



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

Annual Report 2020

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FOREWORD

**TÁNAISTE AND MINISTER FOR ENTERPRISE,
TRADE AND EMPLOYMENT
LEO VARADKAR, T.D**



My Department's Annual Report for 2020 sets out the actions and initiatives undertaken by the Department in 2020 in fulfilling its mandate and its commitments under the Programme for Government. This Report highlights the extensive programme of work undertaken during the most challenging of times, facing the twin crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and preparations for Brexit. In doing so, we never lost focus on the twin transition; digital and green.

With the onset of the pandemic, the Department immediately responded to ensure businesses and service delivery were impacted to the least possible extent. We played a major role in helping businesses during the crisis, by sustaining viable enterprises and jobs and giving companies extra assistance to reopen and stay open.

We continued to provide and to enhance grants and loan guarantee schemes to help with cashflow and business planning. We provided more and affordable loan finance and funding, and helped businesses get ready for Brexit. We focussed on building resilience across enterprise as we strive to ensure the economy and society fully recovers after the pandemic, and as we prepared for Brexit.

We provided the foundation and guidance for businesses to operate and re-open in a safe manner. The Return to Work Safely Protocol provided an assurance to employers and workers in relation to the ability of businesses to stay open and reopen during the period of the pandemic. We changed our company regulation to facilitate companies in their governance responsibilities. In publishing the national Remote Working Strategy and the Right to Disconnect Policy, we will build on the positives experienced from remote working during the pandemic and manage associated risks to make it work for employees and employers.

During 2020, innovation continued to feature strongly for my Department and for the third year in a row, Ireland is top in the European Innovation Scoreboard for both the employment impacts and sales impacts of innovation. The Department's Disruptive Technology Innovation Fund projects continued to deliver, with SMEs collaborating with multinational companies and research institutions on large-scale industrial research projects that are at the forefront of technological change.

Climate Action is a core element of the Department's enterprise and innovation policies and in our Agencies' programmes and activities. We actively engaged with the Government's

Climate Action Plan and provided input into the development of the economy-wide Long Term Strategy outlining Ireland's net-zero 2050 target.

Improving terms and conditions for all workers is a major aspect of the Department's mission. Work is well underway to introducing a statutory sick pay scheme to bring Ireland in line with other European countries, with a full public consultation taking place last year. I intend to bring forward legislation on the scheme in 2021 with a view to having the scheme in place by the end of the year. Work has also been initiated on the move to a Living Wage for Ireland.

In 2020, the Department worked closely with the European Union Commission and Member States to bring several trade agreements to a successful conclusion. Promotion of our companies abroad continued through the work of our State Agencies and their internationally located offices.

During 2020, the Department built on work previously done on the successful development of a stable, transparent and modernised company law framework in Ireland and continued to develop and shape responses to new and emerging challenges in company law, competition and consumer policy at EU and at national level, in particular on Brexit and COVID-19.

Since my appointment to this Department in June 2020, I have been significantly impressed by the calibre, commitment and dedication of the staff from across the Department, its Offices and Agencies. I would like to acknowledge the work of my predecessor Minister Heather Humphreys, T.D., and Ministers of State Pat Breen, T.D., and John Halligan, T.D., who contributed greatly to the achievements of the Department in 2020. I would also like to thank my colleagues, Ministers of State Damien English T.D., and Robert Troy T.D., for their continuing work and commitment.

FOREWORD

**SECRETARY GENERAL
DR ORLAIGH QUINN**



This is the final Annual Report on the Department's Statement of Strategy 2018 to 2021 and outlines the progress made by the Department on achieving our goals and objectives in 2020. A new Statement of Strategy for the period 2021 to 2023 was agreed in January 2021.

The Department faced an unprecedented series of business challenges in 2020, particularly in addressing the major impacts arising from Brexit and COVID-19. We also managed organisational changes and transfer of new functions following the election of the new Government in June 2020.

As we started the year, our focus was on Brexit and trade where we led on assisting businesses through financial schemes and advisory services; we also provided analysis and advice across government on the implications of the EU negotiations. This work continued as a major priority as we also switched our attention to the COVID-19 crisis. A dedicated COVID-19 Unit was established, ensuring a coordinated and coherent approach to the pandemic and its many challenges across the Department. We took immediate and responsive action to enable staff to work from home and our teams moved, at short notice, from a predominantly office-based operating model to full remote working for all but a minority of staff, where their work could not be done remotely.

It is a huge credit to all members of our team that we responded so quickly and flexibly to meet the urgent needs of enterprise. We redeployed staff and created new roles as we developed and implemented new financial schemes and advisory services, regulatory changes to company law, new health and safety protocols in the workplace and a wide range of workplace relations and employment initiatives, such as virtual courtrooms in the WRC and Labour Court. We also worked collaboratively with many other Government Departments and agencies to assist in the national effort; we fast-tracked and prioritised employment permits for front-line health service workers; we took a leading role in assisting the HSE in the sourcing of PPE during a time of great pressure and we redeployed staff on temporary reassignments to areas of the public service where additional resources were needed.

The doubling of our budget enabled us, working with our Agencies and Offices, to deliver much needed assistance to the enterprise sector. This required detailed analysis and delivery of appropriate schemes to assist businesses, sectors and regions at every stage of the pandemic. We also established a new Enterprise Information Centre and communication approaches that enabled us to move online and connect with all our stakeholders. We published extensive guidance, including our Guide to Supports for Businesses, the National Work Safely Protocol and guidance on safe shopping. We also maintained a major focus on

trade and global relationships and our overseas team were to the forefront in assisting us in our international relationships and working closely with the European Union Commission and Member States to bring several trade agreements to a successful conclusion. We also continued to deliver across all other important areas of our business programme, including major policy areas of digital, climate, remote working and the right to disconnect.

Extensive and ongoing contacts with our stakeholders was a priority for us during 2020. We met regularly with employers, employees and representative groups, including the Enterprise Forum, the Retail Forum, the SME Taskforce, the Company Law Review Group and the Labour Employer Economic Forum, as well as a wide range of other groups to assist and inform the Department's ongoing responses to Brexit and COVID-19. These stakeholder engagements were extremely valuable in informing us of the needs of businesses, the impact of our measures and how improvements could be made.

During 2020, following the change of Government, the Department was renamed from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The trade promotion function was transferred to this Department from the Department of Foreign Affairs, and employment rights and redundancy and insolvency policy transferred from the Department of Social Protection. The Department also assumed responsibility for the Low Pay Commission. We have also taken on responsibility for the Balance for Better Business Group from the Department of Justice, and Trading Online Vouchers from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. For each of these new areas of work, we established teams and developed new priorities and work plans, all of which are now being implemented. Some new priorities include development of sick pay legislation, redundancy policy, strengthened trade promotion and outreach, and a stronger focus on gender issues across all our remit. With effect from 1 January 2021, certain research and innovation functions, including Science Foundation Ireland and the Tyndall Institute, transferred to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. We will miss our science and innovation colleagues but look forward to continued collaborative working and we wish them every success in their new Department.

Across the Civil Service, we have taken a leading role on innovation. Through our 'Innovate@ETE' team, all staff are fully engaged and encouraged to make positive changes to how we work and to the working environment. The importance and value of this was never so critical, as staff responded and brought in new ways of working during 2020. A Virtual Recognition Event for the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards was held to formally recognise and showcase the initiatives developed in response to the pandemic. In our adoption of the Declaration on Public Service Innovation, we continued to promote a culture of innovation in our organisation. We also contributed to the national Decade of Centenaries commemorations, by organising 'The 23 Kildare Street Talks - The Countess, Casualties and The Civil Service', a series of short lectures on the revolutionary period between 1919 to 1923.

During this past year, where we have had little face-to-face contact with our colleagues, we have tackled and delivered on many new and unexpected challenges, which is a testimony to the dedication and public service values of our Department. I am enormously proud of the

team and I would like to thank each and every one for their ongoing commitment. I would also like to thank and acknowledge my colleagues on the Management Board and the senior leaders in our Offices and Agencies for their leadership and support. Finally, I must acknowledge and thank the many stakeholders who have engaged with us so positively during the year, which is greatly valued. I look forward to working with them on our many shared agendas as we emerge from the crisis in the year ahead.

Executive Summary

Over the last 18 months, the COVID-19 pandemic has put considerable strain on societies across the world. In 2020, global economic output is estimated to have fallen by between 3.25% - 3.4%, which represents a far larger shock to economies than the recession in the wake of the global financial crisis. In the case of Ireland, the impact on economic output has been cushioned by multinationals based here, with real GDP growing by 3.4% last year. However, strong export growth, which was largely accounted for by a surge in pharmaceutical exports and continued strength in the IT sector, masked a decline in domestic demand as the economy was impacted by the pandemic. The level of State support over the course of the year was substantial to insulate businesses and workers from the worst of the pandemic. The cost to the State over the course of the year was €25bn which included €8.8bn of income supports via the Employee Wage Subsidy Scheme, its precursor the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

The 2020 strategic plan for the Department was, therefore, impacted significantly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the focus on Brexit preparedness continued as a major priority, the Department responded from an early stage across all aspects of our remit to support business during the pandemic. This included sectors in which the Department has not traditionally been involved and we engaged broadly in all areas possible to support business and the national effort. The Department played a major role in helping businesses during the crisis, by sustaining viable enterprises and jobs and giving companies extra assistance to reopen and stay open. On our regulatory remit, the Department worked to provide certainty and administrative flexibility for companies and measures were introduced to assist firms in responding to the challenge covering company regulation, health and safety, and workplace relations.

The Department also provided extensive economic analysis and advice to Government and worked closely with other Government Departments on a range of schemes to support business and wages, including the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme, the Restart Schemes, and the COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme other sectoral supports.

During 2020, the Department's work entailed:

- Assisting enterprise through stakeholder engagement, undertaking of analysis to assess the impact of the pandemic on the economy and through the development of a suite of initiatives including financial and non-financial measures and regulatory supports.
- Developing policies for workplace safety to provide assurance to employers, employees and customers and to enable businesses to remain open and to reopen safely during certain periods of the pandemic.
- Ensuring full continuity in the operations of the Department and enhanced delivery of its services, using technology to seek efficiencies and improve customer service.

- Driving innovation to assist companies in responding to the pandemic with innovative products and solutions and in support of the national effort.
- Continuing extensive work to ensure a coordinated and coherent approach to Brexit across the Department and its Offices and Agencies including engagement across Government on Brexit readiness in preparation for all Brexit outcomes, including a no-deal.
- Future-proofing the economy and society for the twin transition to a sustainable low carbon economy and the acceleration of digitalisation.
- Working with our enterprise development Agencies, leading on creating and sustaining high quality enterprise and employment.
- Maintaining close and mutually beneficial relationships with the EU, the UK, and globally.

