

Minutes of Meeting

Advisory Group on Small Business

1 November 2016, Kildare Street, Dublin 2

Attendance

Minister Pat Breen (Chair)
Nina Brennan, DJEI
Maedhbh Cronin, DJEI
Eoghan Richardson , DJEI
Garry Purcell, DJEI (Secretary)
Catherine Curran, DJEI
Finola Rossi, DCCAE
Joe Kelly, National Association of Community Enterprise Centres
Mary Blanchfield, Design and Crafts Council of Ireland (For Karen Hennessy)
Patricia Callan, SFA
Neil McDonnell, ISME
Ciarán Casey, Office of the Dublin Commissioner for Start-ups
Mark O'Mahoney, Chambers Ireland
David Fitzsimonns, Retail Excellence Ireland
Marie Bradley, Irish Tax Institute
Mark Christal, LEO Centre of Excellence
Tim Fenn, Irish Hotels Federation
Apologies: Gail McEvoy. Martin Stapleton and John Dillane

Opening:

The minutes of the September meeting were approved.

Following on from the last meeting, the Secretariat had prepared a document based on the submissions of the Group to propose 4/5 proposed actions for the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs process.

The five draft actions in the draft have an appropriate cross cutting positive impact for small business. Members were asked to send any observations to the Secretary by email by 2 November.

The Minister then explained that that today's main topic had been due to be Insurance. However, it transpired that a Department of Finance Working Group on the issue was due to conclude an update report by end of October.

The report will set out the priority actions required. From November to December, the Working Group will then develop an action plan to enable the relevant Government Departments and Offices to commence the implementation of these priority actions.

Given this, the Minister felt that it was appropriate to put back the insurance discussion slightly in order for the above work to progress. It was agreed that the group would discuss insurance as soon as possible.

Consequently, a discussion on the Digital Economy was brought forward to today.

Agenda Item Two: Digital Economy and Small Business

Irish Digital Economy Figures:

Irish consumers spend €850,000 per hour online, 24 hours a day

That comes to €12.3 billion, representing 6% of Ireland's GDP.

The amount of online spend has increased by more than 20% since 2012

At the outset of this discussion, Maedhbh Cronin gave a brief outline of the EU's Digital Single Market Strategy

In order to further discuss the issue, the group was joined by:

- Finola Rossi from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment (DCCA), and
- Catherine Curran, who works on DJEI's Retail Consultation Forum.

Ms Rossi gave an update on the Trading Online Vouchers (TOV) scheme:

- 2600 micro businesses (less than 10 employees) assisted so far;
- 5700 have gone through information sessions for the scheme.

TOV Regional seminars were launched in October, with the first one being in Roscommon. Seminars are open to non-micro business.

DCCA is examining the feasibility (subject to Ministerial approval) of scaling up the current scheme and possibly having a central website. There is currently no central point of call with resources on it for information.

Ms Curran gave an update on the three working groups under the retail forum, and in particular how the issue of online trading has arisen in that forum.

Information, Training and Logistics have all come up as issues to be addressed for those that are not yet trading online.

On creating a resource with general information on trading online, there was an initiative in this area in 2011 - gettingbusinessonline.ie This was a joint initiative of a number of organisations:

- The County Enterprise Boards
- Google
- An Post, and
- Blacknight Internet Solutions, an Irish domain name registrar and web hosting company.

One option might be to resurrect support for the website, and have it updated to be fit for purpose today. There would be more of an emphasis on the need to actually trade online, rather than just have a brochure website.

There was general agreement that there was merit in attempting to update and relaunch the site. This would be preferable to creating a completely new site or portal.

In 2011, the emphasis was just about getting online. But now the emphasis must be on actually trading online.

On social media, there was mention that some scepticism is appearing amongst businesses about the actual monetary return from it.

In terms of partners, it was mentioned that working with a sole provider like Google may not be best approach.

Agenda Item Three: New pages on DJEI website.

The Entrepreneurship and Small Business Policy Unit had recently created a number of new pages on the DJEI website.

Many of the issues addressed are cross cutting, both within this Department and beyond. As a result, the Unit has sought to bring together information as a resource to small business and entrepreneurs.

The new pages are:

1. A brief page on Trading Online – it simply brings together existing information from DCCAE, the LEOs and a link from Enterprise Europe Network.
2. Female Entrepreneurship. This has some explanation on the gap between male and female entrepreneurship, and the positive steps we have taken to address the issue.
3. Entrepreneurship Education. It has resources and information for all three levels of education.
4. During the summer we also created a Free Entrepreneurship Resources page. It has links to thousands of short videos, along with some blogs and web articles etc.
5. A useful links section: Includes calendars of startup events around the country independently curated by Startup Digest, along with a comprehensive database of Irish Startups being compiled by The Office of the Dublin Commissioner for Startups.
6. Finally, a small business section: It has some information on the AGSB as well as on the Small Business Act for Europe and the SME Envoys Network.

Members were generally positive on the new pages as an improvement on previous content.

Date of next meeting:

The date for the next meeting is Tuesday 6th December from 3 to 4.30pm. The main topic for that meeting is due to be on Insurance.

Follow up actions:

Members to send any submission on the proposed 4/5 proposed actions for the 2017 Action Plan for Jobs process to Secretariat by 2 November.

Members to also send any observations on the new web pages to the Secretariat.

AGSB Secretariat

30 November 2016