



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

Annual Report

2021



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Foreword



This annual report outlines all the work carried out by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in 2021 on behalf of citizens, workers and businesses.

While our economy grew in 2021, it continued to suffer serious disruption throughout due to COVID-19. Businesses and workers in all sectors were affected and the Department worked closely with the enterprise community to keep staff and customers safe through health & safety protocols agreed with business organisations and unions. We provided hundreds of millions of euro in grants and low-cost loans to keep businesses afloat and people in employment.

The Government's Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) was published in June 2021. As well as committing to a substantial financial package to help SMEs, the Plan outlined a medium-term policy framework to help businesses make the green and digital transition, to create more secure and valued jobs and encourage balanced regional development. It set the target of having 2.5 million at work in Ireland, the highest number ever. This was achieved ahead of schedule in 2022 and it is proof positive of the speed at which our economy bounced back

Over the course of the year, we helped businesses to move online, to access affordable credit, to develop their innovative potential, and to deal with our changed trading relationship with the UK. We co-ordinate Government actions to reduce the cost of insurance for consumers, businesses and voluntary organisations. We are now developing a White Paper on Enterprise which will set out an ambitious vision for future industrial and enterprise policy.

The Department continued to develop and implement the nine Regional Enterprise Plans. It was another very good year for Foreign Direct Investment; we now have the highest ever number of people employed in our multinational sector. Both Enterprise Ireland and IDA client companies recorded their greatest jobs growth in a single year. Most new IDA investments were made outside of Dublin and over two-thirds of jobs created by Enterprise Ireland companies were located outside of the capital. Local Enterprise Offices also contributed to jobs growth. We are contributing to important work across Government, such as Housing for All and the Climate Action Plan.

One of my priorities is to ensure that the rights of workers are protected and improved. The National Minimum Wage was increased for the 6th consecutive year. The Department published a National Remote Working Strategy in 2021 to maximise the economic and social benefits that it can bring. We progressed proposals to introduce a new annual public holiday, a Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect, the right to request remote working, statutory sick pay and better protection of workplace tips and gratuities.

The Department implemented some major legislative reforms including the passage of legislation to establish a new Corporate Enforcement Agency to strengthen our response to white collar crime, a new simplified rescue process for small companies (SCARP) and a ban on reselling tickets at above market value. A lot of work was also done preparing the ground for major overhauls of our Competition and Consumer laws. These are being enacted this year.

I would like to thank Dr Orlaigh Quinn and all the staff of the Department for their work and dedication during the year. I would also like to thank Ministers of State Damien English and Robert Troy for their continuing support in meeting our objectives.



Leo Varadkar TD

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise,
Trade and Employment

Foreword



I am pleased to present the Department's Annual Report for 2021, the first Annual Report on the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023. The Department delivered strongly during a challenging year; dealing with crises while continuing to work on our vision of making Ireland the best place to succeed in business, and to deliver sustainable full employment and higher standards of living across all regions of the country.

Throughout a year which saw continuing impacts from COVID-19 and the consequences of the UK's departure from the EU, we worked to support job creation and innovation, in collaboration with our enterprise agencies, and to ensure the strengthening and development of Irish enterprises across all regions of the country. We delivered a range of significant financial measures and advisory services for enterprise to deliver on the Rebuilding Sustainable Enterprises pillar of the Government's Economic Recovery Plan.

An important aspect of our work is stakeholder engagement and we prioritised this during 2021, with initiatives such as the Enterprise Forum, Retail Forum and the SME and State Bodies Group. This engagement greatly assisted us as we developed research, policy and schemes with examples of initiatives such as the new National AI Strategy, the report of the SME Taskforce, the Disruptive Technology Innovation Fund, reviews of our trade agreements and capital budgets. As a small open and global economy, with a major dependence on trade, we continued to engage internationally and at EU level on a wide agenda, including free trade agreements and new financial and advisory supports for SMEs.

Climate Action is a central objective in the Department's new Statement of Strategy. In partnership with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, we launched the Climate Toolkit 4 Business, an online tool to give businesses practical advice on how to start taking climate action. We provided significant input into the Government's Climate Action Plan 2021 and developed measures to help the enterprise sector to meet emissions targets.

Important legislation was enacted in 2021, including the Loan Guarantee Schemes Agreements (Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland) Act 2021, the Companies (Rescue Process for Small and Micro Companies) Act 2021, the Workplace Relations (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021, and the Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Act 2021. This final piece of legislation will see the establishment of the Corporate Enforcement Authority, on a statutory basis, in 2022.

I want to thank the staff of the Department, our Offices and our Agencies for their contribution, at a time when we faced unprecedented challenges and changes to working arrangements. Across all areas of the Department, staff demonstrated remarkable flexibility, commitment and resilience to ensure that we continued to achieve our business plan objectives and provide services to our customers, during a time when attendance at the office was not possible. The completion of our People Strategy 2021-2024 - Promoting a High-Performance Organisation, will inform and shape our organisation in the coming years. I am pleased that we began to welcome staff back to the office, particularly our many new colleagues who started working in the Department during the pandemic and I extend my appreciation and best wishes to colleagues who retired this year. As the Department that leads on the National Remote Working Strategy, I also look forward to building on our experiences during the last two years to ensure that we make blended working a permanent feature of how we support our workforce, while continuing to effectively meet our business needs.



Dr Orlaigh Quinn
Secretary General,
Department of Enterprise,
Trade and Employment

Executive Summary

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 sets out a vision of making Ireland the best place to succeed in business across all regions of our country, with vibrant enterprises, more high quality employment, growing international trade, fair workplaces and higher productivity. This is the first Annual Report on progress towards achieving the strategic goals that will allow us to realise this vision.

While our economy grew in 2021, it continued to suffer serious disruption throughout due to COVID-19. Businesses and workers in all sectors were affected and the Department worked closely with the enterprise community to keep staff and customers safe through health & safety protocols agreed with business organisations and unions.

The Department played a key role in the government response to the pandemic, including through the provision of funding and advisory schemes for businesses, and by year end we were well on our way to achieving the 2.5 million people in employment target in the Economic Recovery Plan.

The Statement of Strategy contains six strategic goals. The Department, working with its Offices and Agencies, took a range of actions to deliver each of these goals, as follows:



Strategic Goal 1:
Achieve a strong recovery and sustainable economic development through business growth, jobs growth, resilience, and innovation.

During 2021, the Department partnered with local authorities to make funding available to companies through the Restart Grant and Restart Grant Plus to contribute towards the cost of reopening or keeping businesses operational during the COVID-19 crisis. A total of €685 million was provided during 2020 and 2021.

We supported SMEs through a range of initiatives including the Retail Forum, the launch of the report of the SME Taskforce and an increased focus on digitalisation. A third call of the COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme awarded retailers a total of €6.3 million to help them to strengthen their online presence. We also worked on further

developing a range of schemes to ensure that SMEs can access affordable finance, appropriate to their stage of development.

The Department led in coordinating the development of nine new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024 and provided funding to support regional development initiatives through the Regional Enterprise Development Fund and Border Enterprise Development Fund.

We published the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, which aims to optimise socio-economic opportunities and launched the national Remote Work Strategy to maximise economic, social and environmental benefits and provide opportunities for balanced regional development.

We commenced work on a National Clustering Policy and Framework to establish a strategic national approach to enable cluster development.

We continued to support job creation through our agencies, with record numbers of jobs being created in client

companies. IDA Ireland client companies had a net increase of 17,000 jobs during 2021. Enterprise Ireland client companies had a net increase of 11,911 jobs. The Local Enterprise Offices helped client companies to create 3,000 jobs in net terms.

Our Employment Permits Unit processed a large volume of employment permit applications during a period of significantly increased demand and worked to reduce the impact that delays in the processing of employment permits are having on businesses and workers.

We engaged across government on key issues and priorities that impact our economic performance, including housing, taxation, and climate action.

The Department coordinated a national policy position on the State Aid Modernisation programme of reviews. We continued to focus on the implementation of the National Space Strategy and launched a fourth call of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund. €95 million of funding was awarded in 2021 under the third call.



**Strategic Goal 2:
Promote safety, better pay and conditions, more secure jobs, and gender equality in the workplace.**

The Department led on the development and revision of the Work Safely Protocol during 2021, which supported the safe transition back to the workplace following the COVID-19 crisis.

We made significant progress on new employment rights during the year, including statutory sick pay, the right to request remote working and better protection of workplace tips. We also published the Plan for Action on Collective Redundancies following Insolvency, which sets out several commitments to safeguard the rights of workers in these circumstances. The Department supported research by the Low Pay Commission on the progression to a living wage and the examination of Universal Basic Income. We provided a significant volume of industrial relations services through the Labour Court and the Workplace Relations Commission.

During 2021, a High-Level Group on Collective Bargaining was established under the auspices of the Labour Employer Economic Forum.

To help improve gender balance, Enterprise Ireland launched The Level Project, a new initiative to increase the number of women in senior management positions in Irish SMEs.

We provided increased investment to the Health and Safety Authority, with the aim of improving worker health and reducing workplace injuries and illnesses. The Department also coordinated the Irish response to the EU's Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability.



**Strategic Goal 3:
Enhance our business regulatory environment and Ireland's attractiveness as a place to do business.**

2021 saw significant progress on a number of important pieces of legislation. The Companies (Rescue Process for Small and Micro Companies) Act 2021 was established to provide a simplified restructuring process for viable companies. We brought through legislation and secured funding to allow for the establishment of the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement

as a statutory and independent agency entitled the Corporate Enforcement Authority. The Sale of Tickets Act 2021 was signed into law and now prohibits the sale of tickets above their original price for events in designated venues.

We undertook stakeholder consultations and progressed work on transposition of a number of EU Directives and Regulations including the Digital Markets Act, the Copyright and Digitalisation Directive, the Directive on the Use of Digital Tools and Processes in Company Law, the Directive on Representative Actions, and the Digital Services Act.

The first implementation report of the Action Plan on Insurance Reform was published during the year and showed that 50% of actions had been

implemented in the first six months since the Action Plan's launch. We also launched a public consultation on enhancing and reforming the role of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board.

The Company Law Review Group completed its consideration of the issue of creditors' rights in the context of liquidations and submitted reports on the provision of information to creditors and on the consequences of liquidation and restructuring practices. The Expert Group on Future Skills Needs published a report on enhancing skills needed for key zero carbon activities and worked on the implementation of recommendations arising from other recently completed studies.



Strategic Goal 4:
Deepen and extend Ireland’s global business and trade in a fair and sustainable manner supportive of high labour standards and further grow the all-island economy.

The Department and our agencies supported businesses through the post Brexit process and provided financial supports and advice to assist with the disruption arising from the imposition of customs checks and controls which affected trade with the UK.

The Tánaiste established the Trade and Investment Council in 2021, to ensure effective leadership of our national trade and investment priorities. The Department worked closely with the EU Commission and Member States to advance negotiations on trade agreements with a number of countries. We also worked with IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland on a programme of trade and investment missions to key locations. For the first time since 2019, Enterprise Ireland hosted International Markets Week, which saw 700 companies engaging in meetings with EI advisers.