COVID-19 RESPONSE - ASSISTANCE FOR BUSINESS

Working closely with our Offices and Agencies, our colleagues across Government and enterprise stakeholders, the Department participated in many cross-government groups to address key risks arising in the context of COVID-19. In the very early days, we supported the procurement and distribution of PPE and supply chain issues arising from the impact of the pandemic. A wide range of new policies and enterprise advisory and funding schemes were developed by the Department, agreed by Government and delivered rapidly. This included a suite of funding and advisory schemes for business, including new grant, liquidity and loan financing schemes to assist impacted businesses during the pandemic. Regulatory and legislative amendments to support companies were agreed and enacted, while major work was completed in relation to health and safety in the workplace.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Department launched a new **Enterprise Information Centre**, a dedicated resource for information on the wide range of assistance available to business. The Unit was set up in March to deal with queries in relation to COVID-19 and was expanded to include Brexit information. The Centre responded to over 11,200 calls and emails in 2020.

The **Retail Forum** continued its focus on the developmental needs of the sector in 2020 and intensified its work on Brexit preparedness, including in the mitigation efforts necessary to minimise disruption to food supply chains and the impact of COVID-19 on the sector.

The **Enterprise Forum on Brexit and Global Challenges**, with representatives from the key business sectors and representative organisations, acted as a strong advisory body to the Department and met regularly throughout the year.

A new **SME Growth Taskforce** was established in 2020 to provide a platform for structured engagement between entrepreneurs, business representatives and Government in the delivery of a National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, which will map out an ambition long-term strategic blueprint beyond COVID-19.

The Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), a forum for high-level dialogue between government, union and employer representatives on labour market issues provided invaluable information and advice, particularly in relation to workplace experience and health

and safety. Participants in this process included Ibec, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Chambers Ireland and the Construction Industry Federation.

A stakeholder engagement event for the **National Economic Plan** was convened by the Tánaiste in October to exchange ideas on the National Economic Plan, which will set out the Government's guiding priorities and policy objectives for a sustainable recovery. The event was structured around three breakout sessions, addressing building resilience across our enterprises and sectors; an inclusive and balanced recovery; and future proofing our economy and society.

During 2020, the Department rolled out numerous **focused communications campaigns** on COVID-19 Business Supports, the Shop Safely Campaign and the Work Safely Protocol.

A new voluntary **Code of Conduct between landlords and business for commercial rents**, developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including Ibec, Retail Excellence Ireland, Chambers Ireland, Dublin Town and Irish Institutional Property, was published on 1 October 2020. The Code sets out a structured approach for engagement between both commercial landlords and tenants, based on their mutual interest in continuing to work together.

Economic Analysis

Extensive modelling and analysis were undertaken and three papers on **Economic Considerations for Reinstating Economic Activity** were developed by the Department at phases one to three of the **Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business**. These papers were developed in conjunction with the Department of Finance and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and provided an assessment of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Financial Supports

The **Future Growth Loan Scheme** expanded in July 2020 to bring the total lending available under the scheme to €800m for eligible Irish businesses and the primary agriculture and seafood sectors to assist strategic long-term investment.

The **SBCI-COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme** was introduced in March 2020 as an immediate response to the liquidity challenges facing COVID-19 impacted SMEs and small mid-caps at the onset of the pandemic. Together with the Brexit Loan Scheme, €337.5m of lending has been made available to help the liquidity needs of SMEs, as of the end of 2020, through these two loan schemes. A further expansion is in progress to bring available lending up to €500m.

In March 2020, **Microfinance Ireland** responded quickly to the impact of COVID-19 with its COVID-19 Business Loan with reduced interest rates. It approved €27.4m in loans assisting 2,972 businesses, more than four times its loan level in 2019. In November, Microfinance Ireland also launched its Brexit Business Loan. The Microenterprise Loan Fund (Amendment) Act 2020 was passed through both Houses of the Oireachtas allowing for greater equity funding from the Government and for the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) to become a lender to Microfinance Ireland.

The **COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme** was devised, legislated for and signed into law by the President in July to respond to Irish business needs for additional liquidity and to give stability to the SME lending market. With no portfolio cap and a state guarantee of 80 percent, loans of up to 5.5 years and €1m are available at reduced interest rates. After less than 4 months in operation, 1,890 businesses had drawn down funding worth over €98m by year end. This represents more than a 600% increase on the €14.8m drawn in the entirety of 2019 under the Credit Guarantee Scheme.

The **Sustaining Enterprise Fund** helped to sustain business so that they can return to viability and contribute to the recovery of the Irish economy. Funding of €124m under the Sustaining Enterprise Fund helped sustain 418 companies and 17,710 jobs across the country.

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

Almost 1,000 companies were provided with funding to develop a robust financial plan through the **COVID-19 Business Financial Planning Grant**.

To develop their online presence through the **Online Retail Scheme**, 330 retailers were provided with grants in 2020, totalling €11.8m,

Schemes and programmes to deal with the changing external environment ensuring that they helped business in tackling existing and emerging economic challenges for business continued to be developed and adapted. The **Business Continuity Voucher** scheme, introduced in March 2020, provided vouchers for companies and sole traders to develop short-term and long-term strategies to respond to the initial COVID-19 pandemic and to plan for eventual recovery and reopening of the economy. The **Trading Online Voucher Scheme** offered skills training, mentoring and financial assistance to help small and micro-businesses to develop their ecommerce capability. The **Microenterprise Assistance Fund** targeted those micro enterprises that could not avail of existing government measures.

Regulatory Supports

The Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Covid-19) Act 2020 was enacted on 1 August 2020 and makes temporary amendments to ensure 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.

DEVELOPING POLICIES FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY

The Department, in conjunction with NPHEA, conducted a survey in May to determine business capability and capacity to physically implement COVID-19 prevention measures in the workplace. This provided insight into the needs of businesses seeking to enforce COVID-19 public health guidelines.

As a result of the Public Health restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, a Government decision to partially reopen the economy from 18 May 2020 was accompanied by the introduction of **the Return to Work Safely Protocol**. The Protocol set out in a clear and comprehensive way, the steps and processes that businesses needed to take to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. It was developed on a collaborative basis, led by the Department and involving the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Health and the HSE. The members of the Labour Employer Economic Forum were also heavily involved in working on and agreeing the Protocol.

The Protocol was revised and relaunched as the **Work Safely Protocol** in November 2020, still containing information and practical advice on a range of topics such as the management and control of outbreaks, selection of hand sanitisers, wearing of masks, ventilation of workplaces and symptoms. The revision brought together knowledge developed in these areas as the pandemic continued and it was considered important that the guidance reflected the most up to date public health advice available.

The Health and Safety Authority has acted as the lead Agency in co-ordinating compliance with the Work Safely Protocol. It has been helped in this role by inspectors from a range of other Government Departments and State Bodies (Workplace Relations Commission; Environmental Health Officers; Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Department of Education; Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and Tusla). Over 24,000 COVID-19 inspections on compliance with the Protocol were carried out between May and the end of December 2020. This provided an assurance to employers and enabled businesses to remain open during the period of the pandemic.

The **National Standards Authority of Ireland** produced a suite of useful resource documents and guides to assist SMEs, particularly those in the retail sector, to get up-and-running in advance of society reopening. These are easy to follow guides and provide clear steps on how retail operators can make their premises, staff and customers safe in a post-COVID environment. These included the **COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide**; the **COVID-19 Retail Protection and Improvement Guide**; and the **COVID-19 Shopping Centre Recovery and Improvement Guide**.

DEPARTMENT'S OPERATIONS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The work of the Department was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, with the Department shifting at short notice from a predominantly office-based operating model to full **remote working** for all but a minority of staff who were needed on site. This involved the successful deployment of over 800 staff, using a mix of laptops and desktops, to remote working. In addition, video conferencing services were ramped up substantially to facilitate ongoing collaboration between staff, particularly in light of significant increases in many workloads in response to the crisis.

The Department also responded early and quickly by redeploying many staff to other areas within the Department to ensure existing services and emerging areas of critical need were, and are, being appropriately supported.

In March 2020, the **Employment Permits Section** implemented a COVID-19 contingency plan to ensure that the employment permit regime could continue to operate throughout the crisis with operations moving to a fully remotely environment. Operational practices were

adjusted to replace the paper-based elements of the service to allow for a fully online process. Agreement was reached with the Immigration Service Delivery in the Department of Justice to introduce, on a temporary basis, a type of 'e-employment permit'. Employment permit applications from medical personnel were prioritised with over 4,490 granted from mid-March to the end of 2020.

At the **Virtual Recognition Event for the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards** to formally recognise and showcase the initiatives developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis in a challenging and fast changing environment, the Department's selected project was the Contingency Plan to Ensure the Continuation of Ireland's Employment Permit System. The Offices of the Department submitted the WRC Remote Working Information and Customer Service lo-call phone service, and the Labour Court Virtual Courtroom. Other innovative projects included the Enterprise Information Centre and Remote Video Interviews.

A staff survey conducted in June provided up-to-date data on staff needs and allowed for responsive actions to be taken. A **COVID-19 Working Group** was established to oversee progress on initiatives/activities related to Equipment and Ergonomics, Managing Staff Remotely, Health and Wellbeing, Communications for Teams and Remote Working now and in normal times.

DRIVING INNOVATION

Driving innovation for enterprise, and internally, continued as a priority in 2020.

Knowledge Transfer Ireland created a dedicated **COVID-19 Non-Exclusive Royalty-Free (NERF) Licence**, that is aimed at speeding up the dissemination of critical COVID-19 related intellectual property from Irish Higher Education Institutions to companies. The COVID-19 NERF provides cutting edge IP free of charge to organisations engaged in critical research and development activities for the sole purposes of diagnosing, preventing, containing, treating and/or minimising the impact of the virus.

During the year, the **COVID-19 Products Scheme** was developed under a European Commission Temporary Framework, allowing additional aid to be granted by EU Member States to companies developing or producing medicinal products used in the fight against COVID-19. The Products Scheme, which is delivered through IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland, allows for up to €200m in targeted State assistance to facilitate the research and development of COVID-19 products. These enable the construction or upgrading of testing and upscaling infrastructures that contribute to the development COVID-19 relevant products and assist the production of products needed to respond to the pandemic.

A total of 62 applications were received under Call 3 of the **Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund** which will be evaluated for funding in 2021.

During 2020, 936 **collaborative projects between companies and Irish Higher Education Institutes** were helped by Enterprise Ireland as part of driving an increased focus on business development.

Within the organisation, through our '**Innovate@ETE**' group, staff are encouraged to make positive changes to how we work and to the working environment. A **Virtual Recognition Event for the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards** was held to formally

recognise and showcase the initiatives developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis in a challenging and fast changing environment.

In our adoption of the **Declaration on Public Service Innovation**, we continued to promote a culture of innovation in our organisation. As part of the Decade of Centenaries commemorations, we organised '**The 23 Kildare Street Talks - The Countess, Casualties and The Civil Service**', a series of short lectures on the revolutionary period between 1919 to 1923.

The Department continues to play a central role in leading Action 6 of '**Our Public Service 2020**' with the aim to 'Promote a Culture of Innovation in the Public Service'. Secretary General Dr Orlaigh Quinn and Enterprise Ireland CEO Julie Sinnamon act as designated leads, and Assistant Secretary Pauline Mulligan is the Action's Sponsor, chairing the Action 6 team comprising sectoral experts across the Public Service.

