May to create 800 high-value roles across its sites in Dublin, Cork and at its subsidiary Red Hat in Waterford; and Bristol Myers Squibb's \$400m investment which will create 350 jobs, bringing the total number employed at its campus in Dublin to over 1,000 people. Ministers will regularly be involved in meeting IDA client companies as part of our nurturing their establishment or expansion in Ireland and the Departmental team and the IDA support Ministers in such engagements.

Key focus for the IDA remains on green transformation, digitalisation and Industry 4.0 and increasing RD&I and training investments by multinationals in Ireland. This is being done in a context including Ireland's competitiveness challenges relating to: the energy grid and costs; water infrastructure; housing supply; and the planning process. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] International FDI trends suggest there is a reduction in the amount of FDI, globally, in recent years coupled with increasing levels of competition for that FDI. Competition within the EU has also grown with some members using considerable sums of State Aid to compete. Ireland has to ensure our competitive offering on skills and talent, tax (R&D Tax Credit), ease of establishment and so on are maintained against growing levels of competition. It is vital that the Department successfully advocates across Government for improving our competitiveness.

IDA Ireland prepared EWRs (Early Warning Reports) for 83 companies with job losses of 5,369 and 1,272 jobs at risk reported in 2024. EWRs are reports and synopses of potential job losses in IDA client companies. This compares to 111 EWRs for companies prepared for 2023 involving 7,044 job losses and 130 jobs at risk. Reasons cited for early warning reports include decline in client demand, global restructuring which are impacting the Irish operation and challenges in the macroeconomic environment. There have also been several retrenchments/closures in blue-chip sectors [REDACTED] Not all prospective job losses materialise once companies enter discussions with staff and their representatives.

In terms of the IDA's legislative remit, the Department has drafted a General Scheme of an Industrial Development (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill to amend the Industrial Developments Acts to further enhance supports the IDA can provide in the FDI space, including specific provision for Environmental Protection Aid grants, in addition to allowing the agency to enter joint investments with third parties such as ISIF on property acquisition and development. A General Scheme of the Bill is ready to bring to Cabinet for approval.

Current position and next steps

During 2024 IDA Ireland has been developing a new strategy for years 2025+. The strategy is aligned with the White Paper on Enterprise to support delivery of its objectives by the agency. The strategy development process has focused on these new opportunities and the steps the IDA needs to take to realise them, while at the same time putting the IDA client at the centre of everything they do. The Agency will brief the Minister and would hope for a Ministerial launch of the Strategy very early in the new year.

Progress IDA Ireland's Regional Property Programme and Strategic Sites Initiative

PfG Commitment 4.2, 4.10, 4.16, 4.17

The Department with IDA has developed a draft proposal for "Next Generation Strategic Sites" (NGSS). This proposes a significant investment to provide for industrial land of scale (500+ acres) for future enterprise investment. DETE is engaged with other Departments on the proposals including DECC and DHLGH as the infrastructure requirement will be considerable (energy, water/waste-water, housing, transport etc.).

Under its Regional Property Programme, the IDA is progressing the delivery of 19 Advanced Building Solutions in 15 regional locations. Eight of the 19 buildings are complete, three of which remain available to potential clients and are being marketed. Four further buildings in Sligo, Galway, Cavan and Letterkenny along with buildings in Galway and Sligo are due for completion before year end. The remaining buildings are at various Site Selection, planning and contractor procurement stages. The delays to delivery are typical of the experience elsewhere when it comes to building. IDA is also maintaining a focus on land banks and utility intensive strategic sites to future proof the ability of their property portfolio to support the project pipeline. The Exchequer Budget for the IDA Regional Property Programme in 2024 is €65 million (€5m increase on 2023), which together with use of Own Resource Income and carryover brings the total IDA property budget to approx. €100 million for 2024.

EU Chips Act and the National Semiconductor Strategy

PfG Commitment 4.7

DETE leads Ireland's implementation of the Chips Act, which entered into force in September 2023. The Act aims to increase the EU's security of supply of semiconductors and to develop new markets for cutting-edge European technologies. As a country with a strong domestic and international semiconductor industry and R&D ecosystem, this is an important initiative for Irish industry. The sector is also identified by the EU as one of for essential to Europe's economy and is also prioritised in the IDA's new strategy. The Department has been developing a National Semiconductor Strategy which aims to ensure Ireland can ambitiously play its part in reaching EU Chips Act targets.

Ireland, through DETE, successfully nominated a national "Competence Centre" for Ireland under the Chips for Europe Initiative in October 2024. The Centre is called "IC-3" and comprises a consortium of MIDAS (the sector's association), University College Dublin and Tyndall National Institute in UCC. Competence Centres in Semiconductors are intended to play an essential role under the EU Chips Act and will provide access to technical expertise in semiconductors, helping companies to approach and improve design capabilities.

Current position and next steps

The National Semiconductor Strategy will capitalise on opportunities for the semiconductor sector at EU level and set an ambition and direction for activity in the sector. It is close to finalisation and should be ready for the Minister to bring to Cabinet shortly, with a view to a Ministerial launch in early 2025 once a new Government is appointed.

Increase the level of Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) performed by indigenous enterprise including through ERDF co-funded programmes

DETE is responsible for administering c.25% of exchequer spending on R&D, with much of this delivered through EI programmes which had a capital budget of €152.9 million in 2024, including the annual allocation from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). DETE was successful in securing almost €117 million through the ERDF over the period 2023-2029 to fund three innovation programmes:

- Technology Gateways Programme - providing industry access to Technological University expertise,
- Knowledge Transfer 'KT Boost' – providing knowledge transfer support in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs),
- Innovators' Initiative – needs led innovation training for industry.
- The programmes are driving the commercialisation of academic research and the delivery of spin out companies from research conducted by HEIs.

Current position and next steps

- Innovation Vouchers help SMEs seeking innovative input and provide up to €10,000 worth of expert time. In July, the maximum value of the Innovation Voucher was increased from €5K to €10K.
- The successful applicants under the 2024 Capital Equipment Call have yet to be announced – it is planned to make the announcement at the end of January 2025. The Call, with €12.1m in funding, is providing cutting edge technology, to the successful Technology Centres / Technology Gateways, which companies can avail of to carry out research and innovation.
- DETE will continue to work with EI over 2025 as they amend/refresh certain RD&I programmes, such as the Commercialisation Fund, piloting a new support for research talent in enterprise, as well as the launch and roll out of Sustain FIT (which aims to connect researchers with Irish companies to support industry-focused sustainability research projects).

Increase Digitalisation for SMEs through the European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) PFG Commitment 7.2

Ireland has four EDIHs, all established in 2023, forming part of an EU-wide network of Hubs. They are FactoryXChange, CeADAR, Data2Sustain and ENTIRE. These Hubs are playing an essential role in facilitating the digitalisation of Irish SMEs across industries and regions, and in new technology areas. They provide low and no-cost services such as “test before invest”, innovation and financing advice, training and skills development and networking opportunities across the ecosystem. Between 2023 and 2026 each Hub will receive a total of over €5.5m from DETE under the National Recovery and Resilience Facility, and in the case of FxC and CeADAR 50% will come from the EU Digital Europe Programme.

Current position and next steps

DETE officials are liaising with the EC and EI on funding and reporting requirements on the administration of the programme. The Commission is developing the next phase of the EDIH programme and how to further develop the network of Hubs after phase 1.

Implementation of National Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027**PfG Commitment 1.22**

The development of a National Smart Specialisation Strategy was an EU Commission requirement for Ireland to receive structural funding under the ERDF. Of Ireland's total ERDF pool (€853m jointly funded by EU and national Exchequer), just under €400 million is available for programmes which support innovative and smart economic transformation, overseen by DETE and DFHERIS supported agencies. The Strategy was developed by DETE and published in July 2022. It sets out a vision for how innovation, enterprise and regional policies will work together over the coming years. A National Implementation Group ensures coordination across the range of programmes supported under the ERDF including EI's '*Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme*', which aims to address regional innovation ecosystem/infrastructure gaps; and Research Ireland's '*Accelerating Research Commercialisation*' (ARC) Labs that will help the TUs to build capacity and accelerate research commercialisation. The Group is chaired by DETE with representation from DPENDR, DFHERIS, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Research Ireland, and the three Regional Assemblies.

Current position

As part of the New European Innovation Agenda, the EC has established a Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) platform across the EU to encourage joint regional initiatives leveraging strengths and potential for growth. Led by the Regional Assemblies and supported by DETE and the Smart Specialisation Strategy Implementation Group, all three Irish NUTS2 regions have been designated as RIVs.

Next Steps

DETE will continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure the ongoing monitoring and implementation of the Strategy, including through tracking the Regional Assemblies' Regional Development Monitor dashboard. A Progress Report on implementation of the Strategy will shortly be published by DETE. The Department will explore emerging opportunities for Ireland as the EU Commission advances the RIV initiative.

Deliver healthcare innovation through Health Innovation Hub Ireland

The Health Innovation Hub Ireland (HIHI) is overseen by DETE and the Department of Health and supported by EI and the HSE. HIHI drives collaboration between the health service and enterprise - offering early-stage companies the opportunity for pilot and clinical validation studies, as well as offering the health service access to innovative products, services and devices. Phase 2 of HIHI commenced in 2021 with an ambitious 5-year plan. This phase continues to see HIHI providing extensive support to Irish companies with innovative healthcare solutions, who value and benefit from formalised access to the HSE network and infrastructure.

Current position and next steps

An independent mid-term review will be conducted of HIHI in 2025 to assess their strategic performance relative to their agreed 5-year plan. As this is Phase 2 of HIHI, EI's expectation with regard to HIHI's "return on investment" and EVA will be higher than 2019 (€0.61 for every €1 funding from 2016-2019, expected to rise to €2.03 for this Phase).

Disruptive Technology Innovation Fund – Management of New and Existing Calls

PfG Commitment 4.3, 4.9

The Government established the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) in 2018 as one of four National Development Plan Funds under Project Ireland 2040. It is aimed at encouraging collaboration and innovation in the development and deployment of disruptive technologies, on a commercial basis, targeted at tackling national and global challenges. It is managed by DETE and administered by Enterprise Ireland.

Current position

To date, €376 million has been allocated to 105 projects involving collaborative partnerships (comprising of 397 organisations) between industry, especially SMEs, and public research bodies in applying industrial research in areas such as health, climate action, food, ICT and manufacturing. SME participation is mandatory for a project to be eligible for funding. DTIF has launched seven calls, including a sector specific Call on Advanced and Smart Manufacturing. DTIF will continue to provide support to active projects ensuring they are given the opportunity to accomplish what they have set out to achieve.

Next steps

A seventh DTIF Call launched 7 May 2024 as an open, rolling call. Applications can be made at any stage up to the closing date on 30 April 2025. A stakeholder consultancy exercise is currently underway, which is examining if the Fund is still meeting its objectives, if the Fund is meeting the needs of its stakeholders, the future direction of the Fund and the potential options available. The exercise is scheduled for completion by end Q1 2025.

Implement the National Space Strategy for Enterprise & EU Space Policy

Ireland has been a member of the European Space Agency (ESA) since 1975 to facilitate innovative Irish companies develop space technologies for commercial exploitation in the global space and non-space markets. Ireland opts to participate in ESA programmes which deliver the greatest impact in terms of enabling in-company RD&I, supporting industry to successfully transfer technology between the space and non-space markets. At the ESA Ministerial Council Meeting, CM22, in November 2022, Ireland made a commitment of over €125m in funding for ESA for the period 2023 - 2027. DETE also has horizontal responsibility for space matters at the EU Council. This includes servicing the Working Party on Space and representation at Competitiveness Council (Space) meetings. DETE, supported by EI, also leads on EC Expert Groups including on Space Policy, Copernicus (Earth Observation), Space Surveillance and Tracking, Space Weather, and Security.

Ireland's first National Space Strategy for Enterprise 2019-2025 (NSSE) was published in June 2019. The vision of the strategy is for Ireland to develop 'an economically sustainable and expanding space active industry, delivering quality jobs for the economy of tomorrow' DETE has met its target of increasing public and private investment in ESA by 50% (on the 2019 level) by 2025 and has already exceeded its target of supporting 100 companies to win contracts with ESA.

Current position and next steps

The third annual Space Strategy progress report was published by EI in October 2024. Work on the second Strategy is at an early stage of development, while work is also under way to scope out future funding commitments for the period 2026 – 2030 which will be agreed at the next Ministerial Council meeting of ESA in 2025. DETE is also engaging with DFA and D/Transport in seeking to develop cross-departmental structures to support engagement across Government departments on Space issues which are multi-sectoral.

Promote construction sector innovation under Housing for All

PfG Commitments 1.18, 1.19, 1.20

Housing for All recognises the importance of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) in achieving improved productivity, quality and sustainability in the housing delivery. MMC refers to a range of increasingly off-site innovative construction processes that include Modular/3D, Panellised 2D and other innovative building systems and processes. The Department has led the development of a *Roadmap for increased adoption of MMC in public housing delivery (2023)* and chairs the MMC Leadership and Integration Group which works across Government to address barriers to the wider deployment of MMC.

In addition, DETE has overseen a range of key initiatives to support innovation and MMC in residential construction, including:

- the establishment of 'Construct Innovate' Technology Centre hosted by University of Galway with UCC, UCD, TCD and Irish Green Building Council,
- the extension of EI innovation and productivity supports to the domestic residential cohort of companies under the 'Built to Innovate' programme,
- expansion of NSAI Agrément certification for innovative and off-site residential construction systems,
- an EI commissioned study into the scaling potential of domestic SME homebuilders,
- an EGFSN report on the skills needed in the sector for the adoption of MMC.

The Department is making a €2m contribution alongside similar from DHLGH and DFHERIS towards the development of Phase 1 of the MMC Demonstration Park at Mount Lucas, Co Offaly (National Construction Training Centre).

Next steps

- Delivery of an MMC Data Dashboard, to benchmark and track MMC use in housing.
- An extension of the EI Built to Innovate programme to ensure its ongoing impact.
- Continued strengthening of NSAI Agrément capacity (for MMC) through additional recruitment.
- Constructing the first phase of the MMC Demonstration Park in Mount Lucas, Offaly.
- Consideration will be given to updating the MMC Roadmap in 2025.

Progress Intellectual Property Policy and Legislation

PfG Commitment 4.12

DETE has overall responsibility for Intellectual Property (IP) Policy in Ireland and liaises directly with the EU and with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) on the range of relevant policy issues. As per the 2022 joint EPO/EUIPO industry-level analysis report, 45% of GDP in the EU (65% in Ireland) is attributable to IP-intensive industries, worth EUR 6.4 trillion.