We continued our engagement at EU level, including through Ministerial attendance at the Trade Council and Competitiveness Council. We also represented Ireland on a range of

working groups and committees dealing with Single Market issues and managed Ireland’s contribution to other EU networks, including the SOLVIT Centre and Internal Market Information System.

In fulfilling our trade licensing and control functions, the Department issued 636 export licenses in 2021 and conducted outreach and compliance visits to exporters’ premises. The Department also completed its first ever term as a titulaire member of the International Labour Organisation, which entailed speaking and voting rights.

In June, the Tánaiste took part in the Shared Island Dialogue on the all-island economy, entitled Building Back Together, which had strong engagement from the enterprise community.



Strategic Goal 5:
Advance the green transition in enterprise, honouring our climate action commitments.

The Department provided significant input to the Climate Action Plan 2021 and engaged across government to develop the measures that the enterprise sector will have to implement to reduce emission in line with the targets included

in the Plan. We also secured EU funding of €55 million to grant aid projects to accelerate decarbonisation of the enterprise sector.

Enterprise Ireland launched an international campaign to promote Irish green innovators who are delivering sustainable solutions to tackle climate change. The EI Small Business Innovation Research Programme continues to support new smart and green business models and technologies.

The Tánaiste and the Minister for Environment, Climate and

Communications launched an online toolkit to make it easier for businesses to address their climate impact. The Climate Enterprise Action Fund was launched in 2021 to provide companies with opportunities to develop plans in areas such as resource efficiency and renewable energy.

The Department has also taken a range of actions to improve sustainability and become more energy efficient in our own buildings and practices. We have delivered a 63% reduction in energy usage since the baseline year of 2009.



Strategic Goal 6:
Build an innovative and agile department with a strong public service ethos driving effective and responsible policy implementation.

The Department responded strongly to the challenges of COVID-19 and the impact that this had on our operations. We supported staff to ensure that all of our business priorities continued to be delivered, despite a significantly changed working environment during the year. We developed a new DETE People Strategy 2021-2024 which sets out a plan to secure, develop and retain staff that will allow us to deliver our mission. The Connected Teams project was designed to ensure that we delivered a blended working environment that

supports organisational performance, team connectivity and employee wellbeing.

We secured an additional budget allocation for 2021 to ensure that the Department and our agencies could provide the necessary supports for businesses dealing with the COVID-19 and Brexit challenges. We also published a review of the Department's capital expenditure during the 2006-2020 period.

The Department's ICT Unit focused on adapting to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis. A range of measures were taken to increase our capacity to support remote working and to prepare for blended working in the future. We also put a number of additional protections in place to ward against the increased risk of cyber-attack.

Our Communications Unit ran a number of campaigns, primarily through our digital platforms, and saw significant growth in engagement across these platforms; our LinkedIn page following increased by almost 50%, our Twitter page received 14.5 million impressions, and our website recorded 2.2 million page views. Our internal communications team ensured that our staff remained informed, particularly during periods of extended remote working.

We maintained a strong focus on the health and safety of staff during 2021, and progressed modernising and upgrading work in our buildings. We also ensured that our corporate governance and compliance obligations were met, and we continued to ensure a focus on customer service. Our internal audit team focused on strategic risks, and emerging risks in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Vision

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's vision is to make Ireland the best place to succeed in business, delivering sustainable full employment and higher standards of living across all regions of the country.

Mission

Its mission is to lead on the creation and maintenance of high quality and sustainable full employment across all regions of the country by championing enterprise and innovation across government, by supporting a competitive business base to incentivise work, enterprise, trade, innovation and investment and by promoting fair and competitive markets as well as best business practice through the regulatory and enforcement work of the Department, its Offices and its agencies.

Values

Its values are to foster a culture of accountability, efficiency and value for money, which is rooted in a public service ethos of independence, integrity, impartiality, openness, dignity and respect. As Civil Servants, we espouse the highest standards of professionalism, honesty, objectivity and quality, which are central to fulfilling our roles in supporting the democratic process and serving the people.

Department Structure

The Department is led by the Secretary General, Dr Orlaigh Quinn, and is organised into eight Divisions, as well as a number of Offices. The Department is also assisted in the delivery of its programmes by a number of independent Agencies.

Dr Quinn along with eight Assistant Secretaries and the Head of the Governance, Information and Management Support Unit, make up the Department's Management Board.

Each Assistant Secretary leads a Division, which is in turn comprised of a number of Business Units led by Principal Officers. An outline of each Division's functions and responsibilities are available on [the Department's website](#).

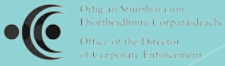
Management Board



Organisation Chart



Offices and Agencies of the Department



Oifig Maoinne
Intleachtúla na hÉireann
Intellectual Property
Office of Ireland



Statement of Strategy 2021-2023





Strategic Goal 1:

Achieve a strong recovery and sustainable economic development through business growth, jobs growth, resilience, and innovation.

Responding to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to disrupt business in 2021. Despite this, employment continued to grow towards the Economic Recovery Plan target of 2.5 million people in employment.

The Department continued to play a key role in the wider Government response to the pandemic, through the provision of funding, regulatory and advisory schemes for businesses.

Restart Grant

Working with the local authorities during 2020 and 2021, €685 million was made available with over 108,000 grants provided through the Restart Grant and the Restart Grant Plus. These contributed towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational and re-connecting with employees and customers.

COVID - 19 Online Retail Scheme

The COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme was introduced in 2020 to help indigenous Irish retailers to sustain their business through the crisis and into the future by strengthening their online offering, increasing their customer base, and building a more resilient business in the domestic and global marketplace, both online and offline. During 2021 a third Call of the Scheme awarded 173 retailers a total of €6.3 million to accelerate their digital offering.

Supporting SMEs

The Department supported small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) through a range of national and international initiatives in 2021:

- The supportingsmes.gov.ie website provided up-to-date critical information on a range of business initiatives from COVID-19 to Brexit supports.
- The Code of Conduct between landlords and business for commercial rents, published in October 2020 was extended until the end of April 2022.
- The Retail Forum, chaired by Minister English, met quarterly to assist the retail sector to navigate the pandemic and focus on the sector's developmental needs.
- Minister English also held a number of Retail Roundtable meetings with the retail, grocery and distribution sectors which focused on Brexit and COVID-19. The meetings facilitated engagement with a range of Government Departments and relevant bodies to minimise disruptions to supply chains. These meetings also helped the sector to address the impact of COVID-19, the periods of closure of non-essential retail and the ongoing public health guidance.
- In January 2021, The Report of the SME Taskforce: National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, provided Government with a set of recommendations, directly from the business community, on how to build the best business and regulatory environment possible for SMEs and entrepreneurs.
- Design & Crafts Council Ireland (DCCI) continued to provide support to designers and makers to develop their businesses in a sustainable way. DCCI's activities are funded by the Department via Enterprise Ireland.
- At EU level, the Department continued to engage proactively as a member of the SME Envoy Network on issues such as supports to SMEs during the recovery, SME digitalisation and access to finance.
- Ireland became a signatory to the EU Start-Up Nations Standard in March 2021, which provides a set of best practices to create a better ecosystem for start-ups.
- Internationally, the Department was again an active participant at the OECD's Committee on SMEs and Entrepreneurship (CMSEE), having played a prominent role in supporting its elevation to Committee status from Working Party status in March 2021. This engagement at OECD level was supported by Ireland's co-chairing, at Ministerial level, of the OECD's Digital for SME initiative Roundtable in December 2021. This active participation has helped to build strong relationships with our international partners and has been a valuable resource to inform domestic SME policy development in areas such as SME financing, innovation and digitalisation.

Access to Finance

The Department plays an important role to ensure that SMEs, including microenterprises, can access appropriate and affordable finance suitable to their stage of development. A wide range of financial supports is now available for companies at all stages of their life-cycle – from start-ups and early-stage companies to those seeking to scale and grow.

Department approved loan schemes		
Loan scheme	Number approvals/ drawn down	Value of loans
COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme	8,867	€616 million
Future Growth Loan Scheme	738	€193 million
Brexit Impact Loan Scheme	48	€18 million
MicroEnterprise Loan Fund Scheme	545	€8.5 million

- In 2021 the Department brought the Loan Guarantee Schemes Agreements (Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland) Bill 2021 through the legislative process and it was enacted in June 2021 to provide the necessary legislation for the delivery of the Brexit Impact Loan Scheme.
- Significant strides were taken in 2021 to develop and enhance the Irish Equity Ecosystem. The third call of the Enterprise Ireland Seed & Venture Capital Scheme was launched in March 2021, with a total of €71 million available for successful applicants.
- The Department also led in the development of the €90 million Irish Innovation Seed Fund, which will invest in innovative Irish organisations at the earliest stage of their development in sectors such as Lifesciences, Healthcare, Pharma, Digitalisation, Green, and Female Led Enterprises.

Regional Development

Regional Enterprise Plans

The Programme for Government has a strong emphasis on achieving more balanced regional development. To achieve this policy goal in 2021, the Department oversaw the development of nine new Regional Enterprise Plans to 2024. These are bottom-up plans, developed by regional stakeholders including the enterprise agencies, local enterprise offices, local authorities, regional skills forum and education and training institutes to drive the delivery of balanced enterprise development.

The Plans aim to identify growth opportunities, recognise vulnerabilities, and in response, strengthen the regional enterprise ecosystem. They are complementary to the ongoing work of Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, LEOs and others with focus on collaborative initiatives aimed at job creation in the regions. Each Plan is overseen and monitored by a Regional Steering Committee made up of stakeholders and chaired by a senior level private sector businessperson.

Regional Enterprise Development Fund

The Regional Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) and Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF) have also been effective instruments of policy in supporting significant regional initiatives to build on sectoral strengths and drive enterprise and employment development in the regions. To date 79 projects have been funded under the REDF Calls 1, 2, & 3 and the BEDF totaling €117 million. An additional €10 million was made available to existing REDF and BEDF projects in sectors and regions negatively affected by COVID-19 or Brexit impacts under the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme with €548,250 allocated to 18 applicants.

Smart Specialisation Fund

Smart Specialisation is an innovation policy concept developed by the European Commission that aims to boost regional innovation, contributing to growth and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths. In 2021, the Department commenced the preparation of Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy. This was also an integral part of the stakeholder engagement for the Regional Enterprise Plans.

National Clustering Policy

During 2021 the Department commenced work on the development of a National Cluster Policy and Framework which is an important deliverable under Ireland's Economic Recovery Plan. Through the development of the National Clustering Policy, the Department is seeking to establish a cohesive and strategic national approach to enabling cluster development, leveraging the potential of clustering as a policy tool that can help to deliver enterprise policy objectives. This will enhance the visibility of Irish businesses in international markets; improve Ireland's attractiveness for new business investment; strengthen SME productivity, enterprise competitiveness and resilience; and act as a driver of green and digital transformation.