PREPARING FOR BREXIT

In 2020, the Department continued its extensive work to ensure a **coordinated and coherent approach to Brexit** across the Department and its Offices and Agencies including engagement across Government on Brexit readiness in preparation for all Brexit outcomes, including a no-deal. This included intensive engagement with the Department's stakeholders to assist businesses to get Brexit ready by end 2020. This work involved Ministerial engagement through key stakeholder groups such as the Enterprise Forum on Brexit and Global Challenges and the Retail Forum as well as with the Department's enterprise and regulatory Agencies.

ACCELERATION OF DIGITALISATION

Ireland rose to **6th place on EU Digital Economy and Society Index 2020** and 1st place on integration of digital technology and is the fastest growing digital frontrunner on the index and a key measure of national competitiveness. The first national platform legislation - the Platform to Business Regulation - was signed into law in July 2020 via S.I. No. 256/2020 - European Union (Promoting Fairness and Transparency for Business Users of Online Intermediation Services) Regulations 2020. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has been designated as the Irish enforcement body for the Regulation.

Comprehensive national cross government submissions were developed on the EU Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act packages and reflected in the EU Commission's proposals.

A comprehensive cross government national submission was developed on the EU Artificial Intelligence Whitepaper and in line with other digital frontrunner Member States.

Work commenced on the development of the national **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy** which will be launched in mid 2021. The Strategy will outline a vision for Ireland to be an international leader in using AI to the benefit of our population, through a people-centred and ethical approach to AI development, adoption and use.

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE LOW CARBON ECONOMY

The Department actively engaged with the Government's *Climate Action Plan 2019*, its governance processes and has monitored progress and provided input into the development

of the economy-wide Long-Term Strategy outlining Ireland's net-zero 2050 target. It committed to further Departmental and cross agency climate actions for the interim period to the **development of Climate Action Plan 2021** and work commenced on the contributions from the Department to *Climate Action Plan 2021*.

The Department participated in discussions with the European Commission on the enterprise aspects of the Commissions reference scenario which will form the basis of Ireland's national effort-sharing target following the increase in EU ambition to reduce greenhouse gases by 55% by 2030.

Research was undertaken into technologies that could be adopted in specific sub-sectors of the manufacturing sector to reduce emissions and in the context of the development of sectoral targets, analysis was conducted to quantify CO₂ abatement if investment in these technologies occurred over the period to 2030. It progressed the Department's actions from the *Climate Action Plan 2019* regarding those applying to the food/drinks and cement sectors and inputted to the quarterly published progress reports on the Climate Action Plan on actions including those undertaken by IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and NSAI. Throughout the year the Department provided analysis and policy input into matters relating to climate action policy and ensured consideration of competitiveness impacts in policy options.

SUPPORTING JOB CREATION THROUGH OUR AGENCIES

Enterprise Ireland

Job creation closely matched the performance in 2019, with 16,496 new jobs created in Enterprise Ireland supported companies. However, in a challenging year, with a significant COVID-19 impact, job losses increased to 17,368 which resulted in net job losses of 872 in client companies. Total employment in Enterprise Ireland supported companies was 220,613 at the end of 2020. 65% of total employment was outside Dublin.

IDA Ireland

IDA Ireland performed strongly in 2020 with client companies creating 20,123 gross new jobs on the ground. The net gain was 8,944 additional jobs. Total foreign direct investment employment in Ireland at the end of 2020 stood at 257,394, the highest ever number employed in the multinational sector, exceeding targets set by Government contained in IDA Ireland's Strategy – Winning: Foreign Direct Investment 2015-2019. Of the 246 new investments won in 2020, 128 (52%) were in regional locations.

Local Enterprise Offices

During 2020 the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) focused on assisting business owners to identify the initiatives available to them to respond to this unprecedented crisis and help them keep their businesses viable. During what was a challenging year, a total of 5,585 new jobs (gross) were created by LEO clients, with a net decrease of 1,494 jobs.

WORKING GLOBALLY

The Department, on behalf of Ireland, worked closely with the European Union Commission and Member States to bring several trade agreements to a successful conclusion. On 1 August 2020 the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (FTA) entered into force, following its signing the previous year. The EU and Mexico on 28 April 2020 concluded the last

outstanding element covering the reciprocal opening of public procurement markets, in the negotiation of the new EU-Mexico FTA.

On 21 August 2020 the EU and US announced agreement on a package of tariff reductions across a number of US and EU exports, the first such negotiated reductions in duties in more than two decades. An Economic and Sustainability Impact Assessment of the EU-Mercosur trade deal for Ireland and partner countries was commissioned. The EU and China signed a bilateral agreement to protect 100 European Geographical Indications (GIs) in China, including Irish Whiskey and Irish Cream and 100 Chinese GIs in the European Union against usurpation and imitation. The Agreement will enter into force in 2021.

At the end of 2020, the EU and China concluded negotiations in relation to a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment that once ratified will improve market access for Irish and European investors to the Chinese market of 1.4bn people across economic sectors.

The EU also adopted an amended Enforcement Regulation that allows the EU to defend the interests of Member States in the event that a 3rd country breaches its commitments or obligations under international trade law and a WTO Dispute Panel upholds a complaint made by the injured party (EU).

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Improving terms and conditions for all workers continued in 2020. In September, the Department commenced the development of a **National Remote Working Strategy** with a vision to make remote working a permanent feature of the Irish workplace in a way that maximises the economic, social and environmental benefits. It was published in early January 2021.

Work is well underway on introducing a **Statutory Sick Pay Scheme**. A public consultation was launched on 16 November 2020 and ended on 18 December 2020.

Work on the **Right to Disconnect** Policy began in 2020, with the Code of Practice on the Right to Disconnect launched in early 2021.

The Low Pay Commission has the principal function of examining and making recommendations to the Tánaiste on the appropriate level of the national minimum wage and related matters. Its current work programme includes research on the transition to a **Living Wage**.

The first **Progress Reports for the Regional Enterprise Plans to 2020** were published in early 2020. The Plans continued to be implemented during 2020 and each region submitted their Final Progress Reports at the end of 2020 for publication in early 2021.

Under the **Regional Enterprise Development Fund**, a further 26 collaborative and innovative projects were awarded over €45m in funding in 2020. This brings the total number of projects funded under the Fund to 68, with €100m in approved funding across the three calls to date. Under the new **Border Enterprise Development Fund**, 11 projects were approved funding of over €17m in 2020.

The third report from **Balance for Better Business** was launched by the Tánaiste in December 2020. The report shows that encouraging progress is being made in some areas and that the gap between Ireland and the European Union average for women on boards

has continued to narrow, from 8% in 2018 to 1.2% in 2020 with Ireland now ranked in 13th position, compared to 17th in 2018.

The **General Scheme of the Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Bill 2020** was approved by the new Government for drafting on 29 September 2020. The Bill's main provision is a prohibition on 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. It includes also a ban on the unauthorised resale of tickets for matches and events taking place during the EURO 2020 football championship.

Focus on Sectors 2020 was published in August 2020. This series of sectoral reports that present concise overviews of 16 key sectors of the economy to assist horizontal oversight of economic performance across these sectors and a platform to facilitate cooperation. The 2020 reports identify some initial indications of the impact of COVID-19 on these sectors.

Vision

WE WILL 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

WE WILL 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

AS A DEPARTMENT, WE 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.

Introduction to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

The title and remit of the Department changed from Business, Enterprise and Innovation to Enterprise, Trade and Employment, following the formation of a new Government in June 2020. The Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar, TD was appointed as Minister and two Ministers of State, Minister English and Minister Troy took up new roles in the Department. A comprehensive brief was prepared for the Tánaiste and Ministers, in line with the Public Service Management Act 1997, and a new Statement of Strategy was developed and submitted to the Tánaiste before the end of 2020. In line with the Programme for Government, this strategy sets out a revised Mission, Strategic Goals and the overall direction for the Department over the next three years. Prior to June, the Department was led by Minister Heather Humphreys, TD and Ministers of State, Pat Breen TD and John Halligan, TD.

Significant negotiations and work took place in relation to the transfer of functions, which involved five separate streams of work, four relating to new functions coming into the Department and one relating to the transfer out of existing work. The trade promotion function was transferred to this Department from the Department of Foreign Affairs, and employment rights and redundancy and insolvency policy transferred from the Department of Social Protection. The Department also assumed responsibility for the Low Pay Commission which has the principal function of examining and making recommendations to the Tánaiste on the appropriate level of the national minimum wage and related matters. The Department also took on responsibility for the Balance for Better Business Group from the Department of Justice and the Trading Online Vouchers from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. Work was completed on transferring out responsibilities in relation to science, including Science Foundation Ireland and the Tyndall Institute. This will, with effect from 1 January 2021, transfer to newly formed Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The Department's mission is to lead on the creation and maintenance of employment across all sectors and regions of the country. We play a key role in implementing the Government's policies of stimulating the productive capacity of the economy, supporting enterprise and trade and creating an environment which assists job creation and maintenance. The Department also has a remit to promote fair competition in the marketplace, protect consumers and safeguard workers.

Working together with its Agencies and Offices, the Department's remit covers a wide range of activity including:

- Leading on helping entrepreneurs and businesses create and sustain high quality employment across all regions of our country, by developing a strong indigenous enterprise base, attracting Foreign Direct Investment and increasing trade.
- Promoting quality employment, positive workplace relations, well-functioning dispute resolution mechanisms and a safe working environment.
- Creating a strong entrepreneurial culture.

- Assisting enterprise with their research and development needs to maintain and create new jobs and contribute to building a better society.
- Identifying the future skills needs of enterprise and working across Government to develop policies to meet these needs, including through upskilling.
- Leading a whole-of-Government approach to developing a competitive environment for investment, productivity and sustainable jobs.
- Ensuring our business regulation facilitates investment and development, competition in the marketplace, high standards of consumer protection and corporate governance, and provides Ireland with a competitive advantage in the global market.
- Working ambitiously across Government with our EU and international partners to achieve progress in EU and International fora, across a wide range of interests, including Brexit.
- Representing and negotiating for Ireland's interests in relevant EU fora, including:
 - Competitiveness Council (incorporating Internal Market, Industry Space and Research),¹
 - Foreign Affairs Council (meeting in its Trade formation)
 - Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)² and relevant international bodies;
 - World Trade Organisation (WTO),
 - International Labour Organisation (ILO),
 - Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),
 - World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).
 - Council of Europe (Social Charter)³

¹ Responsibility for research at Competitiveness Council transferred from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science 1 January 2021
² Responsibility for EPSCO transferred from the Department of Social Protection to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on 14 October 2020
³ Responsibility for Council of Europe (Social Charter) transferred from the Department of Social Protection to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on 14 October 2020

Department Structure



Management Board

The Department's Management Board comprises of the Secretary General, seven Assistant Secretaries and the Head of the Governance, Information and Management Support Unit.

The Management Board met weekly, in person and then virtually, during 2020.

