



Note on the Enterprise Forum of Wednesday, 8 March 2023

Attendees

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Simon Coveney TD (Chair)
Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation	Dara Calleary TD
Minister of State for Employment Affairs and Retail Business	Neale Richmond TD
Secretary General, DETE	Dr Orlaigh Quinn
DETE officials	Ronnie Downes, Pauline Mulligan, Maedhbh Cronin, Gearoid O’Keeffe, Brendan Kelly, David O’Neill, Stephen Bonnlander, Paul McMahon, Chris Donoghue, Special Adviser to Minister Coveney, Laura McGonigle, Adviser to Minister Coveney, Ciara O’Sullivan, Adviser to Minister Calleary Forum Secretariat: Mary Cullen, Susan McNamee, Sinéad O’Brien, Alessandro Medeiros E Silva
D/Finance	Sinéad Ryan, Colin O’Connor
Revenue Commission	Ann Enright, Maresa Hempenstall
Enterprise Ireland	Joe Healy, Donal Leahy
IDA	Mary Buckley
InterTradeIreland	AnnMarie O’Brien
Local Enterprise Office Network	Padraic McElwee
Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland	Fergus Sharkey
American Chamber of Commerce	Mark Redmond & Colm O’Callaghan
Business in the Community Ireland	Tomás Sercovich
Chambers Ireland	Ian Talbot
Construction Industry Federation	Sean Downey
Ibec	Elizabeth Bowen
Irish Exporters Association	Simon McKeever & Karl Picard
ISME	Neil McDonnell
Retail Excellence Ireland	Duncan Graham
RGDATA	Tara Buckley

- Minister Coveney welcomed the attendees both in the room and attending online to his first meeting of the Forum, along with Ministers Calleary and Richmond, for whom this was also their first meeting.
- Today was International Womens’ Day and Minister Coveney took the opportunity to note the importance of the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women from around the world.
- Minutes from the meeting of 5 December 2022 were approved.

Item 1: Update on energy for business

- Members were encouraged to share details of the gov.ie website as a source of information for business on available supports. SEAI would also be updating their details further as scheme details developed.
- **Ukraine Enterprise Crisis Scheme**
- This was introduced in Budget 2023, targeted at viable but vulnerable businesses in the manufacturing and internationally traded services sectors to mitigate against the additional costs (both liquidity and high energy costs) due to the Russian war on Ukraine. There is no restriction on the size of eligible company.
 - It focusses on companies exposed to international markets and competition either in the supply chain or exporting directly and aims to ensure that companies based here continue to contribute in a significant way to the exchequer and at the same time are not disadvantaged over their international counterparts across the Member States.
 - Under the Scheme, the minimum amount of aid available is €20,000 with a maximum of €500,000 and up to €2 million in the case of energy intensive firms. This is to be increased to €2 million and €4 million respectively under the revised Scheme which has been approved by the EU Commission, and sanction from DPER to launch this augmented Scheme is expected shortly.
 - To date nearly €4 million in aid has been drawn down under the Scheme.
- **TBESS**
- An update was given by D/Finance on the drawdown of TBESS. As of 8 March 25,946 claims had been registered, with 25,706 approved for payment to a value of €56.21m of which €49.11m have been paid by Revenue. [Weekly updates](#) are published on the Revenue website.
 - It was noted that applications for TBESS had been fewer than anticipated, but Government had sought feedback on the Scheme and as recently announced, the Scheme is being amended to ensure more businesses are eligible to apply.
 - The end date for the Scheme has been extended to 30 April 2023, the monthly cap has increased €10,000/€30,000 to €15,000/€45,000, and subject to State Aid approval, the energy cost threshold will reduce from 50% to 30% (retrospectively)

with relief increased from 40% to 50% (proposed from 1 March), and the end date extended to 31 May 2023, with a deadline for claims of 2 months after the end of the Scheme.

- Minister Coveney noted the efficiency of Revenue in operating the Scheme with funding from DETE, and that uptake is increasing. As much as possible was being done to make the application process accessible to businesses, with the online system performing most of the necessary calculations and a series of videos available on Revenue website to enhance the [written guidelines](#).
- The Minister noted that options to support business users of LPG and kerosene are currently being examined by officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, Department of Finance and Department of Environment, Climate & Communications.
- The Forum welcomed the revisions to TBESS, and it was agreed that all available channels and organisations would be used in communicating details of schemes and how they would benefit businesses.