Job Creation

2021 saw strong growth in employment driven mainly by our exporting sectors. By the end of the year employment figures were well above pre-pandemic levels. The Department continued to support job creation through its agencies.

IDA Ireland

IDA's new four-year strategy was launched in early January 2021. Entitled 'Driving Recovery and Growth 2021-2024', the Strategy is built on five interlinked pillars – growth, transformation, regions, sustainability and impact. IDA Ireland is targeting 800 investments and the creation of 50,000 jobs over the period 2021-2024. The strategy is designed to deliver substantial job creation and to drive economic activity, targeting a 20% increase in client expenditure to maximise the impact of foreign direct investment.

IDA Ireland performed strongly in 2021 with client companies creating 29,057 gross new jobs, a net increase of almost 17,000 jobs year on year. Total Foreign Direct Investment employment in Ireland at the end of 2021 stood at 275,384, the highest ever number employed in the multinational sector. Of the 249 new investments won in 2021, 133 (53%) were in regional locations, with employment growth in every region of the country.

Enterprise Ireland

As Irish enterprise continues to navigate the impact of COVID-19 and Ireland's new trading relationship with the UK, Enterprise Ireland's focus in 2021 was on building a resilient enterprise base in order to sustain jobs and exports.

To deliver on this, Enterprise Ireland's 2021 strategic priorities were to strengthen Irish enterprise, drive transformational change and build scale. Over €220 million in funding under various schemes was made available to companies in 2021 to help strengthen enterprise.

Reflecting the rebound in economic growth from the pandemic, Enterprise Ireland client companies reported strong jobs growth with 207,894 people employed in Enterprise Ireland supported companies and a net jobs gain of 11,911, the highest single year reported.

The positive jobs figures saw increases in employment across all regions in Ireland, with, 68% of new jobs created outside of Dublin.

Local Enterprise Offices

The 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance, and other supports to those wishing to start or grow their own business. In 2021 the LEOs delivered a net increase of 3,000 jobs through the provision of grant assistance to microenterprises, representing their eighth consecutive year of growth. The LEO portfolio now has 7,158 client companies, supporting 35,729 associated jobs, 85% of which are based outside of Dublin.

InterTradeIreland

InterTradeIreland's (ITI) key responsibility is the promotion of trade and business on an all-island and cross-border basis. The Department's funding for ITI in 2021 was approximately €11 million and during the year, the agency sought new opportunities for North South trade, supported development of clusters and networks across the island and continued to help cross border traders adapt to new Brexit trading relationship. Among its 2021 outputs, was a total jobs impact of 1,866 against a target of 1500 for the year.

Economic Migration

The Department, on behalf of the State, operates a managed employment permits system maximising the benefits of economic migration and minimising the risk of disrupting Ireland's labour market.

The Irish labour market has undergone significant adjustment since COVID-19. This was a significant consideration in the outcome of recent reviews of the Occupations Lists for Employment Permits and recommendations announced in June and October 2021. A number of changes were made to the Employment Permits Occupations Lists to address the more immediate skills and labour shortages in certain sectors, including healthcare, hospitality, construction, agriculture and transport and logistics.

Work continued in 2021 on the drafting of the Employment Permit (Consolidation and Amendment) Bill. The primary purpose of the proposed legislation is to consolidate the Employment Permits Acts, and to make certain amendments to modernise the employment permits system and increase its responsiveness to developments in the economy and labour market.

Employment Permits

In March 2020, the Department implemented COVID-19 contingency arrangements and all medical employment permits were expedited with immediate effect.

There was a significant increase in applications for employment permits over the course of 2021 which impacted on processing times. From the start of January 2021 to the end of December 2021, some 27,666 applications were received, representing a 69% increase over the same period in 2020 (16,293) and a 47% increase on 2019 (18,811), which itself represented an 11 year high in applications.

The Department issued 16,275 employment permits in 2021 and processed a total of 17,968 applications which represents a significant volume of activity. In addition, the Review of the Occupational Lists in October 2021 also increased the availability of employment permits for certain categories of employment including 3,200 additional agricultural permits.

The Department recognised the impact that processing delays for work permits had for businesses and their workers and during 2021 developed a plan of action to reduce processing times built up over the pandemic, including providing additional staff resources and systemic changes.

The Department worked closely with the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive and the Department of Justice to streamline and extend the time period for General Employment Permits (GEP) issued to doctors. A new two-year multi-site GEP for medical doctors in public hospitals and public health facilities was also introduced for the January 2022 doctor's rotation.

A Growing Economy

Economic Infrastructure

During 2021 the Department engaged across Government on key issues and priorities for business users, focussing on the competitiveness of Ireland's business environment. This included representation on the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board at Secretary General level.

The Department also worked closely with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's National Investment Office as well as across other relevant Departments to provide input on the infrastructure needs of enterprise, to maintain a competitive and attractive business environment and employment ambitions.

In addition, primarily as part of Climate Action Plan 2021 considerations, the Department worked closely with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, Eirgrid, SEAI and other stakeholders on a range of issues such as the competitiveness and security of supply implications of energy infrastructure, data centres, the Renewable Energy Support Scheme, the new micro-generation scheme and the development of a policy framework to encourage the uptake of Corporate Power Purchase Agreements by large energy users.

Taxation

During 2021, the Department had ongoing engagement across Government with regard to Revenue administered COVID-19 supports. This engagement aimed to ensure that these supports were designed and implemented in a manner which allowed for maximum take up by those businesses in need of assistance.

The Department liaised widely with enterprise representative groups and worked closely with the Department's development agencies to develop a joint agency Pre-Budget Submission. The primary purpose of the submission was to ensure that Budget 2022 continued to assist enterprise and that the views and needs of enterprise were taken into consideration.

The submission included proposals aimed at lowering the personal tax burden, including enhanced taxation reliefs for remote workers, and a number of proposals aimed at stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship. It is worth noting that Finance Act 2021 saw the detailed design and proposed commencement in 2022 of a new Games Tax Credit which followed on from the Department's proposals in 2020.

Given the importance of the international tax environment to many of our enterprises, during 2021 the Department also engaged closely with key stakeholders across Government to keep abreast of developments in this space.

Housing

The Department is leading on 10 of the 213 actions in the Government's Housing for All (HfA) strategy and established a new unit to lead on this agenda. As part of the Department's deliverables under the strategy in 2021, the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) produced a series of reports which together represent a comprehensive labour forecast for the construction sector in light of HfA and the Climate Action Plan.

The Department also worked with Enterprise Ireland and the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) during 2021 to enhance the remit of the planned Construction Technology Centre, to include a priority focus on driving innovation and productivity in residential construction. The Department worked with the NSAI to ensure that both producers and builders were supported to adopt new technologies by introducing onsite inspections and certification of innovative products and processes at the construction phase.

State Aid Control and The State Aid Modernisation Programme of Policy Reviews

The EU State Aid Legal Framework is a comprehensive set of subsidy control rules designed to minimise the negative impact of public subsidies on trade and competition while still allowing certain subsidies in support of economic development.

Appropriately designed State Aid measures, in compliance with the legal framework, meet the optimal balance of supporting enterprise and industry without damaging the level playing field between competitors. The Department works with officials across the entire public service to ensure compliance with the State Aid rules.

2021 was a significant year for the State Aid Modernisation (SAM) Programme. The SAM Programme is the ongoing policy reviews of the components of the State Aid Framework. The Department coordinates the national policy position in respect of the scope and specific conditions set out in the State Aid rules and in 2021, a number of pieces of EU legislation were reviewed as part of the SAM.

The Department coordinated the development of the national policy position for each of these reviews and engaged with the Commission and other Member States to ensure that Ireland's position was fully represented.

Driving Digital Transformation and Innovation

National AI Strategy

During 2021 a cross-Government National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy, AI - Here for Good was published, providing a high-level direction to the design, development, deployment and governance of AI in Ireland. It presents an integrated framework to manage the expected beneficial socio-economic opportunities that AI presents.

The main areas covered by the strategy are societal opportunities and challenges of AI; enterprise development and deployment of AI; RD&I ecosystem; public sector use of AI; ensuring a workforce prepared for AI; data, digital and connective infrastructure; AI education, skills and talent; as well as ethics, standards, governance and regulatory framework.

Digital Transition Fund

To boost the uptake of digital technology in enterprises, the Department negotiated an €85 million multi-annual Digital Transition Fund as part of Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Under Budget 2022, €10 million was allocated to the Digital Transition Fund to help companies at all stages of their digital journey.

National Space Strategy 2019-2025

During 2021 there was a continued focus on the implementation of many of the key actions for the Government's National Space Strategy, 2019-2024 and the first Space Strategy Progress Report for the period July 2019-2021 was finalised in November 2021.

Since 2018, annual investment in the European Space Agency (ESA) through the Department's Vote has increased from €17.8 million to €27.3 million in 2021.

2021 saw continued growth in Ireland's engagement with ESA as a total of €19 million was awarded to Irish based industry researchers up to end 2021. This includes €3 million in contracts which were secured by the Irish research community. Additionally, five new start-ups were approved for the Irish ESA Business Incubation Centres (BICs) in 2021.

Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, (DTIF), is a €500 million enterprise-focused, challenge-based, fund that encourages collaboration between SMEs, multinational companies and Irish research institutions. The Department manages it in consultation with other Government Departments and agencies. The third call of the Fund was announced in September 2020 and resulted in 29 projects awarded funding of approximately €95 million in 2021. A fourth DTIF call was also launched in November 2021.

Future Manufacturing Ireland

Ireland's vision as a leading location for advanced manufacturing is that by 2025 it will be a competitive, innovation-driven, manufacturing hub at the frontier of the next Industrial Revolution.

During 2021, the Department established a new unit, Future Manufacturing Ireland (FMI) to coordinate the key Research and Development Centres involved in the promotion, development, adoption and use of advanced manufacturing technologies.

Health Innovation Hub Ireland

Health Innovation Hub Ireland (HIHI) is a joint initiative of DETE and the Department of Health. The aim is to drive collaboration between the health service and the enterprise sector leading to the development and commercialisation of new healthcare technologies, products and services.

In 2021, HIHI Phase 2 commenced with an ambitious five-year plan, supported by an additional €5 million through Enterprise Ireland. HIHI 2021-2026 will continue its critical support to Irish companies with innovative healthcare solutions, who benefit from formalised access to the HSE network and infrastructure.

EUREKA

Through the Department, Ireland continues its membership of EUREKA which offers project partners rapid access to skills and expertise across Europe and national public and private funding schemes. In 2021 the funding of Irish participation in EUREKA projects was €1.89 million and six new EUREKA projects were funded in 2021.

Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI)

In June 2021, it was agreed by Government that it would actively engage with EU Strategic Value Chains (SVC) and Important Projects of Common European Interest (IPCEI).