Current issues of note in Patent IP policy and legislation include:

- the **EU Patents Package** (which comprises six new regulations which aim to assist industry, particularly SMEs, make the most of their inventions)
- The **Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill** which encompasses the necessary amendments to copyright legislation following a CJEU judgement in September 2020 and subsequent High Court judgement in February 2021. It has been afforded priority status. Drafting is ongoing along the lines of the General Scheme as approved by Government at its meeting on 2 July 2024.
- **EU Regulation 2023/2411 on the protection of Geographical Indications (GIs) for craft and industrial products**. The regulation establishes a new intellectual property

right for geographical indication protection for craft and industrial products. There are some policy decisions that are required in relation to these provisions which will be subject to Ministerial approval. The Department intends to implement the regulation by the deadline of 1 December 2025.

- the **EU Design Reform Package** which will modernise EU design legislation, provide for greater harmonisation of Member States laws and procedures, and streamlines the EU unitary design right making it more accessible and efficient for designers, SMEs and businesses. The regulation will apply from 1 May 2025 and the Directive transposition deadline is 9 December 2027.
- a series of proposed EU regulations to **improve IP protections**, some of which require Ireland to ratify the Unified Patent Court agreement.

Agreement on a Unified Patent Court ('UPCA')

The Unitary Patent Court ('UPC') is an international court with exclusive competence for actions for infringement and validity of European patents. The objective of the creation of the unitary patent is to promote intellectual property rights and to encourage innovation in Europe, especially among SMEs. The new system will give greater patent protections at European level as it will offer substantial savings on renewal fees as well make enforcement more affordable. This new form of patent gives uniform protection across all participating European countries (currently 18, expected to extend to 25) on a one-stop-shop basis.

Ireland agreed to participate in the UPC in 2013. This participation depends on an amendment to the Constitution to provide a jurisdiction in Unitary Patent litigation to an international court (the UPC). This requires an update to Article 29 of the Constitution to include the UPC Agreement as an international treaty.

Current position

The previous Government affirmed its commitment to holding a Referendum on the UPC on 23 January 2024. The Referendum was scheduled for 7 June to coincide with the European and Local elections. On 16 April 2024, it was decided to defer the date for the referendum, to facilitate public awareness of the issues. A new date has not yet been announced.

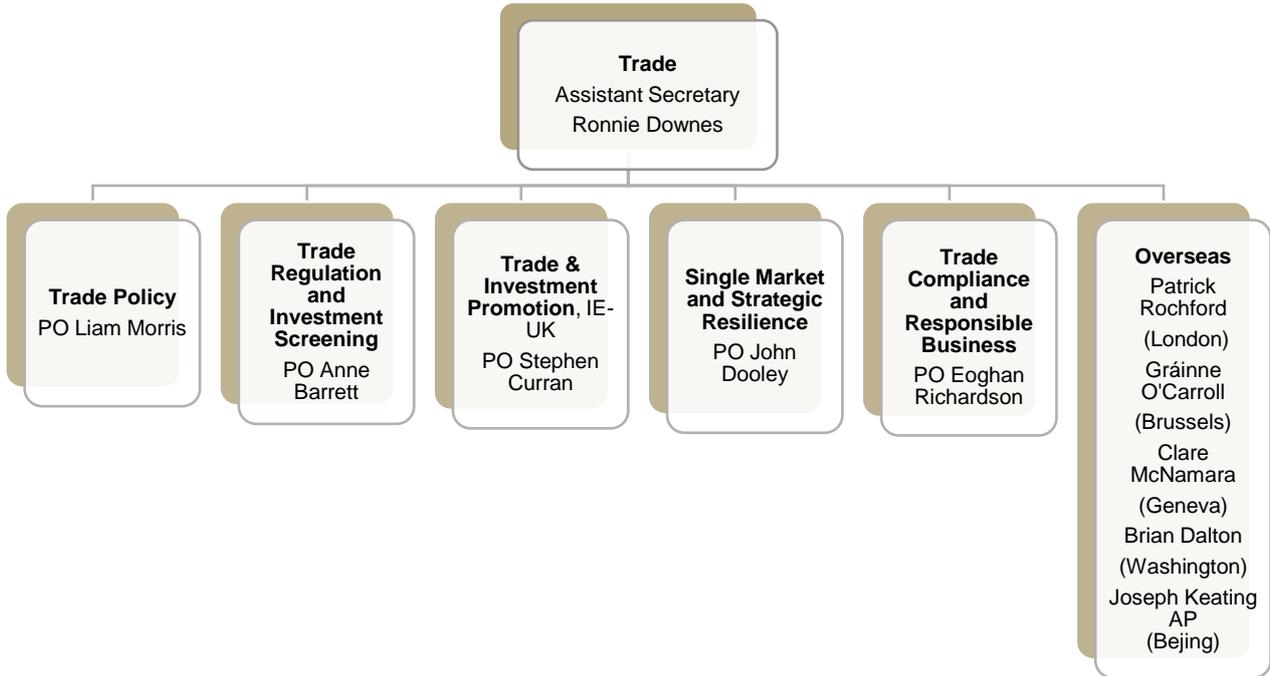
Next steps

A resolution must be passed in the Dail to restore the Bill to the order paper before the remaining Committee, Reporting and Final stages can be scheduled. The new Government must set a date for a referendum before the Electoral Commission can commence the rollout of information to the electorate. Extensive briefing on the UPC, the Referendum, and related matters have been prepared to help inform Government on policy choices.

Matters for consideration:

Failure to participate in the UPC may disadvantage Irish businesses and inventors by potentially limiting their ability to enforce unitary patents effectively across participating EU states. Ireland may also miss out on opportunities to attract investment and innovation, as member states with UPC membership are more attractive to enterprises seeking streamlined patent protections. Ireland holds the distinction of being the only English-speaking EU jurisdiction with a common law tradition. Participation in the UPC from the early stages would allow Ireland to exert influence on UPC jurisprudence, not only through the activities of its proposed local division, but also on a broader international scale. The capacity for common law influence diminishes as jurisprudence in the UPC becomes settled.

3.7 Trade Division



North South Body

InterTradeIreland (ITI)	Margaret Hearty - CEO
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Role of the Trade Division

The Trade Division is responsible for the development of Ireland’s international trade policies, including at European Union trade policy negotiations and through active participation in the World Trade Organization, and including all-Island and UK links. The Division is also responsible for the administration and enforcement of EU export controls and EU trade sanctions, along with other new measures such as investment screening, which form part of the growing agenda of ‘economic security’. It is also the lead Division for DETE staff located in five overseas missions and embassies.

The key priorities for Trade Division include:

Promote free, open trade to support Ireland’s economic model and to protect critical supply chains, advocate for new EU Free Trade Agreements and for maintaining and deepening transatlantic trade relations

PfG Commitments 1.8, 1.9, 1.10, 4.15

Trade is of fundamental importance to Ireland’s economic model, supporting approx. 1.3 million jobs directly and indirectly, and helping to generate significant public resources so that the Government can deliver public services. The EU’s Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) open new markets for Irish firm’s goods and services and increase export and investment opportunities.

Current Position

[Redacted text]

The focus of the previous Commission under Ursula von der Leyen’s first term was building the EU’s open strategic

autonomy. That has since been succeeded by the development of the EU's economic security agenda. Ireland, along with other like-minded Member States, is looking to ensure the appropriate balance between economic security and retaining the EU's attractiveness as a partner for open, rules-based trade and as a destination for investment.

The new Commission, which formally commenced their work on 1 December 2024, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] There are several important free trade agreements under negotiation, but agreements remain elusive including with **Australia**, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. Nine rounds of negotiations with **India** have taken place but have yielded little progress. Negotiations in respect to the joint instrument (on enhanced environmental protections) for the **EU-Mercosur Agreement** were concluded in December 2024. The Department is in ongoing consultation with relevant Department's including the Department on of Agriculture, Food and the Marine on the outcome. We await the final text of the overall agreement in a consolidated text from the Commission which is not expected before the Summer of 2025. We continue to meet with the Commission to interrogate the text of the joint instrument. Ireland has made clear its concerns and the need for the agreement to have legally binding commitments on trade and sustainability including those relating to climate, biodiversity and deforestation. A particular focus for the new Commission will be to enhance the EU's economic relationship with countries in south-east Asia (**ASEAN Group**) and the gulf region (**Gulf Cooperation Council**).

DETE is engaged with the Attorney General's Office, in respect of the ratification of the **EU-Canada FTA Agreement**, CETA. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

EU-US: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Trump has spoken at length about his preference to apply a standard 10% tariff on all imports into the United States with a possible 60%-100% tariff on Chinese imports. This level of import tariff would have a knock-on effect on the EU, given the likelihood of trade diversion of Chinese goods, away from the US market to the EU market, which would be considered the most attractive market in lieu of the US. In May 2024, the Biden administration reviewed the Section 301 restrictions enacted under Trump and imposed higher rates of between 25%-100% on some Chinese imports. Electric vehicles and solar cells were among the affected goods. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Advance Ireland's economic and trading interests in multilateral contexts, including the WTO and the OECD, and work jointly with the EC and EU Member States to ensure that the WTO is at the heart of a global, rules-based, multilateral trading system.

PfG Commitment 1.8

DETE is responsible for the development of Ireland's international trade policy positions and actively articulates Ireland's interests at WTO, OECD and EU level with the view to influencing decision making which supports an open, rules-based, multilateral approach to international trade policy.

Current Position

Ireland and the EU continue to seek to strengthen the multilateral rules-based system under the auspices of the WTO. [REDACTED]

- Four critical technology risk assessments, two of which - Artificial Intelligence and Semiconductors - are the responsibility of this Department
- In January 2024, the Commission also published an Economic Security package, with a draft proposal on revising the existing FDI screening and consultative white papers containing proposals on Dual Use Export Controls and Outbound Investment Screening (DETE elements).
- In February proposals were also published around the digital infrastructures and submarine cable security and resilience (largely the responsibility of DECC).

Current Position and Next Steps

The Department welcomes the discussions initiated by the European Economic Security Strategy, aimed at developing a shared understanding of Europe's economic dependencies. While the evolving geopolitical situation may call for proportionate, precise and targeted responses to new security challenges, Ireland's aim will be to preserve maximum levels of economic openness and dynamism.

Ensure that Ireland has a robust legal and operational framework for regulating the export of controlled goods, in support of global security

Export controls are a multi-lateral, global mechanism that contribute to international peace and security. The primary purpose of export controls is to prevent the proliferation of weapons, both conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction, and to protect human rights and international humanitarian law. The principal categories of goods subject to EU Export Controls are "Dual-use" items and "Military" equipment. Dual use goods are those that may have both a military and a civilian end use. Export Control aims to ensure that dual use goods are only authorised for export for civilian end use. Many standard business ICT systems are classified as 'Dual-use' as they incorporate strong encryption for data protection. These types of exports account for most controlled exports from Ireland. An authorisation is required for the export of controlled goods. All applications for export authorisations are subject to rigorous scrutiny and assessed against criteria set out in EU legislation. The Department issued Dual-use and Military export authorisations with a total value of €2,332 million and €287 million, respectively, in 2023.

Current Position and Next Steps

The Control of Exports Act 2023 commenced on 22 August 2024. A new IT system and outreach to stakeholders ensured a smooth transition and minimal disruption for exporters. In January 2024, the Commission published a White Paper on how to make EU controls for export of dual-use goods more effective. It proposes both short-term and medium-term measures with a stronger focus on the role of export controls and further coordination between Member States. This is currently the subject of discussion amongst MS with a focus on the EU's ability to update the list of controlled items given potential blockages within the multilateral system and the fast pace of technological advancements. Officials will continue to engage across Government, with the relevant agencies and at EU level to address the issues raised in the EU White Paper.

Introduce a mechanism to screen third country investment into Ireland

'Inward Investment Screening' refers to a procedure allowing the State to assess, investigate, authorise, condition, prohibit or unwind foreign direct investments based on a range of security and public order criteria. This approach is an important element of the developing 'economic security' agenda. DETE will need to ensure that a balanced approach is taken, which is effective

in achieving security objectives while retaining Ireland’s positioning as a favourable and attractive destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Current Position and Next Steps

The Screening of Third Country Transactions Act 2023, which provides for security screening of foreign investments, commenced on 6 January 2025. It allows Ireland to screen investments from non-EEA countries for the first time. An online portal was also launched to support stakeholders in meeting their requirements under the Act. As part of the European Economic Security Strategy published in June 2023, the Commission has issued a Proposal to repeal and replace an existing EU FDI Screening Regulation. Ireland is well-placed to conform to any new provisions to emerge from this process.

Outbound Investment Screening

In June 2023, as part of its “European Economic Security Strategy”, the Commission acknowledged the growing concerns regarding **outbound investments** in a narrow set of advanced technologies that could enhance military and intelligence capacities of actors who may use these capabilities to threaten international peace and security.

Current Position

The Commission established an Expert Group on outbound investments with Member States to advance discussion on these issues. A White Paper, issued in January 2024, recognises a lack of available data on which to base any potential policy intervention. As a result, the EC has set out a more deliberate, phased approach. A Commission recommendation was published on 15 January 2025 outlining a 15-month monitoring phase by Member States of outbound investments in three areas – AI, Semiconductors and Quantum Technology, which have been announced since January 2021. A final report from Member States is due to the EU Commission in June 2026

Next Steps

Members States, through the Expert Group, will meet with the Commission in late February to consider a methodology for the monitoring and risk assessment. Any policy intervention will require careful consideration to ensure that it is proportionate, targeted and effective, and that it does not place undue administrative burden on enterprise or inadvertently restrict positive outbound investment.

Implement UN and EU Trade Sanctions in support of international law and human rights

The EU has over forty different sanctions regimes in place. When an EU Sanctions Regulation is amended, which occurs 2-3 times per month, a Statutory Instrument must be enacted. DETE is working very closely with other Competent Authorities, Government departments and State bodies, and the European Commission to ensure that there is comprehensive and effective implementation of EU sanctions. The EU has adopted 15 packages of sanctions in response to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine since 23 February 2022, with the 16th package currently being negotiated. The trade elements of the packages are unprecedented in their breadth and sophistication and apply prohibitions to the export / import of many goods and services to / from Russia and Belarus.