MINISTERIAL MANAGEMENT BOARD

In 2020, Ministerial Management Board meetings took place regularly. The Minister, the Ministers of State and the Special Advisors to the Minister attended these meetings, along with the members of the Management Board.

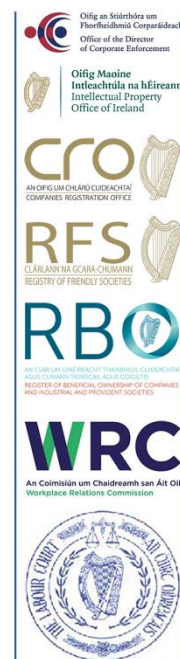
OFFICES AND AGENCIES

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has seven Offices and eight Agencies. With effect from 1 January 2021, Science Foundation Ireland transferred to the remit of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Organisation Chart



Offices and Agencies of the Department



Statement of Strategy 2018-2021

STATEMENT OF STRATEGY 2018-2021

The Department's Statement of Strategy for 2018-2021 sets out seven overarching high-level goals capturing strategic priorities across the broad range of areas for which the Department has responsibility⁴

Goal 1: LEAD ON CREATING AND SUSTAINING HIGH QUALITY ENTERPRISE AND EMPLOYMENT ACROSS ALL REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY BY SUPPORTING A STRONG INDIGENOUS ENTERPRISE BASE, THE CONTINUED ATTRACTION OF FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT AND A STRONG ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE

In 2020, global economic output is estimated to have fallen by between 3.25% - 3.4%, which represents a far larger shock to economies than the recession in the wake of the global financial crisis. At the peak, in April 2020, the COVID-adjusted unemployment rate was 30.5%, with over 1.2m of the workforce in receipt of some form of income support. Over the course of last year, the unemployment rate has fallen and at year end the COVID-adjusted unemployment rate⁵ was 20.4%.

The level of State support over the course of the year was substantial to insulate businesses and workers from the worst of the pandemic. The cost to the State over the course of the year was €25bn, which included €8.8bn of income supports via the Employee Wage Subsidy Scheme, its precursor the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and the Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

The expectations for the forthcoming year recent forecasts suggest that the economy has weathered the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, with forecasts suggest that Irish GDP will grow by between 4.4% and 4.9% in 2021, and by between 4.5% and 5.2% in 2022.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Enterprise Information Centre

With the first closures were announced in March because of the pandemic, the number of calls to the Department from business seeking advice and assistance increased significantly. A dedicated COVID-19 Business Support Call Centre was established immediately to

⁴ A new Statement of Strategy for 2021 to 2023 was published in January 2021 as required following appointment of a new Minister and can be found at www.enterprise.gov.ie

⁵ <https://www.cso.ie/en/methods/labourmarket/monthlyunemployment/monthlyunemploymentandcovid-19adjustedestimatesmarch2020technicalnote/>

provide information on the various new and existing schemes and financial measures available. A dedicated helpline phone number and email address were established and these details were advertised on the Department's website and social media. The Centre responded to over 11,200 calls and emails in 2020.

Having been proven to be a valuable addition to the public service offered by the Department, it was decided to continue and to expand the Call Centre function and for it to be grown into a business information service addressing all business initiatives and measures in a post-Covid environment, including those Brexit-related. The Centre provides a central point of contact within the Department for businesses to learn about the assistance and services available from the Department, its Offices and Agencies and across Government and where and how to access them.

The Centre was included in the Excellence in Customer Services Case Studies published in December 2020 as part of Our Public Service 2020 as an example of how the Department is continually working to improve customer service and put citizens at the centre of service design and delivery.

Retail Forum

The Retail Forum continued its focus on the developmental needs of the sector in 2020. It also intensified its work on Brexit preparedness, including mitigations to minimise disruption to food supply chains and helped the sector with the impact of COVID-19, the periods of closure of non-essential retail and the ongoing public health guidance. In relation to Brexit preparedness, the Forum supported by the Brexit Unit, facilitated engagement with a range of Government Departments and relevant bodies including the Departments of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Transport, Revenue Commissioners, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Environmental Health Services, Dublin Port. In addition to the three scheduled meetings of the Retail Forum, Minister English, formerly Minister Humphreys, as Chair of the Retail Forum met with the Grocery, Retail and Distribution Sector regularly throughout 2020 on COVID-19 and Brexit.

COVID-19 has accelerated structural changes in the retail sector, including the move to digital and online. Trading online is a very important route for retail to grow and improve their business in the current crisis and will be an important element in their recovery over the longer term. The COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme, which is administered by Enterprise Ireland on behalf of the Department, was introduced in 2020 with the aim of helping 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 2020 two calls were announced under the COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme with 330 retailers awarded €11.9m.

Additional issues considered by the Forum in 2020 included town centre renewal, cost of insurance, skills needs, commercial rates, commercial rents and the various COVID-19 business initiatives.

Code of Conduct between landlords and business for commercial rents

On 1 October 2020, a new voluntary Code of Conduct between landlords and business for commercial rents was published. The Code, which is a commitment in the Programme for Government, was developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders, including Ibec, Retail Excellence Ireland, Chambers Ireland, Dublin Town and Irish Institutional Property. It is based on an approach taken in other jurisdictions, including Australia, France and the U.K. The Code applies until 31 July 2021 and sets out a structured approach for engagement between both commercial landlords and tenants, based on their mutual interest in continuing to work together.

The Code sets out a number of principles that both parties should commit to abide by, including transparency and collaboration. It asks commercial landlords to provide concessions where they can and where this is not possible, asks them to set out clearly the reasons for this. It lists some of the issues to consider when determining the impact of COVID-19 and the public health restrictions on a business and the need for concession. Where a concession is being considered, the Code provides some suggested options for new arrangements. The Code also suggests that commercial tenants seeking new arrangements should be clear as to why assistance is needed when seeking concessions from their landlord.

Engagement with Small Business Community

The Department's engagement with the small business community is assisted by extensive participation in international fora on SME policy matters. At EU level, the Department continues to engage proactively as a member of the SME Envoy Network, contributing to the development of the new EU SME Strategy in 2020. The Department was again an active participant at the OECD's Working Party on SMEs and Entrepreneurship and, at Ministerial level, co-chaired the OECD's Digital for SME initiative at its events in 2020. This engagement has helped to build strong relationships with our international partners and has been a valuable resource for best international policy examples.

During 2020, the supportingsmes.gov.ie website provided up-to-date critical information for SMEs regarding COVID-19 business initiatives, Return to Work Policy Guidelines, Brexit supports and signposting facilities to business initiatives and training webinars.

In September 2020, the Department established an SME Growth Taskforce to design and deliver a National SME Growth Plan, a long-term strategic plan for SMEs and entrepreneurs which would look beyond Brexit and COVID-19. The membership of the SME Taskforce was drawn from a wide range of representatives from the small business community, including successful entrepreneurs, representative bodies, and other business leaders.

The Taskforce, which was chaired by the Tánaiste, met in plenary session on four occasions between September and December. There was a further total of 18 meetings of four subgroups, which worked on developing recommendations in thematic areas. The proposals developed include measures to help SMEs to start up, scale up and access foreign markets, as well as recommendations aimed at helping SMEs to become more productive and ready for the transition to a digital, green economy. In addition, there is particular focus on creating and growing local business networks and clusters, which are an important driver of regional development.

The work of the Taskforce concluded with the completion of its draft Report, which sets out over 80 actions aimed at ensuring that Irish SMEs and entrepreneurs continue to grow and become more productive in the years to come. In December, Government noted the Growth Plan and approved its upcoming publication.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

SBCI COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme

The SBCI COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme was launched at the end of March 2020 to provide an immediate response to liquidity needs of COVID-19 impacted SMEs and small mid-caps. Loan amounts under this scheme are offered at competitive rates for between €25,000 and €1.5m for terms between one and three years, with no security required on loans of less than €500k.

Between the SBCI Working Capital Scheme and the Brexit Loan Scheme, €337.5m of lending has been made available to help liquidity needs of SMEs, as of the end of 2020. A further expansion is in progress to bring available lending through these two schemes up to €500m. In the five months to the end of September 2020, prior to the launch by this Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine of a tailor-made liquidity loan scheme for COVID-19 impacted SMEs (the COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme - further details below), 808 loans under the SBCI COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme were progressed to sanction at bank level to the value of €103.5m. A further 150 loans progressed to sanction to the value of €22m, as lenders reviewed their pipeline of applications between September and December 2020. In total 958 loans to the value of €126.5m were sanctioned over nine months of 2020.

COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme

The Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Act was passed through both Houses of the Oireachtas and signed by the President into law in July 2020. It allows for the COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme to be extended to the end of 2021. The COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme provides for €2bn in lending for Irish businesses and is the largest guarantee scheme in the history of the State. Its function is to add certainty to businesses that funding is available for working capital and investment purposes. Loans of up to €1m are available for up to five and a half years at reduced interest rates. Loans under €250,000 do not require collateral or personal guarantees. The Scheme is available to SMEs, small Mid-Caps and primary producers.

The Open Call to the Scheme, operated by SBCI, saw the largest number ever of applications from finance providers in Ireland and by year end over 20 new finance providers had either completed the legal and operational process or were in the final stages. This signifies the largest ever successful interaction by private finance providers with a state scheme and will add competition, regional spread and diversity into the SME lending market into the future.

AIB, BOI and Ulster Bank launched the Scheme in September 2020, with Credit Unions and non-bank lenders joining in December 2020. After less than four months in operation, 1,890 businesses had drawn down funding worth over €98m by year end. This represents more than a 600% increase on the €14.8m drawn in the entirety of 2019 under the Credit

Guarantee Scheme. The Scheme was initially established to operate until end of 2020 but was extended to 30 June 2021 by government decision in November 2020.

Future Growth Loan Scheme

The €300m Future Growth Loan Scheme was launched in March 2019 to provide access to lending to eligible Irish businesses and the primary agriculture and seafood sectors to assist strategic long-term investment. The scheme was expanded in July 2020 to bring available lending to €800m. Finance provided under this scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced, and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses. Loan amounts are offered of between €100,000 (€50,000 for agriculture) to €3m with unsecured loans up to €500,000. Loans are for terms of between seven and 10 years – addressing a gap in the market for longer term finance. The scheme is jointly funded by this Department, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the European Investment Bank.

This scheme has been well received in the market such that at the end of 2020 there had been 2,742 loans progressed to sanction at bank level, to a total value of €555m, of which 2,023 of these loans to the value of €415.1m were sanctioned in 2020 alone.

Microenterprise Loan Fund Scheme

The Microenterprise Loan Fund Scheme, operated by Microfinance Ireland, was introduced in 2012. The purpose of the fund is to provide loans to microenterprises which are defined as businesses with less than 10 employees and/or turnover of less than €2m.

In 2020, Microfinance Ireland approved €27.4m in funding to 2,202 small businesses throughout the country, helping the creation or sustainment of 2,972 jobs with 74% of loans going to microenterprises outside of Dublin.