IPCEI are large-scale, multi-country projects for global state-of-the-art innovation to address market or systemic failures which could not otherwise be addressed. By their nature, IPCEI often entail significant risks and require joint, well-coordinated efforts and transnational investments by public authorities and industries from several Member States.

The Department launched a call for expressions of interest seeking proposals for possible inclusion in an IPCEI on Microelectronics and Communication Technologies in June 2021 with a second call held in August 2021. One proposal was deemed to meet the criteria and conditions and Ireland commenced the initial batch of pre-notification for this IPCEI in December 2021 with completion due in February 2022.

A similar call for expression of Interest for the IPCEI on Health closed on 8 October 2021. The Department received 22 proposals from organisations of various sizes, including consortia, active in the fields of biopharmaceutical, MedTech and other health areas. A shortlist has been prepared and these proposals will be analysed further during 2022.



Strategic Goal 2:

Promote safety, better pay and conditions, more secure jobs and gender equality in the workplace

Responding to COVID-19

Work Safely Protocol

As part of the Government's overall public health management of the COVID-19 pandemic the Department led on the Work Safely Protocol, which supports the safe transition back to physical attendance in the workplace. The Protocol was revised on a number of occasions in 2021 to reflect changes in public health advice on matters such as ventilation, vaccinations, antigen testing, and to coincide with changes in advice on physical attendance in the workplace and the re-opening of different sectors from time to time. Over 25,600 inspections on compliance with the Protocol were carried out in 2021. Inspections showed high levels of compliance at between 90%~ 95% with the requirements of the protocol. In addition, the Department's website recorded almost 125,000 views of the Work Safely Protocol during the year 2021.

Redundancy and Insolvency Policy

Section 12A of the Redundancy Payments Act 1967, suspending an employee's entitlement to seek redundancy by reason of lay-off or short-time, was continued in force until 30 September 2021. This measure helped to maintain employer-employee relationships and protect businesses and jobs through the most challenging periods of the pandemic. The measure has now lapsed.

Workers' Rights

The Department progressed work on a number of new employment rights, namely:

- Statutory Sick Pay;
- The Right to Request Remote Working;
- Better protection of workplace tips;
- A new public holiday;
- A special payment of up to €1,800 for employees made redundant who have lost reckonable service while in receipt of the PUP or another jobseekers payment over the pandemic.

A public consultation on the EU Directive 2019/1152 on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions was held in 2021.

Also, following extensive engagement with the social partners, the 'Plan for Action on Collective Redundancies following Insolvency' was published on 9 June of 2021. This sets out several commitments to safeguard further the rights of workers in these circumstances including:

- a range of amendments to company law and employment law;
- setting up an Employment Law Review Group on a statutory basis;
- the provision of an accessible guidance document to help workers and their representatives navigate the existing legal framework.

The Information Handbook - Rights and Remedies Available to Employees Facing a Collective Redundancy Situation was published in December 2021. Several amendments to company law were progressed in the Companies (Rescue Process for Small and Micro Companies) Act 2021, which commenced on the 7 December 2021.

Making Remote Work – National Remote Work Strategy

In January 2021, the Department launched Making Remote Work - National Remote Work Strategy. The Strategy's vision is to make remote working a permanent feature of the Irish workplace in a way that maximises economic, social and environmental benefits. It outlines 15 actions to be taken to progress remote work in Ireland. Over the course of the year, significant progress was made in implementing the Strategy, including the development of a Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect, the progression of legislation on the Right to Request Remote Work and the development of a National Hub Network.

Low Pay Commission

The Department provides the secretariat to the Low Pay Commission. The Commission's primary function is making recommendations to the Minister on the appropriate level of the national minimum wage and related matters.

During 2021 the Low Pay Commission was asked to examine two Programme for Government commitments: the progression to a living wage and the examination of Universal Basic Income. Supporting research on both issues was commissioned during 2021.

Sectoral Employment Orders (SEO) and Joint Labour Committees

There are four active Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) in the Contract Cleaning, Hairdressing and Security sectors. The most recent JLC was established in 2021 on the Recommendation of the Court and it relates to the Early Years/Childcare sector.

Industrial Relations

Labour Court

During 2021, the Labour Court received 578 appeals and referrals, representing a 38.5% decrease on the number of referrals (940) received in 2020, which may be due to the effect of COVID-19. Despite the impact of the restrictions on physical hearings, the Court scheduled 1,266 hearings in 2021, which included hearings of appeals received in previous years as well as those rescheduled following postponements/adjournment of the first hearing and cases that were settled or withdrawn before the scheduled hearing. This compared to 1,065 scheduled hearings in 2020. Virtual hearings made up 69% of all hearings in 2021.

In 2021, the Court issued 429 recommendations/determinations/decisions. In addition, it investigated 57 cases that were settled prior to or at a hearing. A total of 222 appeals to the Court were withdrawn after the parties had been allocated a hearing date. There were 339 requests for postponement of scheduled hearings during 2021, many of which were COVID-19 related.

Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)

In 2021 the Information and Customer Service Unit of the WRC dealt with 55,810 calls and 6,815 emails seeking information on employment rights, equality, industrial relations, and employment permits. In addition, the WRC website www.workplacelrelations.ie had over 3.39 million web views. WRC Conciliation and mediation services were primarily provided remotely over a variety of platforms, but also in-person as circumstances allowed. The Conciliation service chaired 996 conciliation conferences and 383 facilitations in relation to collective disputes during 2021. The Advisory service developed a Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect which came into effect on 1 April 2021.

The Inspection service undertook a total of 4,432 workplace inspections resulting in €0.964 million in unpaid wages recovered during 2021. As part of the National Return to Work Safely Protocol (RWSP) WRC Inspectors carried out 3,433 inspections involving checks for compliance with the RWSP and employment law, with 89% of the employers inspected found to be in compliance with the RWSP.

The Adjudication service of the WRC received 12,014 specific complaints in 2021, pay, redundancy, unfair dismissal, and hours of work accounted for three quarters of cases received. The Adjudication Service held a mix of 3,320 virtual and in-person hearings in 2021 and issued 1,400 decisions.

Also in 2021, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of Tomasz Zalewski v An Adjudication Officer, WRC, Ireland and the Attorney General 2020. This involved a challenge to the constitutionality of the adjudicative process established under the Workplace Relations Act 2015. The Court found that Adjudication Officers and members of the Labour Court are deemed to be administering justice when exercising their employment rights function within the meaning of Article 34 and 37 of the Constitution. This finding will result in certain consequential procedural amendments being required in law to enable the WRC to continue to discharge its statutory functions in conformity with the Constitution. These include hearings in public and the administration of oaths.

High Level Group on Collective Bargaining

The Minister established a High-Level Group on Collective Bargaining under the auspices of the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) in March 2021. The membership of the Group includes senior representatives of union and employer sides.

The Group will examine issues such as trade union recognition and the implication of same on the collective bargaining processes, the adequacy of the workplace relations framework supporting the conduct and determination of pay and conditions of employment, having regard to the legal, economic, and social conditions in which it operates. They will also consider the legal and constitutional impediments that may exist in the reform of the current systems and, where appropriate, make recommendations for reform.

It is envisaged that a final report will be submitted for consideration by Government during 2022.

Industrial Relations Environment

There was a sharp decrease in industrial dispute activity in the economy throughout 2021. There were approximately 3,055 days lost to strike action in 2021 compared with 21,704 in 2020 and 37,000 in 2019.

Gender Balance Balance for Better Business

Balance for Better Business was launched in 2018 to improve gender balance in senior leadership in Ireland. The fourth Annual Report of the Balance for Better Review Group was launched by the Tánaiste in December 2021. In July 2021, co-chairs Brid Horan and Gary Kennedy stepped down from their roles. Julie Sinnamon and Aongus Hegarty were appointed as the new co-chairs in their place.

Enterprise Ireland

In 2021 Enterprise Ireland launched The Level Project, a new gender balance initiative to increase the number of women in leadership and senior management positions in Irish SMEs. The initiative includes a new online Action Planning Toolkit for companies that want to take steps to improve gender balance in their workforce, and specifically in their Senior Leadership Teams

Standards & Safety

Health and Safety Authority

The Health and Safety Authority was allocated an additional €4.2 million in 2021, some of which was for the establishment of a new Occupational Health Division. This investment represents a longer-term investment by the State in improving worker health, in reducing workplace illnesses and injuries and in reducing social welfare costs and costs to the State. It is also an investment in improving the productivity and competitiveness of Irish business.

The Health and Safety Authority also published the 2021 Chemical Agents and Carcinogens Code of Practice, which, in conjunction with S.I. No. 231 of 2021 (the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) (Amendment) Regulations 2021) transposed Directive (EU) 2019/1831, which seeks to protect workers from exposure to harmful chemicals in the workplace.

In 2021 the Department coordinated the Irish response to the EU's Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability: Towards a Toxic Free Environment, an ambitious project intended to overhaul the EU Chemicals industry, including revisions of the major EU Chemicals legislation REACH and CLP. This Strategy will have cross-governmental impacts and may require significant changes to Irish legislation.

In 2021 the Department continued its programme of work on the modernisation of the regulations for petroleum storage and the retail sector. This included developing proposals to put in place a new regulatory regime to assist the sector in maintaining the highest health, safety and environmental standards.

National Standards Authority Of Ireland

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is at the core of Ireland's trade infrastructure and ensures that Ireland's business community has access to standardisation, certification and metrology services.

The emphasis in 2021 was directed on supporting businesses meet their certification and standardisation requirements in preparation for a re-start and build post COVID-19 and Brexit. NSAI published 1,336 standards during 2021 bringing the total number of standards in the NSAI catalogue to over 24,000. Irish users accessed over 209,986 standards and the number of users of the Authority's 'Your Standards, Your Say' portal increased by 271.

Farm Safety

A Protocol between the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to Farm Safety is in place to assist all parties to work together to reduce the rate of fatal and serious incidents and improve health and wellbeing in the agriculture sector while maintaining their respective legislative responsibilities. The overall objective of this Protocol is to ensure both Departments and the Health and Safety Authority can drive real improvements in farm health, safety and welfare on the ground through a cross-Government approach and sharing of information.

In November 2021, the Department brought in Regulations which will place an obligation on the users of all all-terrain vehicles (ATVs)/Quad Bikes to undergo mandatory training, and to wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), when using such vehicles for work purposes.

Construction Contracts Adjudication

Following a competitive process, a new Chair of the Panel of Adjudicators, Mr. Bernard Gogarty, and a new Panel of Adjudicators were appointed by Minister English. During 2021 there were 53 applications made to the Chairperson of the Construction Contracts Adjudication Panel, for the appointment of an Adjudicator under section 6(4) of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013.



Strategic Goal 3:

Enhance our business regulatory environment and Ireland's attractiveness as a place to do business

Responding to COVID-19

During 2021 the Department responded to the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic with the aim of mitigating the short and medium-term impacts on companies.