➤ **SEAI Schemes**

- SEAI apprised the Members on the Updated Support Scheme for Renewable Heat (SSRH), and Excellence in Energy Efficient Design (EXEED) Scheme.
- It was noted that the SSRH provides financial support to replace fossil fuel heating systems, with €300 million committed to the Scheme. It is aimed at all businesses, with grants for heat pumps up to 40% and €1 million, and a tariff for biomass/biogas up to €3.5 million over 15 years.
- EXCEED provides finance to design a new energy efficient system for the business with up to 30% and €3 million grant support (with an uplift available for SMEs).
- Details of the Schemes are available on the SEAI website, and they continue to develop new schemes as appropriate and in line with priorities on climate and digitalisation.

Item 2: Update on Brexit

- Recent developments regarding the Windsor Framework were discussed and it was noted that this represented a positive step forward to address concerns with the Northern Ireland Protocol. In particular, it was highlighted that this would result in clarity and certainty for businesses. The full details of the mechanism and implementation of the red/green lane system will need to be worked through. The Members were advised that the EU is taking questions on the matter and the DETE Trade Division undertook to raise any questions Members may have with the European Commission, through the Department of Foreign Affairs.
- The importance of North-South trade was noted and good working relationships between businesses.

Item 3: DETE “Building Better Business” conference series 2023

- Minister Coveney advised the Forum of the Government’s ongoing commitment to balanced regional development and the importance of the businesses in all parts of the country. To promote this and provide a platform to bring businesses of all sizes and sectors together, along with State Agencies and other stakeholders, DETE is holding a series of events in 2023 in each of the nine Regions represented by the Regional Enterprise Plans. Minister Coveney had made the keynote address at the first of these events in Donegal (Friday 3 March 2023) at the Letterkenny campus of the Atlantic Technological University in the North-West (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim).
- It was noted that the events are free to businesses and will highlight enterprise opportunities and challenges presented by digitalisation and decarbonisation. The event format is through interactive panel discussions with companies and experts that resonate with the opportunities in the region and to promote the range of supports available to businesses via the staffed stands in attendance.
- The first event had been very positively received and Forum Members would be forwarded details of the future dates and locations. The next event is due to be held in the Midlands on 27 April 2023, at a venue to be decided.

Item 4: Responsible Business Conduct

- Responsible business conduct (RBC) sets out an expectation that all businesses – regardless of their legal status, size, ownership, or sector – avoid and address negative impacts of their operations, while contributing to sustainable development in the countries where they operate.
- The OECD’s held its first ever Ministerial Meeting on RBC in Paris last month (February), attended by Minister Coveney, who also chaired a session on opportunities for responsible business digitalisation.
- Whilst voluntary instruments (e.g., the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises) have been in place for a considerable amount of time, the emerging scenario is a continuance of voluntary measures (updated as appropriate) alongside developing mandatory initiatives for business accountability for failure to operate in a responsible way.
- DETE has responsibility for a number of the EU proposals developing for RBC matters, including the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the proposal to ban products made with forced labour.
- The Forum noted the importance of clarity for businesses, in particular SMEs who have a lack of time or available expertise in navigating new requirements. Events such as the DETE ‘Building Better Business’ series were suggested as invaluable in this regard, along with the need for timely, regular and clear communications.

Item 5: AOB

- Members noted general issues with knock-on effects on business such as supply chains, availability of staff, local housing availability, and recognised that there are no quick fixes, but that there was ongoing commitment to looking at issues and raising them with the appropriate bodies.
- A query was raised by a Member on the progress and implementation of the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill 2022 (*which includes provisions on work-life balance for parents and carers, domestic violence leave, and provisions to entitle certain employees to leave for medical care purposes and to request flexible working arrangements for caring purposes*), the member was referred to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth who are the lead Department on this matter.
- The next meeting of the Enterprise Forum is expected to take place in quarter 2 of 2023.