Since the Microenterprise Loan Fund Scheme became operational in 2012 to the end of 2020, 3,199 loans totalling €53.9m have been drawn which have helped to support 9,002 jobs.

Further to the Microenterprise Loan Fund (Amendment) Act 2020, a governance review was begun to evaluate the potential change in ownership/parentage of the company which owns the sole share in Microfinance Ireland. This was done in tandem with an external due diligence review of the organisation on behalf of SBCI to progress their ability to become a lender to Microfinance Ireland.

RESTART GRANT

Working with the local authorities, the Department launched the Restart Grant and the Restart Grant Plus Schemes which contributed towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business operational and re-connecting with employees and customers. A total allocation of €685m was made available through these schemes in 2020, with over 108,000 grants made.

REGIONAL ENTERPRISE PLANS

Overseen at the national level by the Department, and originally launched in 2019, the purpose of the Regional Enterprise Plans is to identify growth opportunities, recognise

vulnerabilities, and in response, strengthen the regional enterprise ecosystem to enable job creation in the regions.

Developed by regional stakeholders, each Plan contains a small number of agreed priority Strategic Objectives and specific actions to help enterprise development and job creation over a two-year work programme.

The Plans complement existing activities being undertaken by IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, the LEOs and the wider range of State Bodies directly involved in assisting enterprise development in the regions and generate added value from regional and local actors working collaboratively.

Nine 'bottom-up' and collaborative Regional Steering Committees implement the Regional Enterprise Plans. Chaired by a person from the private sector, membership includes: the enterprise Agencies, LEOs, local authorities, higher and further education bodies, private sector and others.

In line with the focus on balanced regional development in the Programme for Government, the Regional Enterprise Plans will be renewed for a further multi-year work programme following a consultation and prioritisation exercise with the Regional Committees overseen by the Department commencing in 2021.

REGIONAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT FUND

The Regional Enterprise Development Fund, which is administered by Enterprise Ireland, has been an effective instrument of policy to encourage and financially assist bottom-up collaborative initiatives that seek to strengthen regional enterprise ecosystems and the potential for job creation in the regions. The Fund complements the aims and objectives of the Regional Enterprise Plans.

In January 2020, under the third call of the Fund, 26 projects were awarded funding totalling €45m. Almost €100m in funding has now been approved for 68 projects across three competitive calls under the Fund to date, with projects approved in every region, ranging from the development of new start-up/enterprise hubs to nationally significant sector focused applied research and innovation facilities that build on specific regional specialisms. Successful projects under the third call include the Future Mobility Campus Ireland which was awarded €4.7m in funding to establish a transport testbed based in Shannon Co. Clare and Premier Lakelands Food hub, which was approved funding of over €1.3m to develop a state of the art food-hub based in Longford.

A Border Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF) was launched in early 2020 to provide assistance for collaborative, enterprise capability building projects, to advance entrepreneurship, productivity and innovation in the Border region. The Fund was part of a €28m Brexit economic stimulus package announced for the six border counties of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal. In June 2020, under the BEDF, 11 projects were approved funding totalling over €17m with projects approved in each of the Border counties. Winning projects under the BEDF range from an innovation-as-a-service project in Donegal which aims to accelerate the uptake of disruptive technology solutions by SMEs, to the establishment of an Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Training Centre in Dundalk, Co. Louth.

ENTERPRISE IRELAND

Reflecting the impact of the pandemic on the Irish economy and global markets in 2020, Enterprise Ireland client companies reported a decline in total employment. Enterprise Ireland's 2020 employment survey reported 220,613 people employed in Enterprise Ireland-supported companies, a decrease of 0.4%, taking into account job gains and losses then overall 872 net jobs were lost. Enterprise Ireland client companies in some sectors saw significant growth in 2020, including Life Sciences (6.8%), Cleantech (6%) and Construction (4.7% employment growth). The total spend of Enterprise Ireland clients in the Irish economy across payroll and goods and services purchased reached €27 bn in 2019.

There were over 60 'International Virtual Buyer Events' organised. In October, '*International Markets Week*' launch witnessed 1,651 virtual attendees. Ireland's largest exporter event saw more than 700 companies meeting 140 market advisors from 40 overseas offices in 2,000 individual virtual one-to-one meetings to plan their COVID-19, Brexit and market diversification strategies.

Enterprise Ireland launched Phase 2 of the '*Enter the Eurozone*' programme for Irish business, designed to maximise opportunities for Irish business in what is now the second largest market for Enterprise Ireland client companies. With growth of 15% in 2019 and exports valued at €5.6bn, the Eurozone constitutes 22% of total exports.

In 2020 the challenge for Enterprise Ireland was to assist companies weathering the storms of COVID-19 and Brexit. This was mainly achieved through the liquidity assistance provided to companies via the Sustaining Enterprise Fund which was negotiated by the Department. The main objective of the fund is to sustain business so that companies can return to viability and contribute to the recovery of the Irish economy. €124m in funding helped sustain 418 companies and 17,710 jobs across the country.

Targeted COVID-19 funding to help companies stabilise, reset and recover included:

- 8,650 companies (including non-Enterprise Ireland clients) offered advice and directed to funding options.
- 989 companies provided with €4.9m in funding to develop a robust financial plan through the COVID-19 Business Financial Planning Grant.
- 330 retailers provided with grants, totalling €11.8m, to develop their online presence through the Online Retail Scheme.
- €5.4m provided to companies innovating and scaling to produce products to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic under the COVID-19 Products Scheme.
- 95 regional enterprise centres throughout the country awarded €8.24m in total through the Enterprise Centres Fund. The local business hubs received grants ranging from €10k up to €150k to help them continue to offer services to local businesses across Ireland.
- 531 company representatives completed a Virtual International Selling Masterclass – providing vital skills for businesses to continue to grow their export footprint during the pandemic.

Building Scale:

- In 2020 a total *125 new start-ups* were assisted through the HPSU programme and Competitive Start Fund initiatives.
- In December, 15 women entrepreneurs were announced as participants in the *Competitive Start Fund*.
- During 2020 Enterprise Ireland established *partnerships for HPSUs* with Amazon and Microsoft.

Details of Enterprise Ireland's strategic response to Brexit is included under Goal 6.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICES

The 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) are the 'first-stop-shop' for providing advice and guidance, financial assistance and other measures to those wishing to start or grow their own business. During 2020 the role of the LEOs focused more on assisting business owners to identify the initiatives available to them to respond to this unprecedented crisis and help them keep their businesses viable. During the year:

- a total of 5,585 new full and part-time jobs (gross) were created by LEO clients overall;
- there was a net decrease of 1,494 jobs (full and part-time); and
- the LEO portfolio in 2020 consisted of 7,529 client companies, with an employment total of 35,236 (full-time and part-time jobs).

COVID-19 Measures

As a key player in the government's response to COVID-19, the LEOs developed new measures and adapted existing ones to provide financial assistance to SMEs across the country

- *The Business Continuity Voucher* scheme introduced in March 2020 provided a voucher, worth up to €2,500 in third party consultancy costs, for use by companies and sole traders to develop short-term and long-term strategies to respond to the initial COVID-19 pandemic and to plan for eventual recovery and reopening of the economy. The scheme, which was closed to new applications in May 2020, had an uptake of 14,871 applications in this period and 12,077 approvals amounting to almost €26m.
- *The Trading Online Voucher Scheme* offers skills training, mentoring and financial assistance of up to €2,500 to help small and micro-businesses to develop their ecommerce capability. New flexibilities to the Scheme were introduced in April, including reducing the requirement for co-funding from 50% to 10% and allowing businesses to apply for a second voucher of up to €2,500 where they have successfully utilised their first one. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, this scheme has proven to be a very popular measure that can open up new markets to struggling businesses and has seen 17,197 applications and 12,946 approvals this year to a value of €30.7m.
- *The Micro Enterprise Assistance Fund*, introduced in September, targeted those micro enterprises that could not avail of existing government measures. This Grant Fund provided eligible businesses with a voucher of up to €1,000 in respect of vouched expenditure, as a contribution towards the cost of re-opening or keeping a business

operational and re-connecting with employees and customers. This scheme saw 428 applicants and 196 approvals to date and with €185,000 approved.

Core Measures

The LEOs continued to provide advice and assistance to entrepreneurs to pursue their business ideas and look for opportunities to start up new businesses.

In 2020, the LEOs paid out direct financial assistance to 1,216 business projects, to the value of €13.2m. Of these, 336 were priming grants for start-up companies of almost €5m.

In addition to the financial measures on offer, the LEOs responded to the restrictions of lockdown by pivoting their training programmes, workshops and networking meetups to an online platform covering areas such as:

- cash management in a crisis;
- leading your business through COVID-19; and
- advice for employers impacted by the crisis.

The LEOs provided free of charge mentoring assistance to 16,231 participants, who work with an experienced mentor to identify solutions to areas of exposure within their business. With advice and guidance from their mentor, clients develop strategies that are more robust, address issues and maximise potential opportunities including those around COVID-19 challenges.

There were also 77,466 participants in the COVID-19 training programmes.

The LEOs launched the *LEO Client Training Initiative*, a new 'Lunch & Learn' live training webinar series, open and accessible to all LEO client companies and prospective clients across the country, with no registration or sign-up required. This series is intended to complement the online training and webinar programmes already in place for clients. This is an interactive chat with a different expert every week under a 'Lunch & Learn' model and is available on the national LEO Facebook Page and through the LEO YouTube channel.

A positive outcome of LEO investment and assistance is the progression of 133 LEO client companies to the Enterprise Ireland portfolio in 2020. These clients are among the best performing companies in the LEO client portfolio (and because of the transfer to Enterprise Ireland their performance is not reflected in the 2020 outturn above).

IDA IRELAND

IDA Ireland performed strongly in 2020 with client companies creating 20,123 gross new jobs on the ground. IDA Ireland client companies now account for 12.4% of COVID-19 adjusted national employment.

Total Foreign Direct Investment employment in Ireland at the end of 2020 stood at 257,394 the highest ever number employed in the multinational sector.

Of the 246 new investments won in 2020, 128 (52%) were for regional locations.

Every region, except the border region, grew employment in 2020. The mid-East showed the strongest growth rate at 6.2%.

Through its Regional Property Programme, IDA Ireland is also developing appropriate property solutions in designated regional locations to help attract overseas investment.

IDA Ireland Strategy: Driving Recovery and Sustainable Growth 2021-2024

Amid the context of COVID-19 related economic uncertainty and Brexit, IDA Ireland developed its new strategy during 2020. The strategy, entitled 'Driving Recovery and Growth 2021-2024', is built on five interlinked pillars – growth, transformation, regions, sustainability and impact. IDA Ireland aims to win a total of 800 investments and create 50,000 jobs over the period 2021-2024. The ambition of the strategy is to deliver substantial job creation and drive economic activity, targeting a 20% increase in client expenditure to maximise the impact of foreign direct investment. Supporting the Climate Action Plan, the strategy also aims to win 60 sustainability investments over the period to 2024 and will help future growth through 170 Research, Development & Innovation and 130 training investments, enabling a transformative recovery focused on sustainability and inclusiveness. The strategy was launched in January 2021.

