



## Note on the Enterprise Forum of Thursday, 28 September 2023

*Meetings are held under Chatham House rule.*

### Attendees

Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Simon Coveney TD (Chair)
Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail	Neale Richmond TD
Secretary General, DETE	Declan Hughes
DETE officials	Pauline Mulligan, Maedhbh Cronin, Ronnie Downes, Dermot Coates, Karen Hynes, Anne-Marie Finlay, Cathy Madden, Brian Walsh, John Hughes, Ciara O'Sullivan, Adviser to Minister Calleary, Fiona Campbell, Adviser to Minister Richmond.  Forum Secretariat: Susan McNamee, Sinéad O'Brien
Department of Social Protection	Paul Carroll & Emma Morrissey
Employers for Change	Christabelle Feeney
Enterprise Ireland	Donal Leahy
IDA	Mary Buckley
Local Enterprise Office Network	John Magee
InterTradelreland	Martin Robinson & Stuart Matheison
American Chamber of Commerce	Ellen McGrath
Business in the Community Ireland	Tomás Sercovich
Construction Industry Federation	Hubert Fitzpatrick
The Family Business Network	John McGrane
Chambers Ireland	Ian Talbot
Irish Exporters Association	Simon McKeever & Karl Picard
ISME	Neil McDonnell
RGDATA	Tara Buckley
SFA	Elizabeth Bowen

## Item 1: Welcome, opening remarks and approval of Minutes of last meeting

- Minister Coveney welcomed the attendees both in the room and those attending online.
- Minister Coveney stated that the Government cannot fully insulate households and businesses from the impact of inflation as Ireland is a price taker on most international markets with the drivers of Irish inflation out of our control. However, they have been proactive in implementing a package of measures to ease the burden, including the new Business Users Support Scheme for Kerosene, launched on the 6<sup>th</sup> September and open for applications until the 31<sup>st</sup> October.
- The Secretary General reminded Members of the Building Better Business events and noted that the previous event was very well attended.
- Minister Richmond noted that the forthcoming budget was at the forefront of everyone's minds.
- Minutes from the Enterprise Forum meeting of 22 June 2023 were approved.

## Item 2: Presentations from Department of Social Protection DSP and Change for Good programme and discussion on employment of people with a disability

- Officials from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) gave a presentation on the supports available for people with disabilities and supports for employers seeking to employ, or who already employ, a person with a disability.
- There are 160,000 people in Ireland on disability payments. A concern for them is the possibility of losing income supports on return to the workplace.
- Several schemes and supports were outlined including the **Welfare to Work** Scheme (provides estimator of 'Benefit of Work' to calculate benefit of returning to work), the **Wage Subsidy Scheme** (financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability), the **Reasonable Accommodation Fund** (supports to make the workplace more accessible), the **Work Placement Experience Programme** (placement programme for work experience over a 6-month period).
- DSP informed attendees that several of the schemes are currently being reviewed and revamped, especially to take into account Hybrid working styles.
- The director of [Employers for Change](#) gave a presentation on how to support employers to create inclusive workplaces.
- Employer for Change services are provided free of charge and include a dedicated helpline, information sessions, customised training, information on grants and schemes and website toolkits and tipsheets. Members were encouraged to review

their recruitment practices in terms of inclusivity and accessibility for those with disabilities.

- It was noted at the meeting that the definition of disability should be broadened to include those with mental health and intellectual disabilities.
- The Forum members valued the presentations and suggested that DSP and Employers for Change add some Case Studies to their websites/online portals where employers experiences with the schemes and supports can be shared.
- Minister Coveney thanked the presenters for their informative presentations and noted that Ireland lags behind in this area and should strive to be the best in Europe for employing people with disabilities.