Companies (Rescue Process for Small and Micro Companies) Act 2021

The Small Companies Administrative Rescue Process (SCARP) was signed into law on 22 July 2021, and provides a new simplified restructuring process for viable small and micro companies. SCARP mirrors key elements of examinership in an administrative context thereby reducing court oversight, resulting in efficiencies and lower comparable costs. The Act was commenced on 7 December 2021.

Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Covid-19) Act 2020

The legislation, which was signed into law on 1 August 2020, makes temporary amendments to the Companies Act 2014 and the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893, to address issues arising as a result of COVID-19. It ensures that 240,000 companies and 950 industrial and provident societies in Ireland can hold their Annual General Meetings and general meetings by electronic means. It also makes provision in respect of business solvency by increasing the period of examinership to 150 days and increasing the threshold at which a company is deemed unable to pay its debts to €50,000. The amendments applied for an interim period, initially up to 31 December 2020. During 2021 these were extended on three occasions by Government Orders with the third extension bringing the measures up to the 30 April 2022.

Legislation

Companies Corporate Enforcement Authority Act 2021

The Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Act 2021 was signed by the President on 22 December 2021. This Act establishes the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) as a statutory and independent agency entitled the Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA). The CEA will have more autonomy and additional resources to investigate suspected wrongdoing and to pursue breaches of company law.

In preparation for the establishment of the CEA, a budget increase of €1.69 million was secured, representing a budgetary increase of 53% to the ODCE in preparation for the establishment of the new Authority. In addition, the planned increase in overall headcount for the Authority will be 50% over previous levels and this includes an increase in both civil service staff and members of An Garda Síochána. Progress continued throughout 2021 to ensure the operational arrangements are in place.

The Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021

The Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021 (Designation of Venues and Events) Regulations 2021 was signed into law in July 2021. The purpose of the Act is to prohibit the sale or advertising for sale of tickets or ticket packages above their original sale price for events in designated venues with a capacity of 1,000 or more or for designated events.

The Consumer Rights Bill

The General Scheme of the Consumer Rights Bill was approved by Government for drafting on 20 April 2021. The Bill will substantially reform, modernise and consolidate existing consumer protection legislation by bringing existing provisions together in a single enactment, while also introducing new and enhanced consumer protection measures.

Eu Directives Regulations

Digital Markets Act (DMA)

The EU Digital Markets Act (DMA) was published in December 2020.

The Act will regulate certain practices used by large online platforms to ensure a higher degree of competition in the European digital markets.

The Department undertook extensive stakeholder consultation on the proposal throughout 2021 and represented Ireland's position at EU working parties throughout the process of developing the final General Approach which was adopted by the Competitiveness Council towards the end of 2021.

Digital Services Act (DSA)

The European Commission published its proposals for a Digital Services Act (DSA) on the 15 of December 2020 and negotiations at Council Working Party took place throughout 2021.

The proposal builds on the e-Commerce Directive 2000/31 EC and is designed to foster a safer online environment. The Department engaged extensively with stakeholders throughout 2021 and represented Ireland's position at EU working parties throughout the process of developing the final General Approach, which was adopted by the Competitiveness Council towards the end of 2021.

Transposition of Copyright and Digitalisation Directive

The EU Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market was transposed by way of the European Union (Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market) Regulations 2021 (S.I. No. 567 of 2021). These Regulations also further amend the Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000 (as amended) and were signed into national law by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment on 12 November 2021.

These Regulations strengthen the rights and protections afforded to various categories of rightsholders in order to reflect the impact of technological advances and increased digitalisation. They also provide for wider access and use of copyright protected works to the potential benefit of the creative sectors, press publishers, researchers, educators, cultural heritage organisations, and citizens.

Directive on the use of Digital Tools and Processes in Company Law

The Department ensured that the provisions of Directive (EU) 2019/1151 on the use of digital tools and processes in Company Law were implemented by the 1 August 2021 deadline. The objective of the Directive was to apply digital solutions to allow online access to business registers for companies registering and providing information, as well as providing access to this information to third parties.

Transposition of ECN+ Directive Through Competition (Amendment) Bill

A public consultation on transposition of EU Directive 1/2019, the ECN+ Directive, was held in January 2021.

The Directive's aim is to empower the competition authorities of the Member States with more effective decision making tools and deterrent fines to enforce EU competition laws independently, ensuring the proper functioning of the internal market. Following Government approval of the General Scheme, the Competition (Amendment) Bill was drafted during 2021 and enacted in June 2022.

The Mobility Directive as Regards Cross-Border Conversions, Mergers and Divisions

Directive (EU) 2019/2121 amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132 as regards cross-border conversions, mergers and divisions was adopted on 27 November 2019. The Directive aims to facilitate company mobility within the EU by providing harmonised rules, legal certainty and common procedures in assessing cross-border operations whilst offering appropriate safeguards for citizens, such as: employees, creditors, and minority shareholders. Draft Regulations were submitted by the Department to the Office of Parliamentary Counsel for settlement in December 2021 and transposition is due by 31 January 2023.

Directive on Preventive Restructuring Frameworks, Insolvency and Discharge of Debt

The Directive (EU) 2019/1023 of the European Parliament and Council, which was adopted in June 2019, seeks to harmonise aspects of national insolvency laws both for companies and for individuals. It is focused on a 'preventive' restructuring framework, second chance/fresh start for 'entrepreneurs' and enhancing the efficiency of restructuring and insolvency.

The Department of Justice, which has responsibility for transposing elements of the Directive which relate to personal insolvency, and this Department, continued to engage in preparing for the transposition of the Directive by 17 July 2022.

Transposition of EU Directive on Representative Actions

A public consultation process dealing with the implementation of the Transposition of the EU Directive on Representative Actions was held in 2021 and the views of stakeholders were noted. This Directive will provide tools for stopping illegal practices and facilitate redress for consumers where a number of them are victims of the same infringement of their rights, in a mass harm situation. No such system currently exists in Ireland. A first draft of the General Scheme of a Bill to transpose the Directive was prepared ahead of detailed legal scrutiny.

Directive on Public Country-By-Country Reporting of Tax Information

Directive (EU) 2021/2101 amending Directive (EU) 2013/34 as regards disclosure of income tax information by certain undertakings and branches was adopted on 24 November 2021 and Department launched a public consultation on Member State the following month.

The Directive requires multinational entities (whether headquartered in the EU or outside) and standalone entities with a consolidated revenue over €750 million for each of the last two consecutive financial years to publicly disclose certain information (including details as to revenues, number of employees and amount of tax paid). Transposition is due by 22 June 2023. The Department launched a public consultation on Member State options on 20 December 2021.

Directive to Empower the Competition Authorities of the Member States to be More Effective Enforcers and to Ensure the Proper Functioning of the Internal Market

Ireland's transposition of the ECN+ Directive was delayed due to the volume of pandemic related legislation in the Oireachtas and the necessary redrafting in the wake of the Zalewski judgement.

The general scheme transposing the Directive was published in 2021 and was enacted in June 2022. This delivered on the Programme for Government commitment to enable the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and ComReg to make greater use of administrative penalties to sanction rogue operators and is an action in the Action Plan for Insurance Reform. In addition, the Bill will further strengthen the powers of the State in tackling white collar crime, economic crime and corruption.

Insurance Reform

Action Plan for Insurance Reform

The Action Plan for Insurance Reform sets out 66 actions to bring down costs for consumers and business; introduce more competition into the market; prevent fraud and reduce the burden on business, community and voluntary organisations.

Government published the first implementation report of the Action Plan in 2021, showing 50% of actions have been implemented in the first six months of the plan, including that the Personal Injuries Guidelines have been given effect.

Personal Injuries Assessment Board

The Programme for Government commits to enhancing and reforming the role of PIAB, with the overarching aim to have more cases resolved through the PIAB system. During 2021 work progressed between the Department and the PIAB to examine options to strengthen the agency.

In March 2021, Minister Troy launched a public consultation on this and 240 submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders, particularly SMEs. The outcome of the public consultation process informed the development of a General Scheme to enhance and reform the PIAB.

Secretariat Support

Company Law Review Group

The Company Law Review Group (CLRG) is an expert advisory group charged with advising the Minister on company law matters. It operates from a two-year work programme, determined by the Minister, and the secretariat is provided by the Department. The Group completed its consideration of the issue of creditors' rights under the Companies Act 2014, in the context of liquidations as well as issues in relation to transactional avoidance and submitted the following reports during 2021:

- Report in relation to the review of existing legislative provisions regarding the provision of information to creditors generally and in particular to employees (March 2021).
- Report on the consequences of certain liquidations and restructuring practices, including splitting of corporate operations from asset holding entities in group structures. (December 2021).

The March 2021 recommendations were included in the Plan of Action for Collective Redundancies following Insolvency and subsequently progressed in the Companies (Rescue Process for Small and Micro) Companies Act 2021.

The CLRG is also mandated to examine and make recommendations on whether it is necessary or desirable to amend company law in line with recent case law and submissions received regarding the Companies Act 2014. In December 2021 it submitted its Report on company law issues under Directive (EU) 2017/828 of 17 May 2017 (SRD II), Central Securities Depositories Regulations (EU) 909/2014 (CSDR) and the Companies Act 2014.

National Competitiveness and Productivity Council

The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) reports to the Taoiseach and the Government, through the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, on key competitiveness issues facing the Irish economy and offers recommendations on policy actions required to enhance Ireland's competitive position. Research, analysis and the secretariat role for the NCPC is undertaken by the Department, which places a high priority on ensuring that the key enterprise competitiveness issues are identified and prioritised for action across the government system. Ireland is currently ranked 13th according to the Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Ranking 2021 report.

Expert Group on Future Skills Needs

The Department provides the secretariat for the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN). In late 2020, the EGFSN initiated a study on the nature and quantity of skills required to deliver on some of the key enabling measures in the Government's Climate Action Plan, in order to significantly reduce carbon emissions by 2030, and ultimately set Ireland on the path to becoming a zero-carbon economy in the coming decades. The resulting report, Skills for Zero Carbon - the Demand for Renewable Energy, Residential Retrofit and Electric Vehicle Deployment Skills to 2030, was published by the EGFSN in November 2021. It contains a suite of 30 recommendations for enhancing the supply of skills in these key zero-carbon activities.

In addition to new studies commenced or completed in 2021, the EGFSN focused on the implementation of recommendations from other recently completed studies. In 2021 this included the areas of Design Skills, Management Development Skills and Logistics and Supply Chain Skills.



Strategic Goal 4:

Deepen and extend Ireland's global business and trade in a fair and sustainable manner supportive of high labour standards and grow further the all-island economy.

Brexit

With the coming into effect on 1 January 2021 of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and the UK, Brexit fundamentally changed the trading relationship between Ireland and the UK. In the initial months of 2021, businesses experienced disruption arising from the imposition of new customs checks, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) controls, affecting trade in goods between Ireland and Great Britain. Rules of origin also presented initial challenges in relation to products that did not qualify under the terms of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and so failed to attract the tariff free status under the Agreement.