Details of IDA Ireland's strategic response to Brexit is included under Goal 6.

INTERTRADEIRELAND

Intertrade Ireland (ITI) is one of the six North/South Implementation Bodies established under the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Since then, ITI has been helping small businesses in Ireland and Northern Ireland explore new cross-border markets, develop new products, processes and services, grow their business and become investor ready. ITI's suite of programmes and services aim to help businesses to build competitive advantage in the crucial areas of trade and innovation, all backed by evidence-based economic and business research. The Department has been steadily increasing its funding to ITI, with increases every year, including an additional €675k provided for 2021. This has seen our funding to ITI increase from approximately €7.5 million in 2017 to over €11 million for 2021.

ITI's activities in 2020 included:

- Providing opportunities and financial resources for North/South technology transfer projects to develop new innovative products and services which can drive exports;
- Scoping new areas for co-operation between firms North and South;
- Providing sales and marketing opportunities to help firms find new cross-border markets;
- Providing access for SMEs to the €12bn all-island public procurement market;
- Continue to help Cross Border prepare and adapt to the new trading relationship following Brexit; and
- Delivering a rapid response to business impacted by COVID-19.

Main outputs delivered by ITI in 2020:

- Jobs impact was 1,597 against a target for the year of 1,500;
- Business Development Value for companies was €79m against a target of €75.6m;
- First time innovator companies were 63 against a target of 67; and
- First time exporters companies amounted to 78 against a target of 67.

BALANCE FOR BETTER BUSINESS

The third report from *Balance for Better Business* was launched by the Tánaiste at a virtual event on 16 December 2020. Balance for Better Business was launched in 2018 by the then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar T.D., to improve gender balance in senior leadership in Ireland.

Co-chaired by Brid Horan and Gary Kennedy, the Balance for Better Business Review Group comprises senior figures in Irish business and the public service. This independent Review Group examines the gender mix within the governance and senior management of companies in Ireland and the issues which arise in connection with the appointment of company directors and senior management.

The Review Group makes recommendations on how more women can be involved in decision-making at the top level of businesses in Ireland including calling for a reform of the current system to ensure more women play a role at board level and in senior leadership teams. It has also set progressive targets to 2023 for the achievement of improved gender balance on the boards and senior management of these companies.

This third report monitors progress against the targets to 1 September 2020 and now includes major multinational companies operating in Ireland as well as companies listed on Euronext Dublin (formerly the Irish Stock Exchange) and other large Irish private companies.

The report shows that encouraging progress is being made in some areas including:

- Overall for listed companies, 22.4% of directors are female, up from 19.1% in 2020 (and up from 14% in 2018);
- ISEQ20 companies, at 27.4% female directors on average, exceeded the interim 2020 target of 25% and on track to achieve 2023 target of 33%. This is a significant improvement from 18% in 2018;
- Two ISEQ20 companies have 50% female boards;
- Females on leadership teams of ISEQ20 companies increased from 17% in 2019 to 22% in 2020; and
- The gap between Ireland and the EU28 average for women on boards has continued to narrow, from 8% in 2018 to 1.2% in 2020 with Ireland now ranked in 13th position, compared to 17th in 2018.

NATIONAL STANDARDS AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

The National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) is the State Agency responsible for standardisation, conformity assessment and measurement. The NSAI saw continued demand for its services in 2020 against a backdrop of a strong performance by the Irish economy. There was a significant interest in standards and across the wider range of services for conformity assessment and measurement services as businesses sought to improve their performance and plan for Brexit.

NSAI's response to COVID-19 had three main points of focus: financial and cash management, continued operational activity and additional operational activity to assist the COVID-19 response. Operationally the emphasis was directed at helping business over the longer term through increased Knowledge Transfer activities which aim to build on the

extensive technical knowledge within NSAI to help companies 're-start' and build post COVID-19 and post Brexit.

NSAI published 1,349 standards during 2020. NSAI rapidly developed several COVID-19 guides in areas such as retail, shopping centre recovery, PPE, and barrier mask specifications. The objective of the guidance for Manufacturers and Retailers was to allow staff safely return to the workplace, and to also put in place measures which protect the public. The documents offer practical advice on how to conduct risk assessments and put in place safety protocols based on current information from NPHEA, the HSE and others. On the medical PPE side, standards were made freely available to allow for the speedy delivery of PPE equipment into the country.

THE NSAI published IS 10101 - National Rules for Electrical Installations (Wiring Rules) in March 2020. The document is the first major revision to the standard in over 10 years and is based on internationally agreed standards for safety of electrical installations including new technologies such as charging of electric vehicles, solar photovoltaic systems and guidance on energy efficiencies.

The total number of standards available in NSAI's catalogue now exceeds 24,000. The number of standards accessed by Irish users exceeded 224,769 (up 30% on 2019) and the number of new registered users to the Agency's 'Your Standards, Your Say' portal increased by 351.

The certification environment was dramatically transformed in 2020 with the requirement to pivot auditing to a virtual working environment, which engaged clients in facilitating remote audits that enabled organisations to continue to use standards for competitive advantage. Business commitment to standards was demonstrated as organisations sought to improve their resilience in the face of COVID-19 impacts while simultaneously preparing for a post Brexit environment. During 2020, NSAI continued to certify organisations to world class business standards:

- Over 1,900 Quality Management Standard certificates issued; and
- Product certification in accordance with the EU requirements for: Automotive (8,118); Construction (866) and Medical Devices (188).

In place of the bi-annual certification ceremony, celebrations were taken online with a month-long social media campaign, #NSAICertified during December 2020. The campaign was a major success with NSAI clients and followers, garnering over 50,000 impressions across media platforms.

Goal 2: LEAD A WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE MOST COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR INVESTMENT, PRODUCTIVITY AND SUSTAINABLE JOBS

INDUSTRY 4.0 STRATEGY

Ireland's *Industry 4.0 Strategy 2020-2025* was published in December 2019. The vision underpinning the strategy is that, by 2025, Ireland will be a competitive, innovation-driven manufacturing hub at the frontier of the fourth industrial revolution, and at the forefront of Industry 4.0 development and adoption.

The Strategy has five goals and 18 strategic actions and the strategic actions are structured around six themes. The Strategy recognises that Ireland is well positioned to pursue opportunities arising from Industry 4.0, and that all firms – large and small, foreign and indigenous - should have the opportunity to engage in Industry 4.0. It also recognises that one of the key policy challenges is to encourage the diffusion and adoption of the new technologies by all firms, particularly those with low absorptive capacity.

In 2020, work continued on the establishment of two key drivers of the Strategy:

- The establishment of '*Future Manufacturing Ireland*' (FMI) – this new coordination mechanism will ensure coherence and optimal delivery of Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) measures across publicly funded research centres of scale. FMI will ensure maximum alignment of activities across the Research and Development centres and avoid unnecessary duplication and fragmentation of effort, providing a coordinated approach to meet the needs of the Irish manufacturing industry.
- The establishment of an Industry 4.0 Stakeholder Forum to oversee the implementation of the Strategy and to provide advice, guidance and inform future policy development. The Forum members will include representatives of the manufacturing value chain, Industry 4.0 experts, Higher Education Institutions, industry bodies, relevant state bodies and the FMI Project Manager.

REMOTE WORK GUIDANCE AND STRATEGY

- Following the findings of the December 2019 *Remote Work in Ireland* report, the Department focussed on providing guidance to employers and employees on the topic of Remote Work. An Interdepartmental Group (IDG) on Remote Work was formed to deliver guidance on Remote Work.
- In July 2020, the Department launched the '*Remote Work Guidance*' webpage. This webpage brought together the information, guidance and legislation relevant to remote working from across Government Departments and Agencies. In the same month, a public consultation was launched, following which, the webpage was updated to address the feedback received and to include an employer checklist. The checklist provides employers a quick way to navigate the adoption of remote working arrangements in an easy-to-use format for businesses.

- In September, the Department commenced the development of a National Remote Work Strategy, steered by the IDG on Remote Work. The Strategy was published in early January 2021 and its vision is to make remote working a permanent feature of the Irish workplace in a way that maximises the economic, social and environmental benefits. It includes 15 actions to be taken to progress remote work in Ireland.

DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES INNOVATION FUND

During 2020, Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF) projects continued to deliver on ambitions set out in Future Jobs Ireland 2019. There are 74 SMEs engaging in RD&I through the Fund, collaborating with multinational companies and research institutions on large-scale industrial research projects. These projects are at the forefront of technological change in areas such as gene therapies, artificial intelligence and carbon reduction. This work will help not only to increase productivity across these companies but also to attract new talent to these sectors in Ireland. See more about DTIF under Goal 3.

DELIVERING SKILLS FOR A GROWING ECONOMY

The Department provides the secretariat for the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) and initiated and published the following reports in 2019 and 2020.

Building Future Skills: The Demand for Skills in Ireland's Built Environment Sector to 2030

The study focussed on the Future Skills Needs across Ireland's Built Environment Sector i.e. activities related to Construction, Engineering, Architecture and Utilities. Framed by national strategies such as *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*, *Project Ireland 2040*, and the built environment elements of the *Climate Action Plan*, the study was completed in Q2 and approved by the National Skills Council prior to its publication at the end of September 2020.

Management capacity and practices of Irish SME managers

A study to examine management capacity and practice in Ireland was carried out by TU Dublin for the EGFSN and with the assistance of the European Commission, between October 2019 and June 2020. The project report was published in October 2020. An implementation group was established following the publication of the report and will convene for an initial period of two years with a view to extending its term to five years. The implementation group will include members from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, ISME, SFA, Chambers Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Solas and the Higher Education Authority.

Together for Design - a new design skills study

In 2019 the EGFSN commenced a new design skills study, *Together for Design*. The objective of this report was to build on the foundations provided by the EGFSN's 2017 *Winning by Design* report to understand the enterprise demand for digital, product and strategic design skills and to measure the provision of educational courses addressing these skillsets. The report identifies recommendations to help drive forward skills supply in this area. *Together for Design* was published Q2 of 2020. The report's recommendations are currently being progressed by an implementation group.

Skills to Enable the Low Carbon Economy to 2030

In late 2020, the EGFSN also initiated a study on *Skills to Enable the Low Carbon Economy to 2030*. This study will seek to determine the demand for, and nature of, the skills required to deliver on key elements of Ireland's Climate Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown over the years to 2030. The study, which will involve comprehensive engagement with enterprises across the low carbon economy and will be guided by a steering group composed of the key public and private sector stakeholders, is scheduled to be completed in May 2021. It will be published following its approval by both the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and National Skills Council.

LOW PAY COMMISSION

Following the transfer of functions from the Department of Social Protection, the Department assumed responsibility for the Low Pay Commission which has the principal function of examining and making recommendations to the Tánaiste on the appropriate level of the national minimum wage and related matters. As part of this agenda the Department is representing Ireland in the negotiations on the draft EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages, which is expected to be finalised in 2021. The Low Pay Commission's current work programme includes two major pieces of research on the transition to a Living Wage and the design of a Universal Basic Income pilot.