[Redacted text block]

Current Position

[Redacted text block]

Next Steps

[Redacted]

Personnel Security Clearance

Ireland is one of only two EU Member States without a statutory National Security Authority (NSA) to provide businesses with security clearance for ICT, personnel and facilities. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Current Position

[Redacted]

Next Steps

[Redacted]

Promote responsible business practices against the background of developments at an EU, OECD and international level

Responsible Business is the umbrella term for a range of inter-related issues that regulate the quality of business conducting themselves in a responsible and sustainable way in line with rules and international standards. These issues include OECD Guidelines for Responsible Business

Conduct; EU initiatives including the Corporate Sustainable Reporting Directive (CSRD) and Due Diligence (the CSDDD); and the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation.

Current Position

To promote a coordinated approach with stakeholders, a Responsible Business Forum has been established, which is Chaired at MoS level. DETE is also developing a new Responsible Business Compass tool, which has received EU funding. Related to this area, the second National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights is being developed by DFA, with the support of this Department.

Next Steps

The Department continues to promote a coherent and coordinated approach on Responsible Business matters through the Responsible Business Forum. Quarterly information webinars will continue to be organised, focussing on some of the initiatives within DETE's remit and beyond which relate to this broad topic. Stakeholder workshops on the Responsible Business Compass are expected to take place in June 2025. At EU level, a regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the EU market was approved in December 2024 and must be fully implemented by Member States and the European Commission by the end of 2027. The first step in implementing the regulation is the designation by each Member State by end-2025 of a National Competent Authority (NCA), which will lead on the implementation of the regulation within their jurisdiction. Discussions are ongoing on the designation of Ireland's Competent Authority for the purposes of this regulation.

Implement the Government's Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026, overseen by the Trade and Investment Council

PfG Commitment 4.14

Ireland's markets for exports of goods and services continue to develop in a positive and sustainable manner. In 2023 the value of exports from Ireland reached a new record level of €595 billion, and export data to date in 2024, shows further growth this year. Ireland's annual global trade (exports plus imports) now exceeds €1 trillion. DETE is responsible for the implementation of the Government's Trade & Investment Strategy, 2022-2026, Value for Ireland, Values for the World which sets out seven priority actions for developing and strengthening Ireland's global trading relations and diversifying export markets.

Current Position

Implementation of the Trade & Investment Strategy is overseen by the Trade & Investment Council, which is chaired by the Minister and is supported by a Senior Officials Group, chaired by DETE. Current issues include:

- Hosting a high-level annual Trade Horizons conference in 2025
- Implementing a trade communication strategy
- Delivering a Trade Attitudes Survey in 2024
- Developing a 'Trade Education' programme
- Implementing the recommendations of the Expert Group on Global Value Chains.

Ministerial led Trade & Investment Missions

The Department decides each year on a schedule of Ministerial led trade and investment missions, the draft 2025 Trade Mission programme has been submitted by the agencies for consideration. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] These are an

important means of helping exporters win business and for promoting Ireland as a destination for FDI, especially in markets where the status of Ministers carries most influence and respect.

Trade Horizons Conference

In 2025 the Department's third Trade Horizons Conference is to take place in Dublin, with the Minister as a key speaker and senior international speakers. The theme of the 2025 Trade Horizons Conference is currently being decided. There are also plans to co-host a Market Access Day for businesses, in conjunction with the European Commission.

Expert Group on Global Value and Supply Chains

On 7 November 2024, the final report of the Expert Group on Global Value and Supply Chains was published, fulfilling one of the key recommendations of the Trade and Investment Strategy 2022-2026: Value for Ireland, Values for the World.

Next steps

The Expert Group recommends policy actions to enable business to build more resilient supply chains including the need for regular monitoring of trade dependencies; partnering with industry and international partners to stress test supply chains; focused advisory supports to assist companies in their risk assessment; regular stakeholder dialogue; continued advocating for open international markets and ensuring world-class trade facilitation systems. Implementation of the recommendations will be detailed in Trade Division's business plan for 2025, with an update on progress to the Trade and Investment Council next year.

Strengthen cross-border trade and foster opportunities for North-South collaboration to enhance the all-Island economy, deliver on Shared Island objectives, and support economic growth in strategic border locations, including through business supports provided by Intertrade Ireland

PfG Commitment 2.9, 3.6

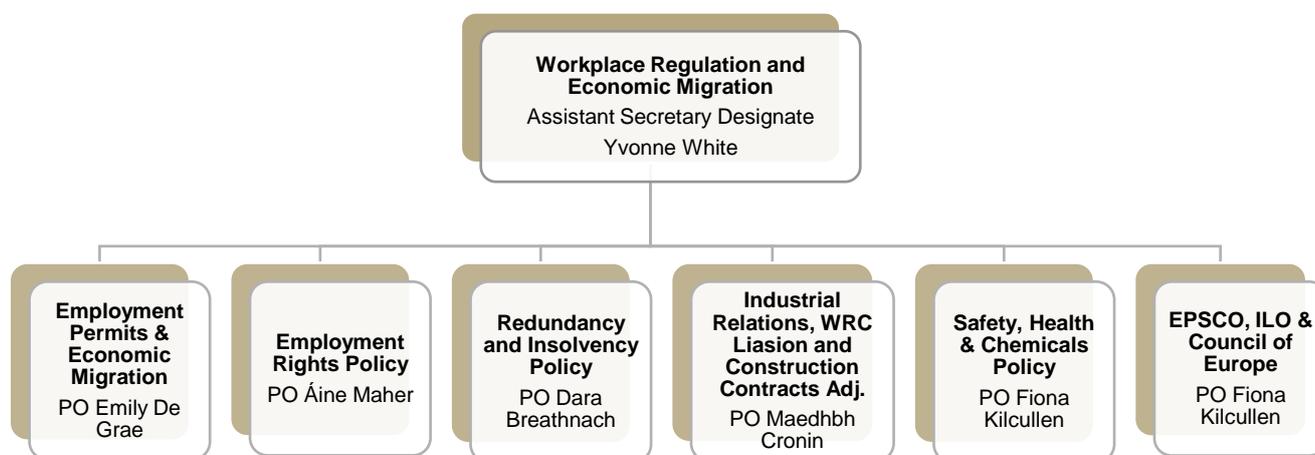
North South matters under DETE include responsibility for (i) the North South Ministerial Council; (ii) oversight of InterTradeIreland (see Offices and Agencies of the Department, below); (iii) DETE projects under the EU-funded INTERREG VA programme and its successor programme, PEACE PLUS; and (iv) DETE's contribution to the delivery of the Shared Island Enterprise Initiative, including projects to be supported by the Shared Island Fund. Broader East West matters for which DETE is responsible include engagement with the devolved regions of the UK, e.g. through the annual Ireland Wales Forum and the Ireland UK summit scheduled for March 2025.

Current Position and next steps

A current priority is the further development the Shared Island Enterprise Scheme, based on a proposal from InterTradeIreland, Enterprise Ireland and Invest Northern Ireland that was recently awarded €30m under the Shared Island Fund. Progress on issues relating to InterTradeIreland, including decisions related to staffing and resourcing, are being progressed with the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and the institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement. [REDACTED]

As regards the Ireland UK Summit in March 2025, DETE is focusing on joint topics (with our counterparts in London) in the areas of SMEs and Economic Security, as well as support for the areas of Offshore Wind and Infrastructure.

3.8 Workplace Regulation & Economic Migration Division



Offices:

Workplace Relations Commission	Audrey Cahill, Director General
Labour Court	Kevin Foley, Chairman
Employment Appeals Tribunal	Kate O’Mahony, Chairman

Agencies:

Health and Safety Authority	Conor O’Brien, CEO
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Role of the Workplace Regulation & Economic Migration Division

The role of the Workplace Regulation and Economic Migration Division is to deliver positive workplace relations, well-functioning dispute resolution mechanisms, robust enforcement of employment rights, a safe working environment and a responsive economic migration policy aligned with the needs of the economy, along with an efficient employment permits process to regulate the entry of workers from non-EEA countries. The Division coordinates the Departments engagement with the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), which is the Governments formal structure for high level dialogue between employer and worker representatives to discuss the impact of economic and social policies on employment and the workplace.

The Division leads on Ireland’s engagement with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a United Nations agency based in Geneva, dealing with employment and labour market issues; co-ordinates Ireland’s participation on the employment, equality and social policy elements of the EU’s Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), and is the lead Department in relation to the Council of Europe’s Revised European Social Charter and coordination on Ireland’s national reports.

The key priorities and strategic issues for the Workplace Regulation & Economic Migration Division are:

Implement measures to allow employees to stay in employment until the pensionable age via the Employment (Retirement Ages) Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to align mandatory retirement ages in employment contracts with the pensionable age where an employee does not consent to the mandatory retirement age. This was recommended by the Pensions Commission in 2021. In September 2022, Government committed to introduce legislative measures to allow, but do not compel, an employee to stay in employment until pensionable age (age 66 currently).

Current position

- Government approved the General Scheme in March 2024.
- The General Scheme was referred for pre-legislative scrutiny in March 2024 and the PLS report was received on 24 May 2024.
- Drafting of the Bill was finalised with the OPC in early October and a stamped draft has been received.

Next steps

It is intended to seek approval from the Minister to circulate the stamped draft and accompanying Memo for Government to Cabinet and, subject to the Minister's approval, to publish the Bill and commence the passage of the legislation through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Address Glegola Supreme Court judgment through Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) (Amendment) Bill

The Supreme Court has held that Ireland did not fully transpose the EU Directive 2008/94/EC. Currently, where an employer ceases trading but does not liquidate their company/business because there are insufficient assets ("informal insolvency"), their employees may be owed monies but are unable to claim them via the Insolvency Payments Scheme. This does not meet the Directive's requirements. Until this is resolved, the State is in breach of EU law and may be at risk of infringement procedures (though there has been no contact from the Commission to date).

Current position

- A General Scheme which will address the Supreme Court judgment and make other targeted improvements to the Act's operation was approved by the then Government on 28 May 2024.
- The General Scheme was referred to OPC for drafting on 31 May 2024.
- A pre-Legislative scrutiny hearing was held with JCETE on 23 October 2024. The committee confirmed on that date that they support the proposal and had no recommendations to make.

Next steps

Drafting of the bill It is ongoing with OPC intending that the Bill will be a priority for publication for the Spring Legislative Programme 2025.

Review of Salary Ceiling used for the Purposes of Calculating Statutory Redundancy and Insolvency Payment

The salary ceiling of €600 per week used for the purposes of calculating statutory redundancy and insolvency payments has not been increased since 2005. Wage growth across the economy since 2005 has meant a greater number of employees are now impacted by the salary ceiling in their redundancy and insolvency payments.

A number of factors must be carefully balanced in any consideration of an increase to the ceiling. These include the rights of employees to a reasonable redundancy payment while also taking account of the potential increased costs to some businesses, largely in relation to redundancy. Consultation with other Government Departments, employer and employee representative groups and other relevant stakeholders would also be required.

Current position and next steps

A detailed policy paper on this matter has been finalised, which will be submitted for the Minister's consideration.

Establishing an Employment Law Review Group

The Employment Law Review Group (ELRG) was established on a statutory basis following commencement on 1 July 2024 of the Employment (Collective Redundancies and Miscellaneous Provisions) and Companies (Amendment) Act 2024.

The ELRG's function will be to monitor, review, and advise the Minister for ETE on matters concerning the design, delivery and implementation of employment and redundancy law; judgments of courts related to the enforcement of employment and redundancy law; EU and international developments in employment and redundancy law and related matters. In advising the Minister, the Review Group will seek to ensure that the State's suite of employment rights and redundancy legislation remains relevant and fit for purpose and is updated to reflect international developments.

In October 2024 an open call for expressions of interest for appropriately qualified candidates to be considered for membership of the ELRG was announced. Nominations were invited from nominating bodies in the Government, regulatory, professional, academic and legal categories. In November/December a screening panel at Assistant Secretary level was convened to review and assess expressions of interest, and to put forward recommendations to the Minister to appoint six Ordinary Members as well as for the position of Chair to the ELRG.

Current position

On 20 December 2024 the Minister for ETE appointed members to the ELRG, including the Chair, Ministerial Nominees and representatives of the nominating bodies from Government, regulatory, professional, academic and legal categories. On 10 January, the Minister issued a press release announcing the appointments, naming Michael Doherty, who previously chaired the LEEF High-Level Working Group on Collective Bargaining, as the Chair of the ELRG.

Next steps

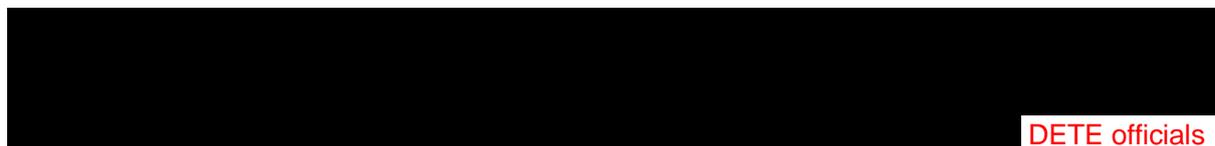
It is intended to convene the inaugural plenary during Q1 2025, and thereafter to agree the first ELRG Work Programme between the Group and the Minister.

Bringing members of the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána within the scope of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997

The Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 (OWTA) sets out minimum rest and maximum working time for employees as well as holidays and other miscellaneous issues. The OWTA excludes members of An Garda Síochána (AGS) from its scope and previously excluded the Defence Forces from its scope. This type of so-called 'blanket exclusion' has been found by the CJEU to be non-compliant with the EU Working Time Directive (WTD), which the OWTA transposed.

Current position

In April 2024 the Tánaiste and Minister for Defence informed the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment that he had, following extensive dialogue, including with the Defence Forces Representative Associations, approved the final management position on the implementation of the WTD. The final approved management position provides for the exemption of certain military activities, due to their specific nature.



DETE officials worked closely with DoD officials and the OPC in recent weeks to finalise an S.I. to bring the Defence Forces within the ambit of the OWTA and to provide for a number of military activities to be exempted from the OWTA. The S.I. was signed by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment on 20 January 2025 and took immediate effect. A joint DoD – DETE press release was issued announcing the legislative.

**Undertake research on the impact of the Statutory Sick Leave Scheme to Date**

The Sick Leave Act 2022 introduced employer-paid statutory sick leave for the first time in Ireland. Commencing on 1 January 2023, the initial statutory entitlement was to up to 3 days' sick leave, increasing to 5 days in 2024. The phased introduction of the statutory sick leave scheme was designed to achieve a balance between giving employers time to adjust and plan for the new responsibility and offering workers, certainty about their rights.