The Department and its enterprise agencies supported businesses throughout the post Brexit process providing financial supports as well as advice, as signposted on www.gov.ie/brexit.

Businesses adjusted quickly to the new trading realities with the UK by: sourcing alternative supply chains; availing of alternative routes to market via new transport routes to continental Europe; and moving away from the traditional UK landbridge routes. Others were encouraged to diversify and to seek out new and alternative markets for their products.

In addition, a significant development in 2021 was the establishment of NSAI Certification UK Ltd as a vehicle to provide Irish businesses with access to UKCA (UK Conformity Assessed) certification, initially for the Construction and Medical Device products. NSAI Certification UK Ltd applied for accreditation in the UK to offer Irish construction product manufacturers UKCA marking. This will be a mandatory requirement for access to the UK market from 1 January 2023.

Trade and Investment

Trade and Investment Council

In May 2021, the Tánaiste established the Trade and Investment Council, to ensure coherent and effective leadership of our national trade and investment policies. Chaired by the Tánaiste, the Council involves Ministers, heads of state agencies, and representatives of business organisations. The Council oversaw the preparation of a new trade and investment strategy and agreed to a number of priority actions Ireland to realise its trade and investment ambitions.

Trade Agreements

In 2021, the Department, on behalf of Ireland, worked closely with the European Commission and Member States to advance negotiations for several trade agreements.

- Negotiations continued for separate Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Australia and New Zealand. It is estimated that ambitious FTAs with Australia and New Zealand will together generate an increase in EU GDP of €4.9 billion annually.

- The EU-China Agreement on the Protection of Geographical Indications (GIs) entered into force on 1 March 2021. The Agreement will protect 100 European GIs in China, including Irish Whiskey and Irish Cream, and 100 Chinese GIs in the European Union against usurpation and imitation.
- Since the provisional application of the Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement with Canada (CETA), goods exports to Canada grew by 44% and Services by 28% since 2016, the last full year before CETA was applied.

The Tánaiste attended both the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment to advocate the Government's continued support for this agreement, and the many benefits it brings, ahead of the formal ratification process.

Trade Promotion

Each year, the Department works closely with its agencies, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, on a programme of Ministerial led trade and investment promotion missions. Many of these took place virtually in 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As travel restrictions were lifted, the Tánaiste led the first in-person trade mission to the UK, France and Germany highlighting the significance for Ireland of our trading relationships with the UK and the EU, in a post-Brexit environment. Further trade and investment missions were led at Ministerial level to the USA and Canada, Finland, Liverpool, Wales and the Gulf region.

In addition, Enterprise Ireland launched International Markets week with the theme: 'Global Recovery. Irish Opportunity'. The key objective of International Markets Week is to help Irish companies increase global export sales, thereby creating and sustaining jobs in Ireland. More than 700 companies in Ireland registered for the event, engaging in more than 1,600 one-to-one meetings with Enterprise Ireland advisors.

EU Engagement

EU Council Meetings

2021 saw the return to in-person EU Council meetings with the Tánaiste representing Ireland's interests at the EU Trade Council.

During 2021 Minister Troy represented Ireland's interests at the Competitiveness (Internal Market and Industry) Councils which considered a wide range of issues including how national recovery and resilience plans can best be used as an instrument for delivering on the Industrial policy goals of strengthening the Single Market. Ministers Troy, English and the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O'Gorman meanwhile represented Ireland at the Employment and Social Affairs Councils (EPSCO).

In keeping with the Department's EU Oireachtas Scrutiny obligations, the Department informed the Oireachtas on 17 EU proposals across a range of policy issues, as well as meeting its obligation to submit two six-monthly reports on EU developments.

EU Single Market in Services

Throughout 2021, the Department continued its engagement at EU level, including with the European Commission and with other Member States, in representing Ireland at relevant EU Working Groups and Committees on Single Market issues.

It continued to work with likeminded member states and the European Commission to identify and remove barriers to the cross-border provision of services in the EU Single Market, including through the Single Market Enforcement Taskforce, established in 2020. The Department also established a national interdepartmental network to underpin ongoing compliance with the Services Directive and enhance Ireland's administrative capacity to implement, enforce and improve the Single Market in services.

The Department continued to manage the Irish Point of Single Contact website. This is an information and assistance resource for EU services providers seeking to provide services in Ireland to facilitate the free movement of services within the Single Market.

The Department also managed Ireland's contribution to other EU networks, including the SOLVIT Centre and the Internal Market Information System. In 2021, the Irish SOLVIT Centre again scored well in the European Commission's Annual Report on the performance of national centres.

EU Trade Council and Commission

Trade Council

During 2021, the Tánaiste represented Ireland's interests at the EU Trade Council which progressed the EU Trade Policy Review and preparations for the WTO 12th Ministerial Conference, that was subsequently postponed due to COVID-19. The Council also debated the EU-US trade relationship as well as bilateral trade relations with other partners.

Under the Portuguese Presidency of the European Council, Member States agreed to a Council compromise position on the Proposal for an EU International Procurement Instrument. The file commenced trilogue discussions between the European Parliament and Commission in late 2021 with a view to finalising the Instrument in 2022. The Department remains closely engaged in the process, working collaboratively with colleagues from the Office of Government Procurement.

EU Commission

The Department also engaged on the Commission's introduction of its Vaccine Export Authorisation Mechanism in 2020, relating to the export of COVID-19 vaccines and other related products from the EU to third countries. The temporary authorisation mechanism expired at the end of December 2021 and was replaced with an export notification process.

Other areas of EU trade related legislative work and Department engagement included the publishing of the Commission's new Anti-Coercion Proposal aimed at empowering the EU to respond to economic coercive actions by third countries against the Union or its Member States.

The Department continued to provide Ireland's input on trade defence cases submitted by the Commission for consideration by the Member States. There were approximately 60 trade defence cases managed by the Department in 2021, requiring significant stakeholder outreach and input. These cases relate to Commission examinations of possible dumping or subsidising of production by third countries of products sold onto the EU market to the detriment of EU producers.

Trade Licensing and Control

The Department is the National Competent Authority for EU and national export control regimes, designed to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to support regional stability and to protect human rights. These regimes are a key component of the business regulatory environment for companies trading internationally from Ireland.

Activity in this area remained strong in 2021:

- The Department issued 636 export licences amounting to exports to the value of €1.9 billion.
- Outreach and compliance visits to exporters' premises were conducted during the year when restrictions permitted. These site visits were complemented with desk-based audits and virtual meetings.
- 21 Statutory Instruments were enacted to give full legal effect to EU sanctions.
- Six Statutory Instruments were enacted to give legal effect to the EU transparency and authorisation mechanism for exports of COVID-19 vaccines to countries outside of the EU.

International Labour Organisation

The Department leads on Ireland's engagement with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a specialist UN agency. In June 2021, Ireland completed its first ever term as a Titulaire member, with speaking and voting rights, of the Governing Body (GB).

National positions on the GB agenda are coordinated through an Interdepartmental Group, which brings together Departments with policy responsibility for items on the GB's wide-ranging agenda. A key feature of the work of the Group is the involvement of employer and employee representative organisations, to reflect the fact that the ILO is a tripartite organisation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ILO conducted its work in mostly virtual format which was complemented by correspondence decision making.

In September 2021, Ireland ratified the instrument of ratification of the 1986 Instrument of Amendment to the ILO Constitution which seeks to broaden the membership of the ILO Governing Body, increasing the membership from 56 to 112 seats. To enter into force, it must be ratified or accepted by two-thirds of ILO Member States, including at least five of the 10 members of chief industrial importance.

Shared Island Initiative

Established by the Taoiseach in October 2020, the Shared Island initiative aims to utilise the Good Friday Agreement to improve cooperation, connection, and mutual understanding on the island of Ireland. The Shared Island unit in the Department of the Taoiseach acts as a driver and coordinator of this whole of the Government initiative. DETE works closely with the unit to coordinate the input of enterprise and trade perspectives into the initiative's vision.

In June 2021, the Tánaiste took part in the Shared Island Dialogue on the all-island economy, entitled Building Back Together with over 140 people from across the business, enterprise, and innovation spheres represented.



Strategic Goal 5: Advance the green transition in enterprise, honouring our climate action commitments.

Climate Action Plan

The Department provided significant input into the Government's Climate Action Plan 2021 and engaged with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and other departments and agencies to develop the measures that the enterprise sector will have to implement to reduce emissions by between 29% and 41% by 2030.

The key measures for the enterprise sector include: accelerating the uptake of carbon-neutral heating in industry, phasing out high-global warming potential gases through further EU regulation, decreasing embodied carbon in construction materials (including replacements for cement), and enabling the electrification of high-temperature heat generation in industry.

In 2021, the Department also secured EU funding of €55 million under the National Recovery and Resilience Fund to grant aid projects to accelerate decarbonisation of the enterprise sector. The funding will address the imperative for decarbonisation across all enterprises, including accelerated action on incentivising the installation of Energy Metering and Monitoring Control Systems.

Green Transition for Enterprise

Climate action is a core element of the Department's enterprise strategies and those of its agencies. The nine Regional Development Plans aim to address the imperative for enterprises to digitalise and contribute to a carbon neutral economy.

Enterprise Ireland launched an international campaign 'Ready for a Green Future' which promoted Irish green innovators who are delivering sustainable and low carbon solutions to tackle climate challenge. The campaign showcased many world-leading Irish green innovators who are solving complex technical challenges and delivering sustainable and low carbon solutions to make renewable energy viable; reduce energy waste in our cities with smart technology; reduce agricultural waste and make construction cleaner.

Enterprise Ireland has also made progress in recent years in building the capabilities of companies in key sectors to reduce their environmental footprint and capture new opportunities emerging from low-carbon and sustainable business practices. The Enterprise Ireland Small Business Innovation Research programme, developed to promote innovation in public sector

bodies and commercial State-owned companies, continues to support new smart and green business models and technologies.

Climate Toolkit 4 Business

The Tánaiste and the Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, Eamon Ryan TD, launched an online toolkit, climatetoolkit4business.gov.ie. This was developed by the Department and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, with the close involvement of a Steering Group made up of relevant state agencies and business representative organisations. Its objective is to make it easier for all businesses get started in addressing their climate impact and to improve their resilience and help them to thrive in a low carbon economy.

Climate Enterprise Action Fund

The Climate Enterprise Action Fund supports Irish companies to build the capabilities required to deliver sustainable products, services and business models. Launched in May of 2021, it includes a Climate Action Voucher of up to an €1,800 grant to engage consultants to identify opportunities and develop plans in areas like resource efficiency, renewable energy and the circular economy. Over 70 companies have already availed of this voucher.

Green For Micro

The Local Enterprise Offices launched the Green for Micro Programme in March 2021 and provided successful applicants with tailored expert advice on how to drive sustainability and to help 'Green' their business. The aim of the Green for Micro Programme is to help small businesses prepare for the low carbon, resource efficient economy of the future.