COMPETITIVENESS AND PRODUCTIVITY

Research, analysis and the secretariat role for the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is undertaken by the Department. In accordance with the European Council recommendation on the establishment of National Productivity Boards by euro area countries, in March 2018, the Government mandated the National Competitiveness Council as the body responsible for analysing developments and policies in the field of productivity and competitiveness in Ireland. This underpins the decision to rename the Council as the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council in November 2020.

The Council 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.

The Department 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 12th according to the Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Ranking 2020 report.

The NCPC published the following reports during 2020:

- Ireland's Competitiveness Scorecard 2020
- Ireland's Competitiveness Challenge 2020
- Competitiveness Bulletins 2020

ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

During 2020 the Department engaged across Government on key issues and priorities for business users across infrastructure areas drawing on analysis carried out focussing on the competitiveness of Ireland's business environment.

The Department engaged with Irish Water and the Commission for Regulation of Utilities on the delivery of water services for non-domestic users, worked with the relevant policy makers in the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications regarding the competitiveness implications of energy infrastructure on policy areas such as the development of the Renewable Energy Support Scheme, a micro-generation scheme and the development of a policy framework to encourage the uptake of Corporate Power Purchase Agreements by large energy users.

The Department is represented by the Secretary General on the Project Ireland 2040 Delivery Board. The Department works 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, as part of achieving our national population, 'place-making' and employment ambitions.

In parallel, the Department engaged on an ongoing basis across the public and private sectors to advocate for policy measures to improve the availability and quality of economic infrastructure to assist enterprise development and maintain the competitiveness of our business environment.

EVALUATION ACTIVITY

The Department carried out a number of evaluations in 2020 including a review of the Department's capital expenditure over the period 2006 to 2018. This exercise examined the Department's expenditure across a number of areas including theme, agency, policy instrument and beneficiary. The paper provided some initial insights in the area of policy alignment which are being further explored. An early evaluation of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund was also carried out through the Spending Review process. The paper found that the programme is working towards its stated objectives and made a number of recommendations around continued monitoring. A review of Enterprise Ireland's Research, Development and Innovation programme was carried out and will be published in 2021.

TAXATION

The Department had ongoing engagement across Government with regard to the wage subsidy schemes created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and delivered via the Revenue Commissioners. The Department's engagement helped to shape the schemes to ensure that they met the needs of enterprise and assisted employment insofar as possible.

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 2021 continued to assist enterprise and that the views and needs of enterprise were taken into consideration.

CLIMATE ACTION

Climate Action is a core element of the Department's enterprise and innovation policies and in our Agencies' programmes and activities. The Department recognises that enterprises have important roles to play to develop and adopt innovative technologies, products and services that increase efficiencies, reduce waste and deliver sustainable development as countries across the world transition to low carbon economies.

Pillar 5 of Future Jobs Ireland 2019 recognises the importance of climate action, complements the all-of-Government Climate Action Plan and outlines three ambitions and actions in transitioning to a low carbon economy:

1. to become a leader in adopting and developing standards in the low carbon economy;
2. to realise the opportunities for economic activity and job creation; and
3. to leverage Ireland's natural resources, enterprise strengths and innovative capacity to be a global leader in the circular and bio-economy.

Four of the projects funded under Calls 1 and 2 of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund address the theme of Energy, Climate Action & Sustainability. These projects include a cooperative energy trading system; an advanced environmental decision support system to address issues such as coastal pollution and flooding; a zero-emission, refrigerant-free heat pump and a sustainable bio-renewable energy from wastewater anaerobic digester for the food and drink sector. Further details on the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund are under Goal 3.

The Department actively engaged with the Government's *Climate Action Plan 2019*, its governance processes and has monitored progress and provided input into the development of the economy-wide Long-Term Strategy outlining Ireland's net-zero 2050 target. It committed to further Departmental and cross agency climate actions for the interim period to the development of *Climate Action Plan 2021* and work commenced on the contributions from the Department to *Climate Action Plan 2021*.

The Department participated in discussions with the European Commission on the enterprise aspects of the Commission's reference scenario which will form the basis of Ireland's national effort-sharing target following the increase in EU ambition to reduce greenhouse gases by 55% by 2030.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Climate

Research was undertaken into technologies that could be adopted in specific sub-sectors of the manufacturing sector to reduce emissions and in the context of the development of sectoral targets, analysis was conducted to quantify CO₂ abatement if investment in these technologies occurred over the period to 2030. It progressed the Department's actions from the *Climate Action Plan 2019* regarding those applying to the food/drinks and cement sectors and inputted to the quarterly published progress reports on the Climate Action Plan on actions including those undertaken by IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Science Foundation Ireland and NSAI. Throughout the year the Department provided analysis and

policy input into matters relating to climate action policy and ensured consideration of competitiveness impacts in policy options.

Focus on Sectors 2020

Focus on Sectors 2020 was published in August and is a series of sectoral reports that present concise overviews of 16 key sectors of the economy, encompassing both exporting and locally trading activities. While a number of the sectors fall within the remit of this Department and its Agencies, broader sectoral development responsibility spans a range of government departments. The reports draw on existing Departmental research and a review of recent national and international analysis undertaken in response to the pandemic. They include inputs from across several government departments, enterprise Agencies and industry representative organisations and outline some initial indications of the impact of COVID-19 on these sectors.

The sectors covered in the reports are: Aerospace & Aviation; Agri-Food & Beverages; Audiovisual; Biopharmachem; Construction; Energy, Sustainability & Natural Resources; Engineered Products & Sub-Supply; Global Business Services & Business Process Outsourcing; International Education Services; International Financial Services & Fintech; Marine & Maritime; Medical Technologies; Retail; Technology; Tourism & Hospitality; and Transport & Logistics.

EU DIGITAL ECONOMY POLICY

In line with the Department's goal of developing a competitive environment to boost investment, improve productivity and create and sustain jobs, work on delivering the digital transformation agenda continued throughout 2020. The Department continued to lead a whole-of-Government activity and cross Government coordination of the Digital Single Market (DSM) agenda at national and EU levels.

Ireland improved its performance in the EU Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) Report for 2020 compared with 2019, now ranked in 6th place. Over the last five years, Ireland has made continuous improvements in these rankings and is now the fastest growing Member State in the EU.

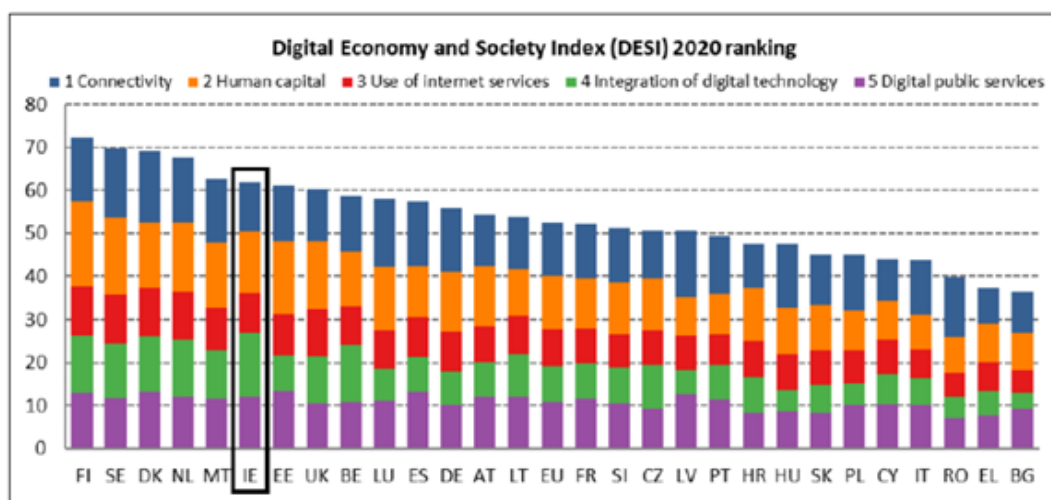
One of the key successes last year was the delivery of the Platform to Business Regulation by the Department which was signed into law in July 2020 via S.I. No. 256/2020 - European Union (Promoting Fairness and Transparency for Business Users of Online Intermediation Services) Regulations 2020.

This aims at creating a fair, transparent and predictable business environment for businesses when using online platforms to trade. The Regulation had direct effect in EU Member States from 12 July 2020 and was signed into law by the Tánaiste by way of S.I. No. 256/2020 - European Union (Promoting Fairness and Transparency for Business Users of Online Intermediation Services) Regulations 2020. The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission has been designated as the Irish enforcement body for the Regulations and will investigate and tackle any structural non-compliance with the provisions of the Regulations.

The Department prepared a national submission to the EU's public consultation on the Digital Services Act package, then one combined package, in September 2020, which was based on an extensive cross-Government collaboration of relevant departments and a wider national stakeholder consultation.

In June 2020 the Department prepared a comprehensive national submission to the EU's Public Consultation on the EU White Paper on Artificial Intelligence that was based on extensive cross-Government consultation.

Completing the Digital Single Market is a priority for Ireland and the Department continues to work with the European Commission, European Parliament and other Member States in delivering outcomes which are pro-trade, pro-enterprise and pro-innovation. Proposals have been formulated for DSM 2.0 and the key areas that are to be focused on as part of the future development of the digital economy are: Platforms and the Digital Services Act; Artificial Intelligence; and Better use of data.



Ireland now ranked 6th in the DESI Rankings (Source: European Commission DESI Report 2020)

NATIONAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY

Work commenced on the development of the national Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy which will be launched in mid 2021. The Strategy will outline a vision for Ireland to be an international leader in using AI to the benefit of our population, through a people-centred and ethical approach to AI development, adoption and use.

NATIONAL PLAN ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Stakeholder Forum was established in 2014 to drive the implementation of the first National Plan and was renewed for the second national plan.

The CSR Stakeholder Forum is a business led voluntary Body with representatives from business, civil society and Government. The primary goal of the Forum is to raise awareness of CSR and grow CSR activity within business in Ireland, working in partnership with business, civil society and Government to deliver on the actions of the National Plan, Towards Responsible Business, Ireland's second National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility 2017-2020.

Some of the key achievements by the CSR Stakeholder Forum included;

- Development of [CSRhub - CSR Hub](#) as a dedicated national CSR resource, assisted by an active social media present to highlight good CSR practice;
- establishment of a flagship CSR Annual CEO/Leaders' Breakfast event;
- promoting CSR peer learning amongst businesses through SME outreach events;
- establishment of a dedicated 'Public Sector CSR Network' – a peer learning network for public sector organisations to develop their CSR strategies;
- establishment of the CSR virtual online network – for CSR practitioners and organisations interested in developing their CSR strategies;
- an increase in the number of CSR Case Studies profiled on the CSRhub.ie website. Case studies are an integral element of the work of the Forum as they provide a strong educational resource for businesses and organisations of all sizes. Case studies are available to download from [CSRhub - CSR Hub](#) and are accessible to all;
- growing a panel of active CSR ambassadors within the business community; and
- highlighting opportunities for the private and public sector to partner on impactful initiatives that align with public policy.