The introduction of a statutory sick leave scheme brought Ireland in line with many other OECD countries, ensuring that all employees are entitled to a minimum level of financial compensation if they are unable to work due to illness or injury. It is primarily intended to provide sick pay coverage to those employees, often in low-paid and precarious roles, who do not have access to a company sick leave scheme. The scheme offers a floor level of protection and does not interfere with existing, more favourable, sick pay schemes. Payment for statutory sick leave days is currently set at 70% of an employee's average gross earnings, up to a cap of €110. The rate of 70% was chosen to ensure excessive costs were not placed on employers, who for certain roles may also have to deal with the cost of replacing staff who are out sick at short notice.

Current position

To respond to concerns raised by the members of the business community regarding the cost of the measure on employers, and to inform future Ministerial decisions on potential further entitlement increases, research was conducted on the impact of sick leave to date. This research includes a comprehensive, firm-level survey representative of the sectoral and size distribution of Irish businesses. The results of this survey were received and analysed by officials from the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES). A qualitative element, consisting of one-

to-one interviews with businesses and employee representatives as well as a stakeholder workshop, was also added to the study to gather detail on experiences and perceptions. The combined exercises above resulted in an IGEES working paper.

Next steps

It is intended the IGEES paper will be published in due course, following appropriate consideration of its content and key findings. Per Section 6(2) of the Sick Leave Act 2022, the Minister cannot make a regulation to vary the statutory sick leave entitlements before 1 January 2025. A decision on the next phase in the roll out of Statutory Sick Leave will be a matter for the incoming Government.

Foster a good industrial relations environment and support the role of the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court

PfG Commitment 6.2

The system of industrial relations in Ireland is essentially voluntary in nature, with the terms and conditions of employment determined by the process of voluntary collective bargaining between an employer or employers' association and one or more trade unions, without the intervention of the State. Under this process standard matters like wages or hours of work are determined and, in addition, some collective agreements lay down procedural rules which govern the conduct of industrial relations between the parties. Over the years, however, legislation has been enacted in certain areas (such as minimum rates of pay, holidays, working hours, minimum notice, redundancy, dismissals and employment equality) laying down certain minimum standards which may be improved upon by collective bargaining but cannot be taken away or diminished. The State's role in industrial relations in Ireland has been largely confined to facilitating the collective bargaining process through establishing by legislation institutions (Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court) to assist in the resolution of disputes between employers and workers.

DETE has responsibility for the provision of effective oversight of the Workplace Relations Commission, the Labour Court and the legacy elements of the Employment Appeals Tribunal. This includes ensuring appropriately resourced structures exist for the provision of an effective employment rights regulatory environment through the enforcement of employment rights and the provision of appropriate workplace relations dispute resolution structures.

Operate an efficient and responsive employment permits regime for the benefit of businesses and workers

Ireland operates a managed employment permit system through two occupation lists, the Critical Skills and Ineligible Lists of Occupations. The purpose of the system is to maximise the benefits of economic migration while minimising the risk of disrupting the Irish labour market. Adjustments may be made following consideration of evidence and cross government engagement taking account of labour market conditions, contextual factors and stakeholder and sector submissions.

Current Position

The Employment Permits System is under significant pressure due to rising demands, with applications received having increased to 46,424 last year, 21% higher than 2023. The backlog currently stands at 4,400 and processing times range across 8 – 29 days depending on the employment permit application type. In 2023, 33,197 permits were processed increasing by 30% in 2024 to 43,176.

At the end of 2023, the minimum salary thresholds for employment permits were increased as they had become seriously outdated, having not kept pace with wage inflation. Further increases

were proposed on a phased basis through a roadmap over the next three years. The first increase came into effect in January 2024 for most occupations, with a deferral provided for the roles of Health Care Assistants, Home Carers and Care Workers. In December 2024, Minister Burke signed regulations to bring this uplift into effect from January 17th, 2025. All applications for new and renewal permits received from this date will be subject to the higher MAR threshold. It should be noted that the increase in the National Minimum Wage from 1st January applies to the wages of existing permit holders where relevant.

Next Steps

In light of concerns raised relating to the general increased costs of doing business, a review of the remuneration Roadmap is underway and includes a targeted consultation launched in November 2024 seeking feedback from employer and employee representative groups and interested stakeholders. The review closed on Friday 10th January 2025 and assessment of the submissions is ongoing.

The Unit is moving to replace its ageing IT systems with a modern Cloud-based system to transform the way in which permits are submitted, processed and issued. The technical development work is almost complete with an anticipated go live date in Q1 2025.

Enable the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) to fulfil its statutory mandate in securing safe and healthy working environments and in supporting business growth, productivity and competitiveness

Current Position

The Department secured additional exchequer funding which has allowed the HSA to undertake restructuring and targeted specialised recruitment. The HSA's legal mandate on Chemicals is greatly expanding as several EU Directives/Regulations are being revised significantly as part of the EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability. The additional €4m exchequer allocation for 2025 will ensure the HSA is effectively resourced to meet the obligations of this expanding mandate. Its current staff complement is over 270 full time posts, and this is expected to increase to over 300 in 2025. The Department also supports the HSA by ensuring that an up to date, fit for purpose, occupational safety and health policy and legislative regime.

Next Steps

Continue to support the HSA in completing its restructuring including the roll-out of its new core ICT platform and obligations of its expanding chemicals mandate. The Department will continue to work with the HSA and the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) to ensure that Ireland is fully prepared to take on new accreditation roles set out in several new EU legislations.

Ensure Ireland has a strong chemical regulatory framework in place by leading across Government and working with stakeholders and industry

DETE is working on arrangements for the transposition of the following EU directives:

- Update to Directive 2009/148/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work (Directive 2023/2668) which is due for transposition by 21 December 2025.
- A codification of Directive 2004/37/EC and its amending Directives to that date. It will be necessary to formally transpose the codified Directive.
- Directive 2024/869, which is an update to both the Carcinogens, Mutagens or Reprotoxic substances Directive (CMRD) and the Chemical Agents Directive (CAD). This is a technical update and is due for transposition by 9 April 2026. A new proposal to further update CMRD is anticipated.

Next Steps

Work has begun on assessing the transposition requirements for Directives and it is anticipated that transposition dates will be met.

Provide leadership and promote collaboration across Government and stakeholders on cross-cutting European and national chemicals policy matters

The Department has the lead responsibility under the Chemicals Acts (2008 & 2010) for the implementation and enforcement of EU chemicals-related legislation within the State. As part of the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, the EU is currently revising a number of pieces of chemicals legislation:

- The **Classification, Labelling and Packaging Regulation (CLP)** is to ensure a high level of protection of health and the environment, as well as the free movement of substances, mixtures and articles.
- The **REACH Regulation** governs the registration, evaluation and authorisation of hazardous chemicals in the EU. It defines the roles and responsibilities of importers, manufacturers, distributors and national enforcement authorities in protecting EU workers, citizens and the environment for the risk of exposure to hazardous substances. The Commission's Work Programme is expected in early 2025 which should provide more clarity on the timeline.
- Currently, chemicals are assessed separately by multiple EU Agencies – the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA). A more effective **One Substance, One Assessment (OSOA)** system is being proposed by the EC. The latest meeting was in May 2024 and a General Approach was to be agreed in June 2024.
- The Commission published a proposal to update the **EU Detergents Regulation** in April 2023. This is to simplify complicated detergents labelling and introduce provisions for microbial cleaning products, refillable detergents and digital labelling. The latest meeting was in May and a General Approach was agreed in June 2024.
- A proposal for a ban on all **PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances)** known as 'forever chemicals' was submitted to ECHA in January 2023 by authorities in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, which would cover over 10,000 uses within the EU. PFAS have increasingly been identified as environmental pollutants and some are linked to negative effects on human health. Due to the unique properties of PFAS, these substances are used across numerous sectors.

Next Steps

- The revised CLP Regulation will require DETE to assess if it will require any amendments to national legislation to enforce.
- DETE will continue to coordinate the Irish position for both OSOA and Detergents and engage in Trilogues in 2025.
- When the proposal for the REACH revision is published, DETE will assess to identify the appropriate stakeholders and engage with them.
- Businesses need to consult their supply chains and identify their uses of PFAS, the non-availability of suitable alternatives and potential economic impacts (for jobs, consumers, patients and society), in order to engage with the next ECHA public consultation expected in 2025.

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)

The EPSCO Council brings together Ministers responsible for employment and social issues from EU member states. There are generally at least six EPSCO Councils a year and meetings are

usually attended by the Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail. In addition, the Department co-ordinates, prepares and develops inputs for EPSCO on a range of items, including the European Semester and European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). The EPSR Action Plan is due to be reviewed in 2025.

Next Steps

The Polish Presidency Programme has been published and will focus on three priorities: the future of work in digital Europe; Europe of equality, cohesion and inclusion; and Europe responding to the challenges of the silver transformation. EPSCO Council meetings during the Polish Presidency are scheduled for Brussels in March and Luxembourg in June as well as an Informal EPSCO meeting in Warsaw in April.

Council of Europe

The Department manages Ireland's obligations and interests in employment and social policy with regard to the Council of Europe's Revised European Social Charter which promotes and protects socio-economic rights, and guarantees rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare.

Next Steps

The 2025 meetings of the Governmental Committee take place in Strasbourg in May and November. Ireland will be represented by the department at official level.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The Department leads on Ireland's engagement with the ILO, which is a United Nations agency based in Geneva dealing with employment and labour market issues. Functions include ratifying and reporting on labour standards, representing Ireland at Governing Body sessions in March, November and June, and leading the national tripartite delegation to the annual International Labour Conference (ILC) for two weeks in June. In 2025, the ILC will agree an Instrument on protection against biological hazards and commence a standard-setting discussion on decent work in the platform economy. The ILC includes a high-level plenary which features addresses by Ministers of Labour, ambassadors and worker and employer delegates. The Unit will contact the Minister's office to ascertain the availability of the Minister to attend the ILC high level plenary debate. The ILC is scheduled for the first two weeks of June 2025. Ministerial attendance is important in the run up to Ireland's Presidency of the EU Council in 2026 including chairing the EU Group at ILO.

Next steps

Ratification of Convention 187 Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187). The Unit is currently reviewing the Convention to ensure that there are no legislative gaps in existing national law before progressing further.

Implement the LEEF High Level Group Report on Collective Bargaining

This Report was published in October 2022 and contains recommendations in relation to improving Ireland's collective bargaining landscape. Many of the recommendations are being progressed.

Next Steps

Engagement is ongoing with the AGO on the two proposals which would require significant legislative change: Good Faith Engagement at Enterprise Level and giving the Labour Court greater powers in relation to developing Employment Regulation Orders.

Transpose EU Directive on National Minimum Wage and Collective Bargaining and prepare Action Plan

PfG Commitment 6.8

This Directive was transposed in November 2024. Under Article 4 of the Directive, Ireland must establish an enabling framework for collective bargaining and an action plan to promote collective bargaining by the end of 2025.

Next Steps

A technical working group was established with the social partners to examine possible actions for inclusion in the plan and has been meeting regularly in 2024. A memo for the information of Government was agreed by Cabinet on 15 October to launch a consultation process on the content of Ireland's Action Plan.

EU Platform Work Directive

The formal steps of adoption of the Directive were completed in October 2024 and Member States must now transpose the Directive within two years. The Directive strikes a balance between respecting national labour systems and ensuring minimum standards of protection for persons working in digital labour platforms across the EU. It is broad and crosscuts the work of the Department, including Chapters on determination of employment status; algorithmic management of work and the use of AI in workplaces; data protection and transparency; and enforcement.

Next Steps

DETE will now begin examination of the requirements for full transposition.

Section 4: Offices and Agencies of the Department

4.1 Introduction

The Department currently funds and staffs six discrete offices. In addition, it funds eight agencies (note: PIRB is self-funding), 31 Local Enterprise Offices, the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland and jointly funds one North-South Body. The offices of the Department are staffed by civil servants, who are employees of the Department. These staff are subject to the same values, standards and behaviours for Civil Servants which apply to other employees of the Department. Each of the agencies is established under primary legislation, which sets out the functions of the agency. Responsibility for the delivery on the mandate and functions of an agency rests, in the first instance, with its Board and the Chairman of the Agency and the Chief Executive.

Liaison arrangements and oversight

The Secretary General, as Accounting Officer, ensures that the appropriate monitoring systems and procedures are in place for oversight of the bodies under the aegis of the Department and the offices of the Department and this is carried out through Liaison Units which are assigned responsibility in respect of individual offices and agencies.

Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and Oversight and Performance Agreements (OPDAs)

The Department and each office agree, on an annual basis, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which acts as a performance contract between the Department and the Office. These MOUs which are jointly signed off by the Secretary General of the Department and the head of each office, set out agreed levels of performance / service in respect of the body for the relevant year. These also allow for the adoption of both annual and multi-annual targets, and the development of output and outcome indicators including milestones to measure performance against targets.

The Department and each agency agree, on an annual basis, an Oversight and Performance Agreement (OPDA) which acts as a performance contract between the Department and the Office. These OPDAs, which are jointly signed off by the Secretary General of the Department and the head of each agency, set out agreed levels of performance/service in respect of the body for the relevant year. These also allow for the adoption of both annual and multi-annual targets, and the development of output and outcome indicators including milestones to measure performance against targets.

4.2 Offices

The Department includes six discrete Offices as part of its integral structure and a short description of each is set out below:

Labour Court

Chairman: Kevin Foley

The Labour Court provides a free, comprehensive service for the resolution of industrial relations disputes and is the sole appellate body under employment rights legislation. Determinations of

the Labour Court arising under employment rights legislation are legally binding on the parties but may be appealed to the High Court on a point of law. The Labour Court is staffed by 25 civil servant staff of DETE along with 13 office holders who adjudicate on appeals under employment rights and industrial relations disputes. It is based in Dublin 4. The Chair of the Labour Court is to retire this year and a campaign for his replacement has recently launched on Public Jobs [here](#). The closing date for applications is 30 January.

In Industrial Relations disputes, the Labour Court operates as an industrial relations tribunal, hearing both sides in trade disputes and then issuing Recommendations, setting out its opinion on the dispute and the terms on which it should be settled. While these Recommendations are not binding on the parties concerned, the parties are expected to give serious consideration to the Court's recommendation. Ultimately, however, responsibility for the settlement of a dispute rests with the parties.

Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)

Director General: Audrey Cahill

The activities of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) are concerned both with facilitating and assisting workplace change and creating an environment of equity and fairness in employment. The WRC has a broad range of functions including industrial relations advisory and conciliation services and the resolution of industrial relations disputes of interest between employers and workers across the public and private sectors. Based in Dublin 4, the Q4 2024 headcount is 193.