### **Item 3: Responsible Business Subgroup feedback**

- The Assistant Secretary of Trade Division spoke to the overall responsible business agenda items and gave an update on the first meeting of the newly established Responsible Business Subgroup, held on 27<sup>th</sup> September.
- It was acknowledged that the EU are introducing many new initiatives with obligations for businesses in areas such as corporate sustainable reporting, due diligence and eco-design. These initiatives come from a worthy place but may pose challenges for businesses in understanding and implementing these new requirements.
- The Responsible Business Forum will be putting an emphasis on effective and clear communication. A new RB webpage is in place and DETE Webinars on RB matters have been well-attended. However, it was acknowledged that further work is required, including more easily understood messaging and the provision of guidance and education on these initiatives.
- The point was raised that businesses, particularly small businesses, have many concerns about access to pathways, finance, public procurement, etc.
- The Responsible Business agenda is associated with the culture of how business is done, building on the positive interaction of many small and family-run businesses within their community and their serious engagement with the climate change agenda; and it will be useful to identify and celebrate good business initiatives. However, with regard to the detail of new requirements, there are low levels of awareness and preparedness. Business representatives would like to be involved in the drafting of any legislation around these initiatives.
- This is an opportunity for Ireland to promote itself as an 'early mover' on Responsible Business and support our status and a reputable and reliable location.
- It was noted that the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence could threaten smaller businesses with the additional auditing costs. The Minister acknowledged the concerns and noted that the same problems exist for SMEs across Europe.

## Item 4: Update on DETE work with DSP on impacts of employment legislation on business and presentation of preliminary findings

- An official from the Enterprise Strategy Competitiveness and Evaluation Division, spoke about the ongoing collaboration between DETE and DSP on an assessment of the cumulative impact of certain measures introduced to improve working conditions in Ireland. Both Departments recently introduced schemes that have impacted businesses and their employees.
- An initial assessment of those sectors likely to be most affected by these changes (i.e., the Living Wage transition would have a large effect on Retail businesses) was set out in the recent *Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2023* report. The project was originally scheduled for completion by the year-end but the team will endeavour to do so by November.

This evaluation is an evidence-based exercise, with an independent panel to assess the work of the project team. While the TORs showed that the schemes would have a positive effect on working conditions, DETE want a realistic assessment.

- It is hoped that workshops can be organised to facilitate and educate Forum members on all the newly implemented schemes and inform them of the evaluation results.
- Further information on these proposed workshops will be sent to Forum members through the Secretariat, once available. The Members welcomed this proposal.

## Item 5: AOB

- Members of the Forum were asked to consider any issues/topics they would like covered at this Forum over the next year. Members were invited to submit any suggestions to the Enterprise Forum mailbox ([enterpriseforum@enterprise.gov.ie](mailto:enterpriseforum@enterprise.gov.ie)), at least 2 weeks before a scheduled meeting to allow for consideration to be given to the item and/or presenters sought.
- The next meeting of the Enterprise Forum is to take place on 7 December 2023, Members were advised of provisional dates for the Enterprise Forum meetings in 2024. These may be subject to change; the secretariat will be in touch to confirm these dates in due course.
  - Wednesday 6 March 2024, 1.30-3.30pm
  - Wednesday 12 June 2024, 1.30-3.30pm
  - Wednesday 25 September 2024, 1.30-3.30pm
  - Wednesday 11 December, 1.30-3.30pm
- Members were reminded that the next Better Business event is taking place on Friday 13 October from 9am to 1pm in the Ballina Arts Centre in Ballina, Co. Mayo.
- The issue of the Late Payments Directive Revision was raised. Forum members felt that there was a lack of consultation and that this Directive is a regulatory overreach

with very little consideration given to businesses by the EU Commission. DETE have committed to holding formal stakeholder consultation on this. Negotiations are just commencing in Brussels.

- Revenue's enhanced reporting was also raised. It was felt that there was no cost consideration given to this new requirement before including the provision in the Finance Bill. Prior to the notice on its website in mid-August, the only engagement with employers and representative bodies on this issue by Revenue has been emails sent to ROS inboxes. There is real concern around some of the conditions being proposed under this directive and it's imperative that these are passed on to Revenue. The Minister was asked, on behalf of the Forum, to engage with Revenue requesting Public Consultation and the use of the SME Test.