Work at EU Level

The EU Ecodesign Directive is intended to improve the energy efficiency of energy related products on the market by setting higher energy efficiency standards. The aim is to encourage consumers to be more responsible about their energy use. In turn, less energy efficient products are forced off the market.

More product groups have been added under the Directive. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) act as the Market Surveillance Authority for these regulations and the Department engages with implementation and enforcement of these measures through the 'Energy Labelling and Ecodesign Regulations Implementation Group' (ELERIG).

The Department has also had initial engagement with the European Commission on proposals to amend the Ecodesign Directive under the Sustainable Product Initiative (SPI). This is part of the Fit for 55 Package of measures under the EU Green Deal.

The Department's Green Transition

As well as setting policy, the Department too is committed to becoming more sustainable across its buildings and practices. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's Annual Report 2021 on Public Sector Energy Efficiency performance shows that the Department has delivered 63% in energy savings since the baseline year (2009). This is well in excess of the initial 33% target set for public bodies and the Department is well positioned to deliver beyond the 2030 target of 50%.

The Department's third Resource Efficiency Action Plan (REAP) was completed in spring 2021. It sets out various actions being undertaken across the Department's buildings with a focus on four thematic areas: Energy; Waste Management; Water usage; and Ecology/ Plant life. It also reports on utilities usage and efficiency gains versus certain baseline data.

The REAP is driven by a very active internal 'Green Team' who work collaboratively to raise awareness of the four themes, as well as implement initiatives and manage improvements in processes and buildings. Green Month was held in summer 2021 and included initiatives such as seed distribution; cycling challenges (real and virtual) and presentations on home energy efficiencies. Two significant 'Green' projects were delivered during 2021:

- The installation of two beehives on the roof of the Department's headquarters at 23 Kildare Street, Dublin 2, supported by a series of internally published biodiversity articles, videos and virtual interactive presentation from the hives.

- Upgrade of the heating system in the Department's Earlsfort Centre building, which included the installation of temperature sensors throughout the building and other energy efficiency enhancements.

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 20/2019 requires that each Department must report annually on its green public procurement (GPP).

The Department commits to ensuring, that where practicable, Green Public Procurement and Social Considerations, will be incorporated into the tendering process for public contracts.

The template in Appendix 3 includes the eight priority sectors listed in the Environmental Protection Agency's 2014 Green Procurement Guidance for the Public Sector and shows the total value of contracts issued by this Department in 2021, valued at over €25,000 by priority sector, which have incorporated GPP.

eDocs

During 2021, the Department also transitioned to a new electronic document and records management system called eDocs. The eDocs application is part of the Build to Share suite provided by the OGCIO. It will help to enhance the Department's record management arrangements and will also reduce the need for paper files and will aid the further greening of the Department over time.



Strategic Goal 6:

Build an innovative and agile department with a strong public service ethos driving effective and responsible policy implementation

Responding to COVID-19

The pandemic impacted operations across all of the Department's corporate functions, but from the outset the Department's Management Board was most conscious of the need to fulfill on the Department's business remit while supporting staff to deal with the associated professional and personal challenges.

Through the Department's Wellbeing Framework which spans four pillars of Physical Fitness, Mental Fitness, Nutrition and Social Wellbeing, a number of initiatives were delivered: a dedicated wellbeing page on the Department's Intranet; a monthly Wellbeing Newsletter, lunchtime webinars with the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service, and various experts on a range of health and wellbeing topics, a book club, yoga/pilates classes online, and virtual activities supported through the Department's Sports and Social Club.

The Department partnered and contributed to the Civil Service Health and Wellbeing Framework which was launched in September 2021. The Department also implemented the guidance set out in the Work Safely Protocol and offered staff remote Health & Safety workplace assessments, information and advice.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing issues also formed a core part of the Department's internal COVID-19 Working Group which involved over 40 staff meetings regularly.

Finance

The Revised Estimates Volume for 2021, published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in December 2020, provided the Department with a gross allocation of €1.142 billion for use in 2021. The Estimate also provided for the carryover of €106 million in unspent 2020 capital appropriations for use by the Department in 2021.

The majority of the additional allocation for 2021, together with the €106 million in capital carryover, ensured that the Department and its agencies could continue to roll out the necessary suite of supports for businesses as they navigated their way through the dual challenges of COVID-19 and Brexit.

The Estimate allowed for the funding of discrete measures such as: the Small Business Assistance Scheme for COVID-19, the Sustaining Enterprise Fund, the COVID-19 Life Products Scheme, the COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme, the Advanced Manufacturing Centre and the Regional Enterprise Development Fund. The increased current funding for the

Department in the 2021 Estimate was mainly directed at increasing the resources of the Department and its agencies so that they could meet the additional demand for their services and continue to administer the significant suite of COVID-19 and Brexit supports for businesses, workers and consumers throughout 2021.

Policy and Programme Evaluation

Spending Review Process

The Department published two papers under the Spending Review process in 2021, the first being a review of the Department's capital expenditure over the period 2006 to 2020. This paper examined the Department's expenditure by thematic area and raised a number of considerations on programmes the Department funds, the mix of policy instruments and beneficiaries, the changing profile of Own Resource Income and the degree to which the Department's expenditure is reflecting new policy priorities.

A second Spending Review paper set out a framework for evaluating the State-supported loan schemes under the Department's remit. This paper proposes that the loan schemes would be assessed across three main dimensions – economic additionality, financial additionality and financial sustainability. Given the increasing importance of

these instruments as a policy tool for the Department, it is important they are assessed on a common basis so that a robust understanding of their impact is formed.

RD&I Programme Evaluation

An evaluation of Enterprise Ireland's Research, Development and Innovation programme was published in March 2021. The review established that the programme produced a significantly positive impact on the R&D expenditure, employment, sales and export of the beneficiary firms.

ISSCOP Certification for Statistical Outputs

The Department worked towards achieving certification under the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCOP) for two of its primary statistical outputs, the Annual Employment Survey and the Annual Business Survey of Economic Impact. ISSCOP certification gives users a very high level of assurance as to the quality and independence of the statistics produced and gives certainty to data providers as to the security and confidentiality of the data that we are entrusted with.

AI-Powered Analysis of CRO Records – Pilot Project

The Department, working in collaboration with the Companies Registration Office (CRO), also undertook a pilot project to extract data from annual reports held by the CRO. The aim of the project is to build a rich, structured database of company performance for evidence-based policy analysis. The team worked with IBM to use its AI-powered document analysis platform to demonstrate the feasibility of bulk extraction of data from annual report PDFs and has secured access to the technology to develop the project on a pilot basis initially.

People Strategy 2021-2024

In 2021 the HR Unit developed a new People Strategy for the Department. The three core goals of the People Strategy are: to be an 'Employer of Choice'; to develop a 'Resilient Workforce' that can withstand future changes and challenges; and to be an 'Inclusive Workplace' that supports equality of opportunity for all staff.

Recruitment, Assignments and Workforce Planning

Our Workforce Plan (WFP) process for 2021 continued to operate in a disrupted landscape, where the COVID-19 pandemic impacted heavily. A more strategic real-time assessment of the workforce involved recruitment of new resources, restructuring of teams, optimising skillsets and matching people to posts, to ensure delivery of critical Government commitments and schemes.

The HR Unit secured a recruitment license in 2020, as part of the Department's succession plan, ensuring a further pipeline of talent in a volatile employment market. Four successful recruitment campaigns were carried out during 2021 using this recruitment license.

Regular engagement continued with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to recruit general grades and some specialist posts.

Natural attrition, additional resources and promotional opportunities accounted for a significant 'churn' of staff during the year:

- 156 New entrants
- 126 Exits, including 40 retirements
- 61 Internal transfers
- 73 Promotions

Numbers serving in the Department rose to 925.9 full-time equivalents at the end of 2021, an increase from 886.3 full-time equivalents at the end of 2020. Redeployment of staff continued including to assist agencies such as the Health and Safety Authority and staff from our ICT Unit assisted the Health Service Executive following the cyber-attack on their IT systems earlier in the year.

The Department continues to support staff members with disabilities. A total of 4.7% of staff members have self-declared disabilities. The Department offered six-month placements to five graduates with disabilities under the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) project. HR Unit also secured approval to recruit a new staff member through the Oireachtas Work Learning scheme (OWL) for young adults with intellectual disabilities.

The Department also continued working to ensure adequate support for staffing in its nine Agencies and assignments to the State Boards under its aegis. Over 100 requests were processed to deal with the filling of vacancies and establishment of new posts for State Agencies in 2021, while five PAS campaigns were undertaken to fill 20 vacancies arising on the State Boards under the Department's remit.

Connected Teams

In response to the challenges of the pandemic, the HR Unit launched an internal ConnEcTEd Teams programme in January 2021 which identified and promoted behaviors that support effective blended working for teams. The programme involved initiatives on remote working, the establishment of a Peer2Peer network linking new recruits with longer serving members of staff, and delivery of customised workshops for senior management.

Learning and Development

As the pandemic and restrictions continued to impact the Department, nearly all training was delivered online. 696 (72%) staff engaged with one of the 367 courses that were offered by both the Learning and Development Unit and OneLearning throughout 2021. The Department also funded 47 staff in third level academic courses in 2021 across a range of courses in disciplines aligned to the Department's strategic priorities such as Economic Science in Policy Analysis, Employment Law and Business Administration. Mentoring and executive coaching offerings continued to act as significant tools to support staff growth and development.

Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey

Results of the third Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey were published in 2021. The results for the Department show a strong sense of staff feeling they have the skills and ability to do their job, that they are well connected and engaged in the organisation and the impact it delivers, and that there is a strong sense of wellbeing and resilience across the Department. Significant improvements have also been seen since the 2015 survey – under Commitment to the Organisation (up 24%), Innovative Climate (up 24%), and Leadership (up 32%).

While the final stages of the annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards were paused in 2021, the Department submitted five projects to this year's awards, successfully securing two nominations:

- In the Excellence in Policy Making and Implementation category the Remote Work Guidance and National Strategy.
- In the Leading Reform during COVID-19 category the SME COVID-19 Loan Schemes.

Upgrading ICT

The work of the Department's ICT service continued to focus significantly on adapting to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis. Several improvements were put in place to increase the capacity of the Department's services to support remote working, to ensure that the Department could deliver its service remotely, and to prepare for hybrid working options in the future.

In particular, the configuration of network services was improved to accommodate increasing volumes of videoconference usage, and greater use of remote collaboration tools. A new staff collaboration platform was put in place to ensure that teams can operate effectively while working remotely.

In response to an increased level of cyber risk, a number of further software defences and process controls were put in place. Cyber vigilance was stepped up and remains an important part of the Department's work.

Customer support systems in the Intellectual Property Office of Ireland were upgraded to support future longevity and ease of maintenance. Improvements were also made to the employment permits support systems to increase processing efficiencies, and additional customer support systems were put in place in the Workplace Relations Commission. A new document management system, eDocs, was rolled out across the Department to support knowledge management initiatives, and preparations were made to replace a number of legacy systems.