The WRC provides comprehensive early resolution, mediation and adjudication services in relation to the full spectrum of employment rights and equality cases. It carries out workplace inspections to ensure the employment rights of workers and responsibilities of employers are respected and it has an enforcement function in relation to breaches of employment legislation.

The WRC is currently recruiting inspectors through the Public Appointments Service (PAS), to bring the number of inspectors up to the eighty sanctioned. The interview stage of this process was completed on the 9 December 2024, and it is anticipated that the first batch of inspectors will be appointed shortly

Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT)

Chairman: Kate O'Mahony

The functions of the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) were transferred to the WRC in October 2015. At that time there were c3,500 cases still awaiting adjudication by the EAT. In early 2024, that legacy caseload has been completed. The Department will now progress the formal dissolution of the body while managing any residual obligations or outstanding customer service commitments.

Intellectual Property Office of Ireland (IPOI)

Controller: James Kelly

The Intellectual Property Office of Ireland (IPOI) is an independent statutory office under the control of the Controller of Intellectual Property and is responsible for the grant and registration of intellectual property rights in Ireland, specifically patent, trademark and industrial design rights. IPOI's end of year headcount figure for 2024 is 46 and is headquartered in Kilkenny. The IPOI provides input to the Intellectual Property Unit of the Department in the drafting of certain legislation and in the formulation/implementation of policy in relation to the development of the system of intellectual property protection. The IPOI also plays a critical role in the dissemination

of information on intellectual property rights to students, individual entrepreneurs and the SME sector.

Companies Registration Office (CRO)

Registrar: Maureen O'Sullivan

The CRO is a statutory office of the Department with responsibility for the incorporation of new companies and the registration of business names and limited partnerships in the State. The Office is also responsible for the receipt and registration of post incorporation documents, the enforcement of the filing requirements of companies, and provision of information to the public. Based in Dublin and with an office in Carlow, the current headcount is 115.

Registry of Friendly Societies (RFS)

Registrar: Maureen O'Sullivan

The RFS is a statutory office of the Department responsible for the registration of industrial and provident societies (mostly co-operatives) and trade unions. The office is also responsible for the receipt and registration of post incorporation documents from industrial and provident societies, trade unions and friendly societies and the provision of information to the public. The RFS is based in Dublin and has a headcount of two. Administration, legal and IT support services are provided to the office by the CRO.

Registrar of Beneficial Ownership of Companies and Industrial and Provident Societies (RBO)

Registrar: Maureen O'Sullivan

The RBO is a statutory office of the Department responsible for the registration of beneficial ownership information in relation to companies and industrial and provident societies, the enforcement of filing obligations and the provision of information to competent authorities. The RBO is based in Carlow and has a headcount of 8. Administration, legal and IT support services are provided to the office by the CRO.

The CRO, RFS and the RBO, while separate statutory offices, effectively operate as a single administrative unit with shared resources. The current headcount of the three offices is a whole time equivalent of 114.

4.3 Agencies

DETE funds eight agencies and, through Enterprise Ireland, supports the work of 31 Local Enterprise Offices and the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland (EI)

CEO: Leo Clancy

Chair: Michael Carey

Enterprise Ireland is the government agency responsible for the development and growth of Irish enterprises in world markets. In support of the Government's White Paper on Enterprise, Enterprise Ireland works with Irish businesses to support them to start, innovate, and grow global sales. EI's primary goal is to start, scale, and internationalise Irish business. Headquartered in Eastpoint Business Park, Dublin 3, EI also has a national network of nine regional offices

throughout Ireland and 33 international locations, facilitating access to more than 60 countries worldwide. Enterprise Ireland's headcount figure for Q4 2023 is 697. This figure includes Irish based staff, expatriate staff and locally hired staff across the network of international offices. EI CEO Leo Clancy intends to step down from his role in March 2025, a sanction request process for his replacement has commenced.

EI works with and supports over 4,000 Irish companies, which employed 234,454 people in 2024 and delivers a range of supports across key sectors e.g. Food and Beverage, Industrial, Life Sciences, ICT and International Services.

EI at a glance:

- 234,454 people employed in EI client companies.
- 15,741 new jobs in EI client companies created in 2024 with 6,212 net jobs created (3% employment growth overall).
- 64% of all new jobs were created outside Dublin
- Two-thirds of client employment outside Dublin.
- EI client exports of €34.57bn in 2023.
- Spend in the Irish Economy by EI clients was approximately €39.3 billion in 2023.

IDA Ireland

CEO: Michael Lohan

IDA Ireland is the Department's inward investment promotion agency and works – through its domestic operations and offices abroad – to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). The Agency partners with potential and existing investors to help them establish or expand their operations in Ireland, with the aim of job creation and increased expenditure in the Irish economy. IDA Ireland supports investment throughout all regions of Ireland, including through the provision of strategic property solutions.

Headquartered at 3 Park Place, Dublin 2, IDA Ireland has a national network of eight regional offices throughout the country. The Agency also operates 19 overseas offices across four main territories including North America, Asia/Growth Markets, Europe and the UK. The IDA's headcount is sanctioned for an additional 30 posts plus five graduate posts to be recruited in 2024 to bring the agency total to 395, including the graduates. This figure includes Irish based staff, expatriate staff and locally hired staff in its offices abroad.

IDA Ireland has 1,830 clients across key sectors including Medical Technology, Pharmaceuticals, Financial Services, Life Sciences and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The Agency supports clients who are considering investing or expanding in Ireland through a range of different means including financial supports, property solutions and showcasing Ireland as a place to invest.

IDA at a glance:

- 302,566 people employed in IDA client companies, 2024.
- 234 investments won in 2024 of which 69 were new name investors with job creation potential of almost 13,500.
- 137 investments, 59%, outside of Dublin.
- 55% of client employment outside Dublin, 2024.

- Total exports from client companies €434.6.1bn and expenditure by IDA clients in the Irish Economy €38.6bn, €11.3m Irish Services, €3.3bn Irish Materials and €24bn payroll (preliminary results Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact, 2023).

Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA)

Sole Member and Chairperson: Ian Drennan

The mission of the CEA is to promote and serve the public interest by ensuring high levels of compliance with company law through effective advocacy and proportionate, robust and dissuasive enforcement. Headquartered on Parnell Square, it has an approved staffing complement of 88, made up of 72 civil servants and 16 seconded members of An Garda Síochána. The CEA functions include enforcing and encouraging compliance with company law; investigating suspected offences under the Companies Act; prosecuting detected breaches of the Companies Act; referring cases to the Director of Public Prosecutions for prosecution on indictment; and exercising a supervisory role over the activities of liquidators and receivers. Section 944D (4) of the Companies Act 2014 provides that the CEA shall be independent in the performance of its functions and the Minister has no function in respect of the CEA's day to day operations.

Competition and Consumer protection Commission (CCPC)

Chair: Brian McHugh

The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) is the statutory body responsible for enforcing consumer protection and competition law in Ireland and its mission is to make markets work better for consumers and businesses. Headcount at the beginning of November 2024 was 225. It is an independent investigative and enforcement body and the Minister and Department are statutorily restricted from directing it especially in the area of competition law. It has gained responsibilities under the Competition Act and Consumer Rights Act. The CCPC also has a role in relation to product safety as one of 19 market surveillance authorities (MSA).

The CCPC is growing as additional functions are ascribed to it. There are a suite of proposals and legislation agreed at EU level designed to further strengthen protections for consumers and fairness in the operation of online markets. DETE will continue to engage with the CCPC on the role it will play in relation to this developing area of regulation.

The CCPC is a competent authority under the Digital Services Act (DSA) for three articles relevant to online marketplaces and is engaging with Comisiún na Meán as the Digital Services Coordinator (DSC) to implement and enforce the legislation. Under the Digital Markets Act (DMA), the CCPC will be expected to support market investigations led by the European Commission on request. This could involve assisting the European Commission in carrying out investigative or fact-finding measures such as inspections or providing information to the Commission. The CCPC has been designated via Cabinet decision as the competent authority for the Data Governance Act (DGA). The CCPC will continue to engage with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications on the necessary secondary legislation to designate it competent authority and endow it with the relevant powers and functions. Under the Data Act, the CCPC has been designated as the national Data Coordinator and the competent authority with responsibility for business-to-consumer and business-to-business data sharing; business-to-business contractual fairness and smart contracts for connected products and related services. The CCPC have also been designated as the market surveillance of certain products and checking the compliance of services under the European Accessibility Act (EAA). The CCPC's

annual funding and sanctioned staffing levels have grown in recent years on account of these additional roles.

Health & Safety Authority (HSA)

CEO: Conor O'Brien

The principal functions of the Health and Safety Authority are to monitor and enforce compliance with occupational health and safety law, to provide information and expert advice to employers, employees and the self-employed, to promote workplace safety, health, welfare, education and training, to publish research on workplace hazards and risks and to propose new regulations and Codes of Practice to the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Headquartered in Dublin 1, it has a staff of 277.

The Authority is also responsible for the administration and enforcement of more broadly based chemicals legislation, including REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals), CLP (Classification, Labelling, Packaging) and Seveso and incorporates the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB), which has responsibility for the accreditation of laboratories, certification bodies and inspection.

Injuries Resolution Board

CEO: Rosalind Carroll

Chair: Tom Coughlan

The Injuries Resolution Board is an independent statutory Body which resolves personal injury claims through assessment and mediation. The role of mediation was assigned to it in the Personal Injuries Resolution Board Act 2022. In resolving personal injury claims without the need for costly and lengthy litigation, the Board has significantly reduced the cost of delivering compensation. Headquartered in Tallaght, it has a staff of 79.

Irish Auditing & Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA)

CEO: Kevin Prendergast

The mission of the Irish Auditing & Accounting Supervisory Authority (IAASA) is to contribute to Ireland having a strong regulatory environment in which to do business by supervising and promoting high quality financial reporting, auditing and effective regulation of the accounting profession in the public interest. Arising from the transposition of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, IAASA will also have a role in the oversight of corporate sustainability reporting and assurance. The Chair of IAASA Board, Martin Sisk, will conclude his second term in December 2024 and a total of eight years, the maximum permissible under the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies. The Public Appointments Service is currently in the process of completing the recruitment for the vacancy, which was advertised through an open competition. An appointment is anticipated by mid-December. Headquartered in Naas, IAASA has a staff of 38.

National Standards Authority of Ireland

CEO: Geraldine Larkin

Chair: James Kennedy

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is Ireland's national standards body and an agency of the Department. In recent years, NSAI has grown into a hybrid organisation, combining

its 'public good' services such as national and legal metrology (weights and measurements), certification of products and services for trade, and the development of standards, with the more fee-generating commercial certification of medical devices. Headquartered in Santry, Dublin, NSAI currently has 223 staff.

NSAI has notified body responsibility for two EU regulations – Medical Devices Regulation (MDR) and In Vitro Devices Regulation (IVDR), the accreditation requirements of which have been challenging for the agency. NSAI has been working closely with the Health Products Regulatory Authority to overcome these challenges and avoid permanent suspension of its certification services particularly for IVDR devices. The agency is currently suspended from taking on new clients for IVDR certification, but it is hoped that the matter will be resolved soon, with the restructuring of NSAI's Medical Devices division which the Department supports.

4.4 North/South Body

InterTrade Ireland

CEO: Margaret Hearty

Chair: Richard Kennedy

InterTradeIreland (ITI) is one of six North-South implementation bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement and is responsible for the promotion of trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis. It is headquartered in Newry and employs 60 full time staff. ITI operates under the oversight of the North South Ministerial Council and its two sponsor Departments which jointly fund it, i.e. DETE in Ireland and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland.

4.5 Associated Bodies

Local Enterprise Offices

The 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), located in the Local Authorities (LA) nationwide are the 'first-stop-shop' for advice and guidance, financial assistance and other supports for anyone intending to start or grow a business. Policy, funding and legal responsibility rests with DETE through Enterprise Ireland (EI). A Service Level Agreement (SLA) is in place between EI and each LA, which sets out respective roles and responsibilities.

The LEOs can offer direct grant aid to microenterprises (up to 50 employees) in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sector which, over time, have the potential to develop into strong export entities. The LEOs also provide a 'signposting' service in relation to all relevant State supports available through agencies such as Revenue, the Department of Social Protection, Education and Training Boards, the Credit Review Office and Microfinance Ireland. The LEOs can also offer advice and guidance in areas such as Local Authority rates, Public Procurement and other regulations affecting business. The LEOs offer a range of productivity and competitiveness supports to help small businesses digitalise and decarbonise including Grow Digital, Lean for Business, Green for Business and the Energy Efficiency Grant.

LEOs at a glance:

- 39,541 people employed in LEO client companies

- 7,104 new jobs in LEO client companies created in 2024 with 2,459 net jobs created (7% employment growth overall)
- 81% of all new jobs were created outside Dublin

Design and Crafts Council of Ireland

Interim CEO: Mary Blanchfield

The Design and Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCoI) is a registered private company limited by guarantee that promotes craft and design activities in Ireland. From this Department's perspective design is seen as an intrinsic part of the innovation agenda and the wider enterprise development agenda and critical to particular emerging and growth sectors including medical devices, professional services, digital/media/gaming and the wider creative sectors, as well as to business production and service systems more generally. DCCoI receives funding through EI for the purpose of promoting crafts and design initiatives in Ireland.

Microfinance Ireland

CEO: Des McCarthy

Microfinance Ireland (MFI) was established in 2012 to provide loans to microenterprises with fewer than 10 employees and with an annual turnover of less than €2 million, which do not meet the conventional risk criteria applied by commercial lenders. MFI also provides post approval mentoring services to its borrowers through the Local Enterprise Office Network.

MFI is funded by DETE and benefits from a guarantee from the European Investment Fund (EIF). In 2021 MFI agreed a debt fund facility with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland. MFI was established with a sunset clause, so that it could be easily discontinued if it was not a success. However, it has been very successful, and an independent Review of the Microenterprise Loan Fund in December 2019 concluded that MFI fulfils a unique role for microenterprises unable to secure finance via other sources, and acts as an effective countercyclical intervention in the market.

Work has been underway to put permanent arrangements in place to underpin the future of MFI, and legislation is being progressed to provide for ownership of MFI to transfer to the Minister for ETE and to put in place the related governance structures. Following a Government decision on 30 May for the approval of the transfer of Microfinance Ireland into State Ownership, legislation has progressed to Report and Final Stage [Dáil] which was completed 25 September 2024 and will be further progressed through the Seanad.

Section 5: Legislation

5.1 Published Bills

Title and Purpose of Bill	Status
<p>Microenterprise Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill 2024</p> <p>This legislation provides for ownership of Microfinance Ireland (MFI) to pass from its current parentage, the Social Finance Foundation, to the Minister for ETE and to put in place the related governance structures. It will give greater oversight to a body which is responsible for an increased amount of state sponsored lending than its original mandate. It will also create a more established relationship between DETE and the body delivering the funding directly to recipient businesses.</p>	<p>Second stage [Dáil] was completed on 20 March 2024 with the Bill agreed at Committee Stage [Dáil] on 22 May. Report and Final Stage [Dáil] was completed 25 September 2024 which will be further progressed through the Seanad.</p>

5.2 Priority Bills for Publication Autumn Session

Title and Purpose of Bill	Status
<p>Employment (Restriction of Certain Mandatory Retirement Ages) Bill</p> <p>To introduce measures that allow, but do not compel, an employee to stay in employment until the State Pension Age</p>	<p>A stamped draft of the Bill was received from the OPC on 3 October. The Minister approved the Bill on 30 October; however, the legislation was not brought to Government before the Dáil was dissolved.</p>

5.3 Priority Bills for Drafting Autumn Session

Title and Purpose of Bill	Status
<p>Copyright and Related Rights (Amendment) Bill 2024</p> <p>The Bill encompasses the necessary amendments to the Copyright and Related Rights act 2000 (as amended) following a CJEU judgement in September 2020 and</p>	<p>The General Scheme was referred to the Joint Committee on ET&E for PLS. On 23 Sept the Committee wrote to the Minister and agreed to waive PLS on the Bill.</p> <p>The General Scheme has been referred to the OPC for priority drafting. DETE is currently reviewing a partial (non-</p>

subsequent High Court judgement in February 2021.	complete) Draft 1 version of the Bill which was received on 14 November.
<p>Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) (Amendment) Bill</p> <p>To update the legislation governing the protection of employees during their employer's insolvency, to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing Supreme Court judgment by fully transposing Article 2(1) of Directive 2008/94/EC • Incorporating technical amendments to improve the Act's operation. 	The General Scheme was referred to JCETE for PLS on 5 June 2024. PLS hearing held 23 October 2024. JOC confirmed on that date that they support the proposal and have no recommendations or obs to make.

5.4 Other Legislation

Title and Purpose of Bill	Status
<p>Co-operative Societies Bill</p> <p>The purpose of the Bill is to consolidate and modernise the existing Industrial and Provident Societies legislation and to provide an effective and robust legislative framework for the diverse range of organisations using the co-operative model in Ireland.</p>	OPC drafting began in March 2023 and is nearing completion, with weekly engagement between officials and the drafting team.
<p>EU Data Bill</p> <p>The EU Data Act (Regulation) creates a harmonised framework on fair access and use of data and clarifies who can create value from data and under which conditions, to ensure fairness in the allocation of the value of data among actors in the data economy and to foster access to and the use of data. This enabling legislation needs to be in place by 12 September 2025.</p>	On 8 October the Government approved the drafting of a General Scheme to give effect to the Data Act. Further legal advice is being sought, with work on transposition to commence in Q4 2024.
<p>Industrial Development (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill</p> <p>The primary purpose of the Bill is to amend the Industrial Development Act 1986 to strengthen IDA and Enterprise Ireland's provision of (i)</p>	<p>A General Scheme of the Bill was approved by the Minister in October 2024.</p> <p>A Draft Memo for Government seeking obs before going to Government seeking formal approval to draft the Bill</p>

<p>environmental protection aid grants and (ii) consultancy grants.</p> <p>It will also provide that IDA Ireland be permitted to establish jointly owned Designated Activity Companies (DACs) to develop industrial and commercial property and infrastructure.</p> <p>This Bill also contains additional unrelated amendments in respect of EI (re FOI) and the Health and Safety Authority (re terms for board members) and technical enabling amendments to the Dangerous Substances Act 1972 and the Chemicals Act 2008.</p>	<p>was circulated to relevant Government Departments on 30 October.</p> <p>On foot of advice from the Government Secretariat, new policy measures will not be considered at Cabinet until after the General Election.</p>
<p>Miscellaneous Provisions (Registration of Limited Partnerships and Business Names) Bill</p> <p>This Bill will reform the Limited Partnerships Act 1907, strengthening Ireland's regulatory framework and responding to concerns raised in relation to the transparency of Limited Partnerships.</p>	<p>Government approval for drafting on 9 July, following which the General Scheme was submitted to the OPC for drafting and referred to the JOC ETE for consideration for pre-legislative scrutiny. OPC Drafter appointed on 5 September 2024.</p>
<p>[Scheme of] Registration of Trade Unions Bill 2021</p> <p>The purpose of the Bill is to modernise and consolidate the existing legislation in respect of the registration requirements for trade unions. The Bill is a modernising piece of legislation and is not expected to be contentious.</p>	<p>Due to other legislative priorities, work on finalising a General Scheme is currently not progressing.</p>
<p>Regulation of Artificial Intelligence Bill</p> <p>The purpose of the Bill is to give full effect in Ireland to Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 <i>laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act)</i>. The Bill will provide for competent authorities for implementing the regulation, and for penalties for infringements of the regulation.</p>	<p>The General Scheme of the Bill will be drafted during Winter 2024, with a view to priority drafting during Spring Session 2025. The General Scheme will be submitted for PLS in Spring 2025.</p> <p>The Bill must be enacted before the Summer 2025 recess to comply with Ireland's EU obligations, as set out in the EU Regulation.</p>

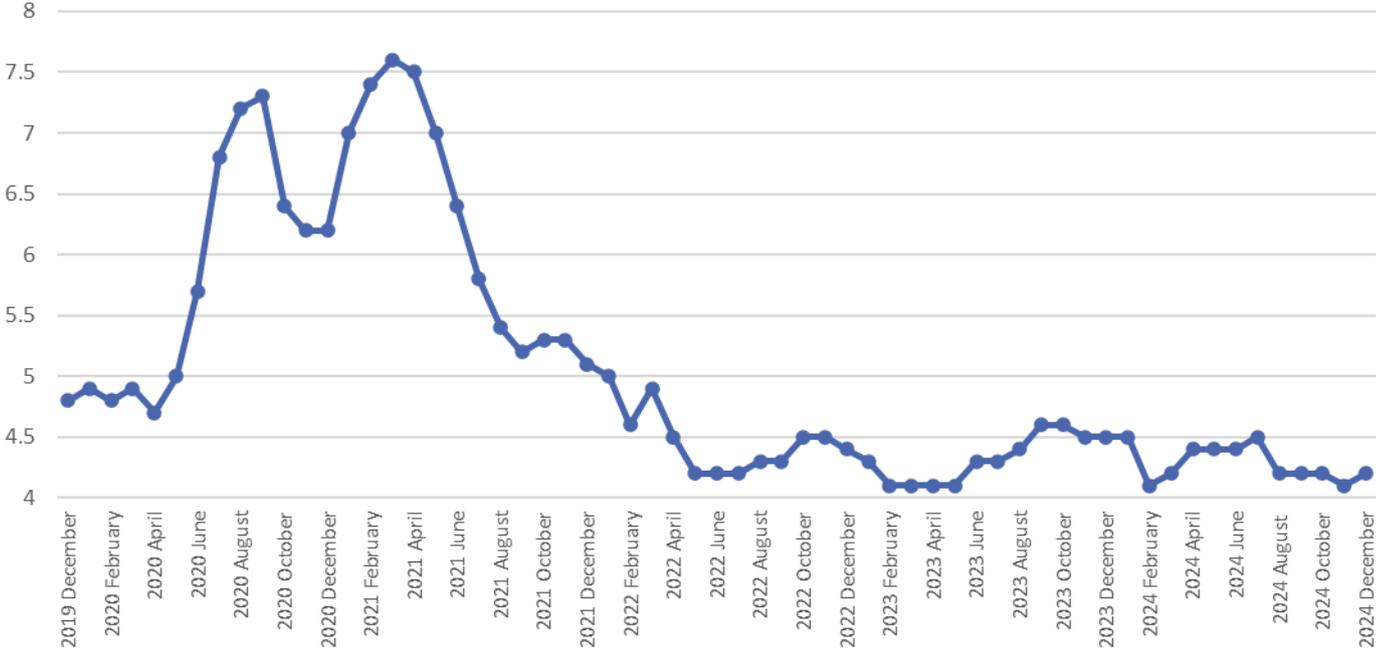
Section 6: Economic Dashboard January

Annual Dec' 24 ↑	Inflation (CPI) +1.4% Electricity -8.3% Gas -8.0% Bread +0.8% (CSO)	Annual Nov' 24 ↓	Agriculture Input Price Index -5.7% Fertiliser -9.4% (CSO)	Annual Nov' 24 ↑	Wholesale Price Index +2.1% Electricity +18.9% Energy Products +11.5% Food products +3.0%	Annual Dec' 24 ↑	UN Food Price Index +6.7% Meat +7.1% Dairy +17.0% Cereals -9.3% Oils +33.5% Sugar -10.6%
16 January 2025 ↓	Shipping Costs 2290.7 (-3.93% Month) (+20.78% Year) (Containerized Freight Index, Trading)	Annual Q2 2025	Gas Futures UK 55% ↑ TTF 50% ↑ (DECC)	16 January 2025	Fuel Prices Brent Oil Gas \$81.64 ↑ Natural Gas \$4.13 ↑	15 January 2024	FX rates €/\$ 1.0300 ↑ €/£ 0.8431 ↑ (European Central)
May 2024 ↑	Attempts to Rescue: SCARP 4 68 Total since Jan-22 (CRO Monthly)	May 2024 ↑	Attempts to Rescue: Examinerships 2 28 Total since Jan-22 (CRO Monthly)	May 2024	Business Incorporations/Liquidations Received 2,014 (May) ↓ 237 (May) ↑	Q4 2024 ↓	Insolvencies* -21.0% from Q4 2023 -18.9% from Q3 2024 (PwC Insolvency)
December 2024	Collective Redundancies** ↓ Notifications Received in the last 12 months. 166 (168 in November 2024)	September 2024 ↑	Total Lending Households €97,621m (€95,924m in September '23)	Q3 2024	Net Lending to SMEs/Stock of SME Loans -€97m ↓ €18.2bn ↓	18 December 2024	ECB Interest Rates Deposit 3.00% ↓ Lending 3.40% ↓
Annual Nov' 24 ↑	Construction & Building Costs ↓ +0.9% (CSO)	December 2024 ↑	Construction PMI 51.6 (47.5 November '24) (BNP Paribas Real Estate/Markit)	Annual Nov' 24 ↑	Manufacturing/Services PMI 49.1 (In Dec) ↓ 57.1 (In Dec) ↓ (49.9 in Nov) (58.3)	Annual Nov' 24 ↑	Manufacturing Output +3.2% (Traditional +4.2%) (Modern sectors +3.3%) (CSO)
October 2024 ↓	Services Output -1.1% from September 2024 +5.5% from October 2023 (CSO)	November 2024 ↑	Retail Sales +0.7% from Oct' 24 +0.5% from Nov' 23 (excl. motor sales) (CSO)	Annual Nov' 24 ↑	Exports 28% GB -22% NI -1% (CSO)	Annual Nov' 24 ↓	Imports -18% GB -7% NI -34% (CSO)

November 2024	<p>Funds Administered by EI</p> <p>Climate Fund Allocation €16m Grant Offer €16.55m</p> <p>Digital Fund*** Allocation €32.7m Grant offer €41.91m</p>	December 2024	<p>Consumer Sentiment Index</p> <p>73.9</p> <p>(74.1 Nov-24) (62.4 Dec-23)</p> <p>(Credit Union)</p>	July 2024	<p>Ireland's Global Competitiveness Ranking</p> <p>4th position</p> <p>(2nd in 2023)</p> <p>(WCR-Rankings)</p>	2024	<p>Ireland's Global Innovation Ranking</p> <p>19th position</p> <p>(22nd in 2023)</p> <p>(WIPO)</p>														
Q3 2024	<p>Weekly Earnings</p> <p>€955.49</p> <p>(+5.3% from Q3 2023)</p> <p>€907.10 in Q3 2023</p> <p>(CSO Quarterly)</p>	Q3 2024	<p>Total Employed</p> <p>2.79m</p> <p>+98.6k from Q3 2023 +519.8k from Q3 2020</p> <p>(CSO)</p>	Quarterly Q3 2024	<p>Job Vacancies</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Q2 24</td> <td>Q3 24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wholesale and Retail</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>2,200</td> <td>2,400</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accommodation & Food</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>1,100</td> <td>1,200</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Construction</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>1,500</td> <td>1,300</td> </tr> </table> <p>(CSO Quarterly)</p>	Q2 24	Q3 24	Wholesale and Retail		2,200	2,400	Accommodation & Food		1,100	1,200	Construction		1,500	1,300	Quarterly Q2 2024	<p>Retail & Wholesale</p> <p>-14.4k net jobs</p> <p>(Total 314.6k Q2 2024) (-10.9k from Q2 2022)</p> <p>(CSO)</p>
Q2 24	Q3 24																				
Wholesale and Retail																					
2,200	2,400																				
Accommodation & Food																					
1,100	1,200																				
Construction																					
1,500	1,300																				
December 2024	<p>Monthly Unemployment Rate</p> <p>4.2%</p> <p>(121,700 Unemployed) (11.6% Youth Unemployment Rate)</p> <p>(166.6k Live Register)</p> <p>(CSO) (CSO)</p>	Q3 2024	<p>Hours Worked per Week</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>Average</td> </tr> <tr> <td>85.9m</td> <td>35.6hrs</td> </tr> </table> <p>(83.5 in Q3 2023) (35.6 in Q3 2023)</p> <p>(CSO)</p>	Total	Average	85.9m	35.6hrs	Quarterly Q3 2024	<p>Growth Rates</p> <p>Gross Domestic Product +3.5%</p> <p>Gross National Product 0.9%</p> <p>(CSO)</p>	Quarterly Q3 2024	<p>Growth Rates</p> <p>Modified Final Domestic Demand +1.3%</p> <p>Modified GNI +€23.9bn (at current market prices in 2023)</p> <p>(CSO) (GNI)</p>										
Total	Average																				
85.9m	35.6hrs																				

Notes: Direction of arrow indicates change from previous week, month or year. Colour of arrow indicates positive (Green) or negative (Red/Orange) impact on the economy/business.