Communications

In 2021 much of the material the Department disseminated to its target audiences, both internally and externally, was through our digital channels and platforms. This was due to the COVID-19 restrictions that were in place around the holding of in-person events.

The Department's digital function grew to be the cornerstone of external communications with over 20 campaigns run on digital platforms. The priority multiplatform campaigns were around the impacts of COVID-19 and Brexit on business, but campaigns around the increase in the National Minimum Wage and Making Remote Work were also run. The Department's LinkedIn page continued to see strong engagement in 2021 with its following increasing by almost 50%, from 38,377 at the beginning of the year to 56,744 at its end. Posts on the Department's LinkedIn page received over 2.8 million impressions during the year.

The Department's Twitter (@DeptEnterprise) also grew as followers increased by over 2,000 from 28,121 to 30,850, with tweets receiving over 14.5 million impressions. Engagement on both platforms was primarily around COVID-19 supports for business, Making Remote Work, Brexit supports, Shop Safely, the National Minimum Wage, Work Safely and the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund. The Department's website recorded over 2.2 million pageviews from almost 300,000 users in 2021. The most popular website topics during the year were employment permits, COVID-19 business supports, the Work Safely Protocol, and guidance for remote working.

Internally as staff continued to work remotely, the Department's intranet remained a crucial platform to keep people informed about both business and personal updates. The publication of content on the intranet ensured that staff stayed connected with each other, with content covering a range of topics, including staff wellbeing, training sessions, webinars and talks, updates from management board, and new staff introductions and personal retirement stories. Content was also created and shared for a number of broader topics including Pride Month, Innovation Week, Green Month and the arrival of beehives on the roof of 23 Kildare Street.

Buildings Management

Hybrid Working

During 2021, the Department maintained a strong focus on the health & safety of its staff, regardless of whether they were working from home or in the Department's buildings. This involved providing a safe work environment, complying with all COVID-19 related protocols and procedures.

It also included the safe transition of staff in greater numbers back to the Department's buildings in September 2021 and featured: numerous information sessions; a desk booking app investigation and testing; and introductory videos. In addition, the Department also ensured regular updates to our Work Safely Protocol.

Upgrades

While COVID-19 restrictions severely curtailed the staff presence within buildings it gave opportunities to continue modernising and upgrading areas across several buildings. During 2021 certain open plan accommodation areas were upgraded to optimise desk capacity. In addition, storage and file records rooms were refurbished and repurposed to provide agile spaces to support hybrid working and the provision of additional meeting spaces.

Corporate Governance

The Department's Governance Framework was regularly reviewed. A Compliance Framework is also in place and provides an overview of all compliance assurance activity in the Department.

Risk Management

In January 2021, the eRisk application developed by OGCIO was introduced. Comprehensive training, delivered internally, was provided to all Divisions in using the system. The Risk Management Policy for the Department was updated to reflect procedural changes. In June 2021, the Department produced a Risk Appetite Statement which sets out the Department's risk appetite levels for each of the Strategic Goals in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021 to 2023.

General Data Protection Regulation

Throughout 2021, the Department's full time Data Protection Officer (DPO) continued to work with Business Units across the Department and its Offices in reviewing their personal data practices and assisting in the formulation of new policies and protocols. Work was also undertaken with a number of Business Units involved in delivering assistance to business in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, the Department and its Offices received 37 Subject Access Requests and these were processed in accordance with the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018.

Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2015

The Lobbying Act is designed to provide information to the public about who is lobbying whom about what. A list of our Designated Public Officials under this Act was updated in 2021 and is published on our website.

Protected Disclosures Act, 2014

The Department published its Annual Report on Protected Disclosures for 2020 on the Department's website in June 2021.

Internal Audit

The Internal Audit Unit (IAU) reviewed and revised its annual work plan in 2021 in the context of the impact of COVID-19 and remained focused on strategic risks whilst adopting agile work arrangements to address new and emerging risks in the context of the impact of the pandemic.

An External Quality Review of Internal Audit Unit was carried out in Q4 2021. The overall conclusion of the report was that IAU activity has achieved a high level of conformance with the Institute of Internal Audit Standards and achieved an overall rating that it 'Generally Conforms' to the requirements of the International Professional Practice Framework developed by the Institute of Internal Auditors.

The following list of audit reports were presented to the Audit Committee during the year.

- Management and Oversight of ICT Expenditure
- Review of Payment Processing
- Review of Employment Permits
- Review of Succession Planning
- Review of Records Management
- Integrated Audit of Payroll Overpayments
- Health and Safety Authority – Liaison and Governance
- Review of the Systems of Internal Control 2020

Wider Public Service Obligations

Irish Language Scheme 2019-2022

The Department's Third Irish Language Scheme came into effect in 2019 and sets out the extent to which services are currently available through Irish and identifies areas for future development. Throughout 2021, the Department ensured that commitments made in relation to the provision of services in the Irish language were implemented.

Customer Charter and Customer Service Action Plan 2019-2021

Throughout 2021, the Department ensured that the commitments made in relation to the provision of customer services under the Department's Customer Charter 2019-2021 and Customer Action Plan 2019-2021, were implemented. The Department is committed to treating all customers equally and with respect, ensuring services are fully accessible and personal information is protected.

Freedom of Information

In 2021 the Department received 279 Freedom of Information requests, and these were processed in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Periodic Critical Reviews

The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies 2016 includes a requirement that Periodic Critical Reviews (PCRs) of Government Agencies should be carried out every five years. A PCR of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the statutory body that enforces competition and consumer protection law in Ireland, is scheduled to take place in 2022.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014

In line with our obligations under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Department is committed to proofing its wider policies, procedures and services across its business areas to ensure the Department complies with its requirements in the area of human rights and equality. In 2021, the Department's Disability Consultative Committee (DCC) met twice virtually and members were circulated regularly with emails throughout the year to provide updates on COVID-19 and information on relevant workshops and seminars held during 2021.

In March 2021 the Department provided input to the National Report in preparation for Ireland's review under the United Nations Universal Periodic Review on domestic human rights.

Appendix 1

Bills Enacted in 2021

Loan Guarantee Schemes Agreements (Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland) Act 2021 was enacted 25 May 2021

Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021 was enacted 14 July 2021

Companies (Rescue Process for small and micro companies) Act 2021 (30/2021) was enacted 22 July 2021

Workplace Relations (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021 was enacted 22 July 2021

Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Act 2021 was enacted 22 December 2021

Appendix 2

Statutory Instruments made in 2021	
S.I. No. 48 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures Against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 49 of 2021	European Union (COVID-19 Vaccines Export Authorisation) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 71 of 2021	Delegation of Ministerial Functions Order 2021
S.I. No. 73 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Syria) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 74 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning Tunisia) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 75 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 96 of 2021	Ecodesign Requirements for Energy-related Products (Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No.103 of 2021	Redundancy Payments Act 1967 (Section 12A (2)) (COVID-19) Order 2021 [Made on 23 February]
S.I. No. 123 of 2021	European Union (COVID-19 Vaccines Export Authorisation) (No.2) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 191 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures Against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses) (No. 2) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 192 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Zimbabwe) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 200 of 2021	Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Act 2020 (Extension of Guarantee Date) Order 2021
S.I. No. 231 of 2021	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Chemical Agents) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 235 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures Against Serious Human Rights Violations and Abuses) (No. 3) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 236 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Central African Republic) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 237 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Iran) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 250 of 2021	Protection of Young Persons (Employment) (Exclusion of Workers in the Fishing and Shipping Sectors) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 253 of 2021	European Union (COVID-19 Vaccines Export Authorisation) (No.3) (Temporary Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 254 of 2021	Companies Act 2014 (Section 12A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2021
S.I. No. 255 of 2021	Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893 (Section 14A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2021

S.I. No. 269 of 2021	Loan Guarantee Schemes Agreements (Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland) Act 2021 (Commencement) Order 2021
S.I. No. 284 of 2021	Redundancy Payments Act 1967 (Section 12A (2)) (COVID-19) (No. 2) Order 2021 [Made on 1 June]
S.I. No. 286 of 2021	Employment Permits (Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 292 of 2021	Early Years' Service Joint Labour Committee Establishment Order 2021
S.I. No. 395 of 2021	Companies Act 2014 (Fees) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 396 of 2021	Companies Act 2014 (Forms) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 397 of 2021	Workplace Relations (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021 (Commencement) Order 2021
S.I. No. 398 of 2021	Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021 (Commencement) Order 2021
S.I. No. 399 of 2021	Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Act 2021 (Designation of Venues and Events) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 421 of 2021	European Union (COVID-19 Vaccines Export Authorisation) (No. 4) (Temporary Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 484 of 2021	Worker Participation (State Enterprises) Act 1988 (Section 9) Order 2021
S.I. No. 517 of 2021	National Minimum Wage Order 2021
S.I. No. 514 of 2021	European Communities (Intra-Community Transfers of Defence Related Products) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 528 of 2021	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 559 of 2021	Employment Permits (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 567 of 2021	European Union (Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 568 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Syria) (No. 2) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 569 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Sudan) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 570 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 571 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Republic of Guinea-Bissau) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 572 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Nicaragua) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 573 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Iran) (No. 2) Regulations 2021

S.I. No. 574 of 2021	European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Republic of Guinea) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 598 of 2021	Sectoral Employment Order (Construction Sector) 2021
S.I. No. 610 of 2021	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 619 of 2021	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) (Amendment No 2) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 673 of 2021	Companies (Rescue Process for Small and Micro Companies) Act 2021 (Commencement) Order 2021
S.I. No. 674 of 2021	Companies Act 2014 (Fees) (No. 2) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 675 of 2021	Companies Act 2014 (Prescribed Form and Notice) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 676 of 2021	Companies Act 2014 (Section 897) Order 2021
S.I. No. 703 of 2021	Sectoral Employment Order (Electrical Contracting Sector) 2021
S.I. No. 711 of 2021	European Communities (Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road and Use of Transportable Pressure Equipment) (Amendment) Regulations 2021
S.I. No. 724 of 2021	Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893 (Section 14A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2021
S.I. No. 725 of 2021	Companies Act 2014 (Section 12A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2021
S.I. No. 750 of 2021	Social Welfare Act 2021 (Section 24) (Commencement) Order 2021 {part 3 enacted by An Tánaiste}
S.I. No. 751 of 2021	Credit Guarantee Act 2012 (Extension of Guarantee Date) Order 2021

Appendix 3

Green Public Procurement				
Reference year 2021	A. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector	B. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector	C. Total number of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP	D. Total value of contracts issued over €25,000 by priority sector which have incorporated GPP
Priority Sector				
Transport	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Construction	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Energy	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Food & Catering Services	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Cleaning Products & Services	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Textiles	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
IT Equipment	1	€154,000	1	€154,000
Paper	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Other				
Consultancy	8	€666,407	Nil	Nil
Recruitment Services	1	€37,000	Nil	Nil
Totals	10	€875,407	1	€154,000

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