Figure. 1. Trends Seasonally Adjusted Monthly Unemployment Rate (%), January 2020 to December 2024 (CSO)



Section 7: Briefing from Tourism Division; Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

7.1 Overview

Tourism is the most significant indigenous enterprise sector, employing c. 200,000 people in every corner of Ireland. In 2023 (the most recent full year data), it is estimated that the 6.3 million overseas visitors generated €5.4 billion in export revenue while the total value of domestic overnight trips was estimated at €3.1 billion.

This industry is comprised mainly of SMEs and indeed might more accurately be described as a sector of micro-enterprises. The two key tourism state agencies are Fáilte Ireland (499 employees) and Tourism Ireland (193 employees). A key element of the Ministerial leadership role for tourism is in promoting the sector at home and, especially abroad particularly in key markets such as North America and Europe. Sustaining investment in overseas marketing is critical to ensuring that Ireland's profile as a tourist destination is maintained in an increasingly competitive global marketplace.

While there are over 20 different representative organisations within Irish tourism, they are collectively represented by ITIC, the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation, an umbrella organisation that has proven to be a credible and representative interlocutor for the sector over the years. The department has a good working relationship with ITIC, in particular, and engages as much as possible with individual bodies depending on the live issues of the day. A particularly useful engagement mechanism in recent years was the Hospitality and Tourism Forum which brought together those two very closely related sectors and was co-chaired by the Minister for Tourism and the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

7.1.1 Tourism Division Configuration

The Division is responsible for the following areas:

- Setting of national policy and strategy for the sector, and implementation of the 2025 – 2030 Tourism Policy Framework
- Funding to and oversight of the two tourism agencies: Fáilte Ireland (product development and promotion and marketing of the industry within Ireland) and Tourism Ireland, the all-island body established under the Good Friday Agreement to promote the entire island overseas as a tourism destination
- Engagement at international multilateral level (EU, OECD, Council of Europe, UN) on tourism issues
- North South tourism cooperation, including co-chairing the All-Island Strategic Tourism Group and delivery of capital projects under Shared Ireland
- Implementation of Ireland's Business Events Strategy 2030

The Division, led by an Assistant Secretary, has four business units with a total of 25 staff (20 based in Killarney and 5 in Dublin).



7.1.2 Recent relevant issues

Displacement impact of humanitarian accommodation on availability of tourism bed stock

The recent humanitarian crisis had a pronounced impact on the availability of tourism accommodation; at its height, 13% of all Fáilte-registered stock was taken out of the market by the State to provide humanitarian accommodation. Specific counties had up to one third of tourism stock displaced as a result. Changes in government policy and approach, plus a steady increase in new tourism bed-stock coming into the sector, have significantly improved the position; the most recent analysis (December 2024) shows that the displacement rate for Fáilte-registered accommodation is now 7% nationally, with the worst affected counties at 18%.



Business costs in tourism; VAT rate

In common with many SME sectors, tourism operators have been vocal about the challenges of coping with a range of increased business costs, several of which are on foot of government interventions (e.g. minimum wage increases, statutory sick pay changes, higher PRSI etc). The sector’s main and consistent proposal in this regard has been for the applicable VAT rate to be reduced once again from 13.5% to 9%, or for the lower rate to apply at least to food and other non-accommodation services, or for a new 11% compromise rate. D/Finance has estimated that a reduction to the VAT rate for hospitality could cost up to €750m per annum if a simple reversion to 9% was agreed to. The draft PFG contains a commitment to bring forward measures to support the retail and hospitality sector which will entail changes to VAT.

It is noted that the Enterprise and Employment section of the draft Programme for Government contains a range of measures aimed at reducing costs for businesses and focusing on competitiveness. As the tourism sector contains a large number of SMEs, the Department's programme of work should be of assistance to the sector and will be complemented by the work of Tourism Division and Fáilte Ireland's work in areas such as sustainability, digitalisation and commercial resilience.

Dublin airport passenger cap

The cap of 32m passengers per annum at Dublin Airport is a condition attached to planning permission granted for Terminal 2. The DAA has submitted planning applications to Fingal County Council seeking an increase in the cap. In late 2024, following a legal challenge by airlines on the capacity constraints imposed by the Irish Aviation Authority the High Court imposed a stay on constraints for summer 2025. It is possible that the High Court will extend the stay, which may result in no effective capacity constraints at the airport for the next 18-24 months.

While the cap is a concern to the growth of inbound tourism there are no capacity constraints at the other State airports, Cork and Shannon. There is an opportunity for these airports to expand services on offer, bring tourists directly into the regions and for Shannon to maximise the US preclearance facility there. Tourism Ireland promotes regional air access to Ireland in overseas tourism markets through initiatives like the Regional Cooperative Access Scheme, which seeks to encourage new access and optimise the opportunities presented by direct access to the regional airports to drive incremental business to commercially viable, high yielding tourism routes to the regions. It is noted that measures are included in the PfG on improving access to Ireland's tourist destination including a review of National Aviation Policy to maximise use of our airports.

UK Electronic Authorisation Scheme (ETA)

The UK Nationality and Borders Act 2022 provides for the establishment of a scheme under which non-Visa required nationals will need to obtain an ETA before travelling to the UK. From 8 January, eligible non-European visitors (including US citizens) need an ETA to travel to the UK. Eligible European visitors will need an ETA from 2 April 2025. UK and Irish citizens and permanent Irish residents will not require an ETA. The fact that the scheme does not provide for an exemption for international tourists who wish to travel from Ireland to Northern Ireland is a matter of concern for the tourism industry, both North and South. Particular concern remains around seamless cross-border travel on the island, with a majority of international visitors to Northern Ireland typically arriving via this jurisdiction. Requiring tourists to apply and purchase an ETA to travel to Northern Ireland results in an additional layer of bureaucracy and complexity that may deter potential visitors from choosing the island of Ireland as a holiday destination. Tourism Division is engaging with the Home Office on communications of the ETA scheme and together with Tourism Ireland will continue to monitor the impact of the scheme on the tourism economy.

7.1.3 Issues that may attract public interest end January/Start February

St Andrew's Church Suffolk Street

Fáilte Ireland owns the St Andrew's Church building on Suffolk Street Dublin 2 which has been vacant for a number of years and has attracted public comment. After a legal dispute with the most recent lessee, Fáilte Ireland is preparing to go to market, via outside estate agents and by means of a transparent expression of interest process, to reassign the lease of St Andrews Church. Fáilte Ireland have been advised to seek new planning for use as a food establishment to

successfully lease the premises. Planning was recently submitted to Dublin City Council and their estate agents plan to go to market to seek expressions of interest by the end of February.

18/19 Parnell Square

Dublin City Council have expressed their intention to develop nos. 18 and 19 Parnell Square into a cultural tourism experience which will greatly enhance Dublin's cultural tourism offering. Consequently, Fáilte Ireland, who own the properties, have agreed to transfer the properties to Dublin City Council. As it is primarily a Dublin City Council issue, Fáilte Ireland will not be issuing a press release on the matter, but they have requested that DCC might advise them in advance if they plan to issue any statements. However, this is outside of the control of Fáilte Ireland and it is more likely that news of the acquisition of the properties will be shared within the Council.

7.2 Key opportunities and challenges

New Tourism Policy Framework 2025 – 2030

A new Tourism Policy Framework was approved by government in November 2024. The framework aims to have a thriving tourism sector by 2030 supporting year-round quality jobs throughout the country. The Policy Framework contains the targets of growing tourism revenue annually by an average of 5.6% for both overseas and domestic tourists. Implementation of the Policy Framework will require the establishment of a range of working groups with the priority being the appointment of a new Tourism Leadership Group (with representatives from the tourism agencies, industry bodies, local authorities and other partners) to finalise an Action Plan for 2025 – 2028 to deliver the key policy objectives. This would provide an opportunity for the new Minister to highlight the growth objectives for Irish tourism in the short to medium term and to show clear leadership to the sector. A specific Tourism Accommodation Policy will also flow from the Framework in 2025. The new PFG states that the Government will “*Publish and implement a new national tourism policy to 2030, setting out a vision to grow visitor and employment numbers in the sector across Ireland*” and how this aligns with the November 2024 Policy Framework will require consideration.

Short term letting regulatory controls

The growth of the Short Term Letting (STL) sector over the past 15 years is a key aspect of the tourism ecosystem but it has brought with it certain challenges, in particular the impact on the availability of long-term rental accommodation. This is a significant challenge in many EU Member States, as in Ireland. In response, the EU Short Term Rental (STR) Regulation was adopted on 14 April 2024. This Regulation, which is applicable from 20 May 2026, will enable authorities to implement and enforce appropriate and proportionate laws to ensure there is a balance between the short and long term accommodation sectors. According to Fáilte Ireland there are c.32,000 STL properties advertised online in Ireland, and potentially 10,000 of those properties could be of a type and location that could be suitable for long term housing requirements.

Accordingly, the outgoing government committed, in the context of making more efficient use of existing housing stock, to develop regulatory controls with a view to ensuring that homes are used to best effect in areas of housing need. The General Scheme of the Registration of Short Term Tourist Letting Bill was approved by Government and published in December 2022. This bill provided for the establishment of regulatory controls including the establishment of a register for all STL properties. Following a legally required notification of the General Scheme to the European Commission under the Technical Regulations Information System (TRIS) Directive a standstill period was imposed by the Commission until December 2023 as work was underway to

agree the STR Regulation and this would enable a unified approach to regulation across the EU. During this period the General Scheme was revised to align it to the STR Regulation.

The revised and retitled Short Term Letting and Tourism Bill General Scheme requires Government approval to enable a conclusion of the TRIS process and to proceed with drafting of the Bill. The Bill also has potential to enhance the wider data gathering capacity of Government in relation to the full suite of tourism accommodation on offer in the State and this will be of particular assistance in planning, introducing and collecting an accommodation levy.

Tourism Accommodation data

Current data on tourism accommodation occupancy is drawn from the Inbound Tourism and the Household Travel Surveys. According to the CSO there are limitations to the precision and accuracy of the estimates that these surveys can achieve.

The proposed Short Term Letting and Tourism (STLT) Bill allows for the implementation of the Short Term Rental (STR) Regulation, adopted by the EU on 14 April 2024 and applicable from 20 May 2026. The STR Regulation deals with data collection and sharing, for the Short Term Letting (STL) sector, also described as NACE 552. Following its implementation in May 2026, STR online platforms will be obliged to provide Member States with data concerning STL units listed/advertised on their platforms. This data will include the specific address (geolocated via Eircode in Ireland) and activity data for each unit including the number of nights a unit is rented, the number of guests per night and the country of residence of each guest. Ireland will then have comprehensive data for the NACE 552 category. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Business Events Strategy

A new strategy for the growth and development of business tourism was approved at end-2024 and an Oversight Group was established to monitor its implementation. The Business Events Strategy 2030 *For Tourism and Beyond* seeks to strengthen Ireland's reputation as a competitive and attractive destination for international business events. These events can serve as a catalyst for delivering significant national benefits through integration with other government policies and strategies and it is intended to establish a cross-departmental group to optimise the wider benefits of business events to other Departments and sectors and segments of the economy.

North South Ministerial Council (NSMC)

Tourism Ireland CLG was established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement, is funded through the Department with responsibility for Tourism and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland and is accountable to the NSMC.

A Tourism sectoral meeting took place on 24 June. A second meeting planned for late 2024 did not take place due to the general election in Q4. It is envisaged that a tourism sectoral meeting will take place early in Q1 2025 with a number of matters to be taken for decision by the NSMC, including Tourism Ireland's 2025 Business Plan and budget. In accordance with normal rotation arrangements, this meeting will be chaired by the southern Minister and the NSMC Joint Secretariat will shortly be seeking a date for the Minister's availability to attend.

All Island Strategic Tourism Group (AISTG)

At the NSMC Tourism Sectoral on 24 June 2024, Minister Murphy and Minister Martin signed a Joint Ministerial Statement supporting Sustainable Tourism and agreed to the establishment of a Joint Strategic Coordination Group to identify and examine opportunities that will support sustainable growth of the tourism sector across the island and advance brand collaboration initiatives across both jurisdictions.

The newly established AISTG which is co-chaired by officials in the Sponsor Departments, has representatives from the three tourism agencies. The group provides a strategic approach, aligned to policy priorities, to the development and implementation of all-island initiatives, including collaboration in relation to the regional tourism brands – Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East.

The aim of this group is aligned with the measure in the new PfG to 'Support Tourism Ireland to further integrate tourism offerings on an all-island basis'.

Shared Island Fund

The government's Shared Island initiative aims to harness the full potential of the Good Friday Agreement to enhance cooperation, connection and mutual understanding on the island and engage with all communities and traditions to build consensus around a shared future. €7.6 million has been allocated out to 2025 for a brand collaboration and marketing project linking the Wild Atlantic Way and the Causeway Coastal Route in the North West region. This project is being developed and implemented by the three tourism agencies on the island. A key milestone for the project is the Coast to Coast Capital Investment Scheme which will be rolled out in 2025.

A tourism proposal for the next round of Shared Island funding was recently submitted to D/Taoiseach. The proposal includes 3 shared destination projects - Cuilcagh Lakelands, Carlingford Lough and Sliabh Beagh. It is anticipated that two of these projects will proceed with funding of €6-€8 million for each.

Tourism Marketing – Emerging Markets

When exploring new marketing opportunities Tourism Ireland adopt a strategic approach to assess the economic benefit of opportunities versus the environmental impact and with an emphasis on attracting visitors with value added tourism traits.

Tourism Ireland will also explore the opportunities to build on new markets identified through engagement with Global Ireland, EXPO, St Patrick Day events, the network of Irelands' embassies and Ireland House.

Expo 2025

Expo will be held in Osaka, Kansai from 13 April 2025 to 13 October 2025. Over the 6-month period, official participants from 161 countries and regions, as well as 9 international organisations, will showcase at the event. Ireland's attendance at EXPO is being lead by DFA.

The concept of Ireland's Expo 2025 participation is 'Creativity Connects People', which will be reflected in a series of events and activities held over the six-month duration. In terms of overseas marketing of Ireland as a tourist destination the promotion of Ireland as the home of Halloween is planned for inclusion in the activities taking place in October.

Tourism and Sport

2025 will be an important year for golf and sports tourism in general as preparations continue for the Ryder Cup at Adare Manor in 2027, the hosting of Euro 2028 and the Aer Lingus College Football Classic in Dublin in August.

The Aer Lingus College Football Classic has consistently boosted Ireland's economy. The August 2024 game was played in front of a capacity crowd, with over 27,000 international fans attending. The match provided a major boost for tourism, delivering an estimated €115 million to the economy. Coupled with the 2023 game between Notre Dame and Navy (which generated over €180 million to the economy), large-scale events such as these, which are supported financially by the tourism agencies, are important in terms of driving tourism demand as they provide international visitors with a compelling reason to choose the island of Ireland as a wonderful holiday destination as well as a top location for sporting events.

In addition, a proposal on hosting regular NFL games in Croke Park is likely to be brought to government imminently for approval.

PfG Commitment – Year of the Invitation

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to launch the Year of the Invitation, extending a global invitation for visitors to reconnect with Ireland, following on from the success of The Gathering in 2013. The tourism agencies have welcomed the idea of a themed year in the past and have advised that it would need a significant lead-in period and budget to develop a project of scale. To maximise the potential of such a project, the establishment of a project team comprising additional resources in both agencies and a project director in the department, would need to be considered.

Tourism Employment & Careers

The Department and Fáilte Ireland continue to support the tourism industry to build the talent and skills it needs to remain profitable, competitive and resilient. A key priority in this regard is to support tourism businesses to adopt quality employment practices, to ensure that the sector is recognised as a desirable and rewarding career choice, and that individuals working in it can continue to develop their own expertise, knowledge and skills, to build a long-term and successful career.

Work is continuing with industry and across Government to ensure a coordinated approach to addressing labour and skills shortages. In 2025, in line with commitments in the new Programme for Government the Department will engage further with the Department of Further and Higher Education to expand courses in tourism and hospitality, as they increase investment in this sector, utilising the National Training Fund. Additionally, the Department will work to reinstate the

Tourism and Hospitality Careers Oversight Group (COG) to facilitate enhanced engagement with all industry representatives, state agencies, Government Departments and the education sector. In 2024 an independent feasibility study completed in response to a JOC report, entitled “Working conditions and skills shortages in Ireland’s tourism and hospitality sector” set out potential responses to certain JOC recommendations including the possibility to reinstate the COG which was established to support sustainable employment in the tourism and hospitality sector in order to attract and retain new and existing talent within the tourism and hospitality industry.

EU matters

The EU supports, coordinates and complements the actions of Member States related to tourism. EU tourism policy aims to maintain Europe’s position as a leading global destination and to turn Europe into a sustainable destination, with due regard also to its social and environmental aspects. Objectives include maximising the industry’s contribution to growth and jobs, as well as the promotion of cooperation between EU countries and development of the attractiveness of Europe as a destination .

Actions at EU level must be within the confines of Article 6 and Article 195 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). To that end, the EU’s competence on tourism is to complement the actions of Member States and aims to encourage the creation of a favourable environment for the undertakings of the sector, and promoting cooperation between Member States, particularly through the exchange of good practice.

While the key decision-making levels for developing tourism in the EU are the Member States, regional and local authorities, based on their regulatory structures, there are several areas where EU-level policy affects the tourism ecosystem, including policies on environment, mobility, digital, consumer protection and passenger mobility, data and statistics, cohesion, travel facilitation (visas), employment, taxation, education and culture.

In recent years, a number of guiding initiatives and publications have helped to shape work at EU level in relation to tourism, most notably the Transition Pathway for Tourism (“TPT”) which identifies 27 areas of measures for the green and digital transition, and for improving the resilience of EU tourism, and the European Agenda for Tourism 2030 (“2030 Agenda”). The Commission (CION) conducts a regular stocktaking exercise on progress of the TPT and by mid-2025, will provide a report on progress under the 2030 Agenda. That report will also include recommendations for future areas of action and will help inform the work of the Irish Presidency (“IE PRES”) in H2 2026.

EU Meetings

Tourism matters are considered under the **COMPET Council** which holds five to six formal meetings a year, depending on the urgency of the topic related to the relevant policy field, (internal market, tourism, industry, research and space). Whilst not prohibited under Council structures, there does not tend to be a formal COMPET Council in Tourism. However, in recent years, several MS (ES, BE) have held informal Ministerial meetings for Tourism Ministers. The PL PRES will host an informal meeting of tourism ministers in Warsaw from 23-24 June 2025.

The **Tourism Working Party** (a subgroup of the Working Party on Competitiveness and Growth) is responsible for issues related to the promotion of the competitiveness and sustainability of EU undertakings in the tourism sector. It seeks to work on matters that complement the action of the Member States in this field. It encourages the creation of a favourable environment for sustainable development and promotes cooperation between the member states.

7.3 Recent Key Files in Tourism WP

Legislative:

- REGULATION (EU) 2024/1028 of 11 April 2024 on data collection and sharing relating to short-term accommodation rental services and amending Regulation (“**the STR Regulation**”) which was signed by the co-legislators and published in the Official Journal of the EU on 29 April 2024. It entered into force 20 days later. It will start applying from 20 May 2026.

Council Conclusions:

- Council Conclusions on ‘European Agenda for Tourism 2030’ (adopted 01 December 2022) pdf (europa.eu)
- Tourism in Europe for the next decade: sustainable, resilient, digital, global and social (adopted 27 May 2021) st08881-en21.pdf (europa.eu)
- The competitiveness of the tourism sector as a driver for sustainable growth, jobs and social cohesion in the EU for the next decade (adopted 27 May 2019) link

Ongoing/Upcoming:

Sustainability, digitalisation and skills are frequent topics at the Tourism WP.

- At the next meeting of the Tourism WP (28 January 2025), CION is likely to present its stocktaking report on progress of the TPT and the twin transition (digital and sustainability).
- Work continues in relation to the development of a Tourism Dataspace and ongoing population of the EU Tourism Dashboard.
- The new Commissioner for Transport and Tourism intends to present a strategy for sustainable tourism following consultation with stakeholders. The 2025 report of the CION on progress of Agenda 2030 will also inform the strategy. (The Commissioner has indicated that important themes will include climate change, climate preparedness, overtourism, upskilling).
- The Commissioner has also indicated that the influence of AI on tourism business is also a priority. While the new Commission work plan is awaited, the broader Commission focus is shifting towards sustainable technology and innovation, strategic autonomy and competitiveness, in line with the recent Letta and Draghi reports.
- Current topical matters on sustainability include the project on Sustainable EU Tourism – Shaping the Tourism of Tomorrow and Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules (PEFCR) for hotel accommodation. Several matters dealt with in other working parties will also impact on tourism (not directly the work of DTCAGSM but the Department is consulted on them).

Statistics

CION is currently looking at amending the Regulation on Tourism Statistics. Harmonisation of collection rules would allow for more consistent collection of environmental and sustainability indicators. Review process commenced in 2024 (chaired by Eurostat).

Transport

Air Passenger Rights – Under PL PRES, Council is reopening previous discussions regarding review and update of Reg. (EC) 261/2004, and CION’s proposal from 2013, which seeks to update common rules on compensation and assistance to passengers in the event of denied

boarding and of cancellation or long delay of flights. PL PRES aiming to secure a general approach / progress report for June Transport Council. Previous European Parliament (“EP”) position was adopted 2014, with vote to enter into trilogue in 2019.

Multimodal & Omnibus Passenger Rights Regulations: Council General Approaches on both files agreed at recent December Transport Council. Awaiting adoption of EP position (expected June earliest).

EU Just Transition Funding

Under the EU Just Transition Fund, the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is the Managing Authority and Fáilte Ireland is an Intermediate Body. As an Intermediate Body, Fáilte Ireland has been tasked with the administration of €68 million for a Regenerative Tourism and Placemaking Scheme in the period 2023-2026. The purpose of the Fund is to assist the most affected regions where there have been direct impacts from the move away from peat production and electricity generation from peat. In Ireland, the Fund’s geographic territory includes Counties Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath, Roscommon and the Municipal Districts of Ballinasloe (County Galway), Athy, Clane-Maynooth, (County Kildare) and Carrick-on-Suir and Thurles (County Tipperary). The tourism element includes allocations of €38 million under Regenerative Tourism business supports and €30 million for a Tourism Trails Network. While many projects are progressing well, ensuring all projects are complete and the funding is fully drawn down by the end of 2026 will be challenging.

Tourism Product Development - Capital Investment

All Exchequer funding voted to the Department for tourism services is channelled to the tourism agencies. With specific regard to capital support for the development of tourism product (including visitor attractions), there is no Department role in the design or administration of these schemes or assessment of projects under such schemes. The funding is administered by Fáilte Ireland.

Fáilte Ireland has previously provided funding channels for its capital investment in tourism product development in the schemes such as:

- Large Grants Schemes: Provided under the Platforms for Growth approach to large grants schemes;
- Strategic Partnerships and other collaborations; and
- Direct investment in experience brand infrastructure.

Fáilte Ireland is now preparing a new capital investment strategy following the completion of the Tourism Policy Framework 2025 -2030. The forthcoming review of the National Development Plan will also be of interest in terms of capital funding for the sector.

Tourism Sector Climate Adaptation Plan

The National Adaptation Framework outlines a whole of government and society approach to climate adaptation in Ireland. Ministers with responsibility for sectors included in this Framework are required under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 to submit Sectoral Adaptation Plans to the Government by September 2025. Development of these Adaptation Plans must follow statutory sectoral adaptation guidelines and a number of requirements set out in the Act, including consultation with the Climate Change Advisory Council and public consultation.

Tourism is one of 13 sectors required to develop a Sectoral Adaptation Plan. This will be Ireland’s first Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the Tourism Sector, whereas the other 12 sectors

submitting plans in September are in their second adaptation planning cycle.

Tourism Policy Unit (Tourism Division) and Strategic Policy Unit (Corporate division) are chairing a Strategic Adaptation Team to work through a six-step adaptation planning process. The Team also includes the two tourism agencies, Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland; the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications; the Environmental Protection Agency; and the local authority sector's Climate Action Regional Offices.

OECD Tourism Committee

Ireland is also represented on the OECD Tourism Committee. The Committee's mandate is to provide an integrated, whole-of-government approach linking tourism to policies such as economy, investment, transport, trade, inclusive growth, employment, innovation, green growth, local development, SMEs and entrepreneurship. The Committee also supports work on tourism policy performance and evaluation through its tourism policy reviews.

Ireland's representation on the Tourism committee usually involves attending (at official level) 2/3 meetings per year but also contributing to various publications/reports as well as working with our state agencies including Fáilte Ireland and the CSO on OECD initiatives.

Tourism Statistics

The division also monitors tourism performance and works closely with the CSO and the tourism agencies in relation to tourism statistics. It also participates in an All-Island tourism statistics group with representation from relevant tourism and statistics agencies north and south.

7.4 Schedule of Upcoming Events

Domestic / International	Date	Destination	Event
D	5 February	Webinar	Faillte Ireland Industry Briefing
D	6 February	Galway	AIPCO Business Events Conference
D	12 February	Dublin	Global Tourism Forum
Intl	24 – 27 February	USA	Tourism Ireland West Coast US Sales Mission (Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles)
Intl	4 March	Berlin, Germany	ITB Berlin, major intl travel fair
Intl	13 – 20 March	TBC	St Patrick's Day overseas promotional visits
D	1 – 2 April	Killarney	Meitheal – flagship tourism trade event for overseas buyers
Intl	21 – 24 April	USA	Tourism Ireland US Sales Mission (Detroit, Indianapolis, Nashville, Charlotte)
Intl	20 – 22 May	Frankfurt, Germany	IMEX Frankfurt Global Business Events Trade Show
Intl	23-24 June	Warsaw, Poland	EU Informal Ministerial meeting

7.5 Breakdown of Tourism Budget

Allocation for 2025			
Subhead	Description	2024 Revised Estimate €'000	2025 Revised Estimate €'000
A3	Fáilte Ireland	95,474	99,684
A4	Tourism Ireland CLG	27,258	23,948
A5	Overseas Tourism Marketing Fund	59,600	66,639
A6	Tourism Product Development	36,500	33,169
A7			
A8	EU Just Transition Fund	1,500	22,681
Total		220,332	246,121

Subhead A3 - the general operating and administration expenses of Fáilte Ireland, including salary and pension costs and the costs incurred in promoting and supporting the development of Irish tourism.

Subhead A4 – general pay, pension and operating costs of Tourism Ireland.

Subhead A5 – overseas tourism marketing fund to support Tourism Ireland’s overseas marketing.

Subhead A6 - to support investment in tourism product and infrastructure.

Subhead A8 - to support work being undertaken as part of the EU Just Transition Fund in the Midlands Region.

7.6 Tourism Agencies

Fáilte Ireland

Chairperson of the Fáilte Ireland Authority - Ruth Andrews

Chief Executive Officer - Paul Kelly

Fáilte Ireland was established under the National Tourism Development Authority Act 2003. As the National Tourism Development Authority, Fáilte Ireland’s role is to support the long-term sustainable growth in the economic, social, cultural and environmental contribution of tourism to Ireland.

It works in partnership with Government, State agencies, Local Authorities, representative groups and industry, to develop tourism across Ireland by creating destination development plans and networks, investing in infrastructure, activities, visitor attractions and festivals. It provides consumer and buyer insights, mentoring, business supports and training programmes and buyer

platforms to help tourism businesses innovate and grow. Fáilte Ireland has responsibility for domestic holiday marketing across four regional experience brands.

Fáilte Ireland Authority – Board Appointments

The Chair and members of the Fáilte Ireland Authority are appointed by the Minister for Tourism pursuant to the National Tourism Development Act, 2003. There will be one vacancy in May 2025 which does not need to be filled until other vacancies arise, so no action is required in 2025.

Tourism Ireland

Chairperson of Tourism Ireland CLG – Christopher Brooke

Chief Executive Officer – Alice Mansergh

Tourism Ireland CLG was established on foot of the Good Friday Agreement and is funded through the Department with responsibility for Tourism and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. It is a company limited by guarantee and not having a Share Capital. Under the terms of its Memo and Articles of Association and Financial Memorandum it is accountable to the NSMC.

Tourism Ireland works closely with a wide range of partners both on the island of Ireland and around the world. Their plans are closely aligned with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland who have close inter-dependencies particularly around the development of regional, seasonal and sustainable product and experiences.

Tourism Ireland – Board of Directors

The Board and Chairperson of Tourism Ireland are nominated by the Minister with responsibility for Tourism and the Northern Ireland Minister for the Economy. The Board nominees – six from Ireland and six from Northern Ireland – are appointed by the NSMC. Four southern director positions are due to become vacant on 31 July 2025 on the expiry of their periods of appointment. The process for identifying Ministerial nominations for appointment by the NSMC will need to commence shortly.