The Department continued to liaise with the CSR Stakeholder Forum throughout 2020 and had started the consultation process on a new iteration of the CSR National Plan. However, due to the prioritisation for COVID-19 and Brexit the initiative was paused in 2020.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications' '*Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2018-2020*' provides for a whole-of-government approach to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) ⁶.

The Department has lead role and stakeholder responsibility for the implementation of a number of targets under the plan under Goal 8 (Good jobs and economic growth), Goal 9 (Innovation and infrastructure) alongside the new Department for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and Goal 12 (Sustainable consumption and production).

The Department continued to progress work on targets under the SDGs in 2020 through implementation of its policies including Future Jobs 2019 and Enterprise 2025 Renewed, which sets an ambition for Ireland to be the best place to succeed in business delivering

⁶ In 2015, 193 United Nations Member States, including Ireland, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 goals cover the social, economic and environmental requirements for a sustainable future.

sustainable employment and higher standards of living for all. A particular action on this front in 2020 was the consultation on remote working which informed the National Remote Working Strategy.

The Department also continued to promote the environmentally sound management of chemicals through its chairing of an interdepartmental and interagency steering group on Chemicals to coordinate national policy responses to chemicals-related issues.

Goal 3: LEAD A WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO POSITION IRELAND AS A GLOBAL INNOVATION LEADER, DRIVING AN INTERNATIONALLY COMPETITIVE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM, CREATING AN INNOVATIVE ENTERPRISE BASE AND BUILDING A BETTER SOCIETY

INNOVATION 2020

Innovation 2020, Ireland's national strategy for research and development, science and technology, sets a vision for Ireland to become a Global Innovation Leader.

In the 2020 European Innovation Scoreboard, Ireland is now at 9th place in the EU and 15th place in the 2020 Global Innovation Index. Key actions in 2020 included:

- Commencement of the consultation process for the development of the next national research and innovation strategy;
- Appointment of a National Open Research coordinator, co-funded by this Department and the Department of Education;
- Appointment of a researcher under the Science Foundation Ireland Public Service Research Fellowship to the Department to develop a standardised research classification system;
- Continued success in Horizon 2020 - Irish researchers and innovators continue to perform well with €1.09bn in competitive funding won by the end of December 2020;
- In June 2020, eight Irish start-ups and SMEs were awarded €31m in funding under the Horizon 2020 Accelerator Programme;
- Ireland's EuroHPC National Competence Centre was launched. Hosted by the Irish Centre for High-End Computing, it will afford training and infrastructure access in high-performance computing to Irish researchers and SMEs;
- The acquisition of a Quantum Learning Machine in 2020 will enable ICHEC to pursue R&I activities in the emerging field of Quantum Computing;
- An allocation of €9m was made through the Capital Equipment Programme – providing SMEs/industry with access to critical, leading-edge equipment and infrastructure through Technology Centres and Technology Gateways; and
- The first tranche of Innovation Roadmaps was launched to develop an Innovation Roadmap for each of their clients that is consistent with their capabilities and ambition.

DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES INNOVATION FUND

The Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, (DTIF), is a €500m enterprise-focused, challenge-based, fund that encourages collaboration between and among SMEs, multinational companies and Irish research institutions. The aim of the fund is to encourage the enterprise sector to engage and invest in developing, deploying and commercialising industrial research. Announced in 2018 as one of four National Development Plan funds under Project Ireland 2040, the Department manages it in consultation with other

Government Departments and Agencies. Enterprise Ireland administers the DTIF on behalf of the Department.

The Fund is delivering on Pillar 1 of the Government's Future Jobs Ireland framework – *Embracing Innovation and Technological Change* – by funding the development and deployment of disruptive innovative technologies on a commercial basis. It also aligns with the ambition of making Ireland a Global Innovation Leader by increasing public and private investment in RD&I due to its requirement for 50% co-funding from firms applying for DTIF funds.

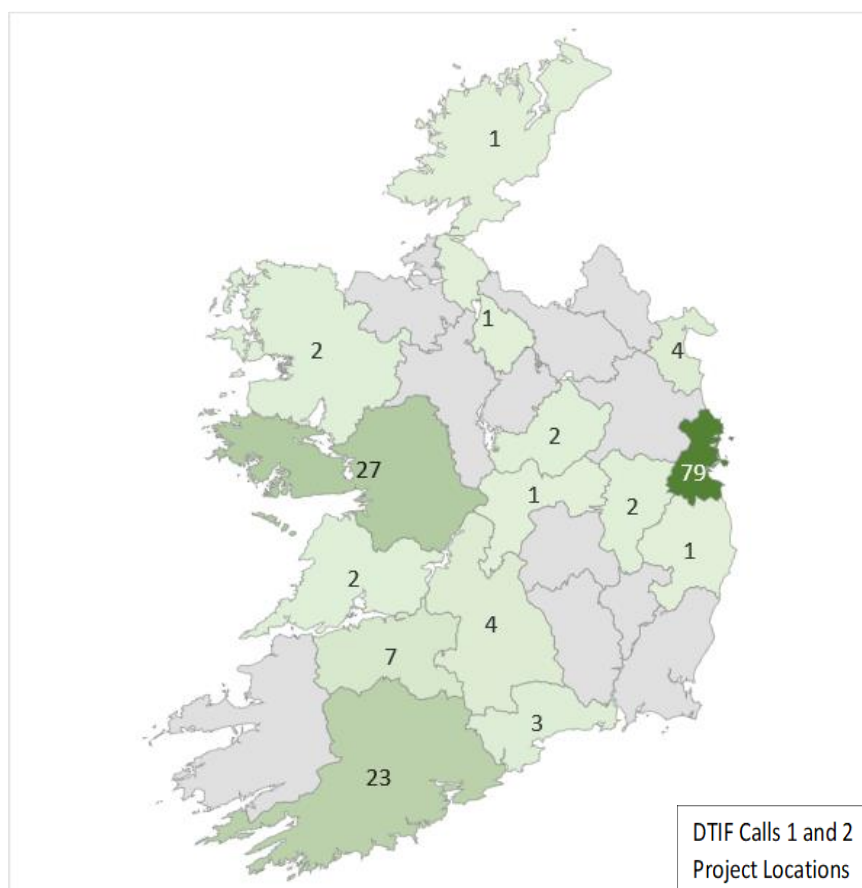
The third Call of the Fund was announced in September 2020 and 62 applications were received by the closing date of 17 December 2020. These are checked for eligibility by Enterprise Ireland and then undergo evaluation by panels of international experts and successful projects were announced in Q1 2021.

In 2020 the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service conducted a Spending Review of the Fund, with the key findings summarised below:

- There is a strong rationale for a publicly funded programme making significant investments in disruptive technologies. The funding provided through DTIF reduces risk for participating firms thereby helping to bring these technologies forward. If successful, the innovations emerging from DTIF offer Irish companies a route to compete in (and potentially disrupt) global markets. This would increase employment in those sectors and drive Irish exports and output.
- DTIF is a distinct new programme among other RD&I measures to enterprise. A combination of the scale of funding available for projects, the focus on collaboration and commercialisation, in combination with its funding of disruptive innovation sets the fund apart from other RD&I measures available in Ireland.
- The DTIF appears to be aligned well with a number of international initiatives, including in Germany and the EU, which recognise the importance of SME partnerships for innovation.
- The programme is working towards achieving its stated objectives. It is funding significant innovations which could potentially capture global markets.
- The innovations which DTIF is funding are high-risk, high-return - public funding is intended to help ensure that these technologies are brought forward.
- By lowering the risk profile of the innovations, the fund is also encouraging private co-investment along with DTIF funding.
- In line with its objectives, it has maintained a focus on collaboration and building on previous publicly funded research.
- It has secured strong involvement from SMEs within project consortia.

- The scale of projects funded and the focus on collaboration has ensured that the DTIF is sufficiently different from other RD&I measures, thereby ensuring additionality.

The 43 successful projects under Calls 1 and 2 comprise of 159 partners from the enterprise and research sectors based at locations all around the country as illustrated in this map.



Locations of the 159 project partners that were allocated funding under Calls 1 and 2 of the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund

SCIENCE FOUNDATION IRELAND

During 2020 Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) continued to play a key role in assisting the government's vision for Ireland to become a Global Innovation Leader, as outlined in Ireland's strategy for research and development, science and technology, Innovation 2020, as well as implementing a number of actions in the Future Jobs and other national strategies. With effect from 1 January 2021, SFI transferred to the remit of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Key areas of progress in 2020 included:

- Research and Innovation, in health, academia and industry, continues to have a significant role to play in the national and global response to COVID-19.
- A key element of the SFI's plan was the COVID-19 Rapid Response Research and Innovation Funding programme.
- SFI assisted researchers across the system undertook a vast array of actions to assist and deal with the challenges that were faced as the country responded to the pandemic. These included key research expertise, donations of equipment, essential supplies, staff for testing, modelling, 3D printing, etc. SFI also assisted the HSE by providing access to expertise from HEIs to inform the development of the HSE national COVID-19 app.
- SFI has continued to deliver significant investments including: assisting Centres for Research Training and Centres for Doctoral Training to deliver the skills needed for the future of the economy; assistance to the network of world leading SFI Research Centres, new awards to assist excellent independent researchers to conduct discovery research; the introduction of dynamic funding models designed to address national and global challenges; and strategic partnerships to assist research projects of scale in strategically important areas.
- SFI jointly hosted the National European Research Council Support and Information Forum with Enterprise Ireland and the Irish Research Council.

Programmes and Awards Highlights

A number of significant SFI Strategic Partnerships were supported:

- A €4.8m investment into a research partnership that investigates the immunology of COVID-19 was assisted.
- SFI and Microsoft co-funded a €5m climate change project called Terrain-AI, led by researchers at Maynooth University.
- An award was granted to the National Institute for Cellular Biotechnology (NICB) at DCU, to assist ACORN, led by Prof. John Crown and Dr Denis Collins which aims to advance cancer research skills in DCU and bring new findings to clinical trials that will benefit cancer patients in Ireland and globally.
- The first awards were approved under the new SFI Frontiers for the Future programme, which assists important investment in high-risk, high reward research, assisting individual discovery research from early-career researchers through to well established leaders. An important gender initiative is also implemented as part of the programme.
- As part of an overall Government plan to cultivate challenge-based funding in Ireland, SFI continued the roll out of new Challenges through the SFI Future Innovator Prize, with a focus on key issues such as AI for Societal Good, Zero Emissions, Plastics and Food.
- Twelve awards were approved under the SFI Public Service Fellowship. These support researchers working across Government departments, in the Houses of Oireachtas

Library & Research Services, Food Safety Authority of Ireland, etc. helping to inform policy and improve services.

- Professor Jens Walter was recruited at UCC, to lead a €3.7m research programme at APC Microbiome Ireland SFI Research Centre, through the SFI Research Professor Programme and will investigate the impact of a modern lifestyle on the gut microbiome and its relationship to increased chronic diseases.
- SFI continued to assist the network of 16 SFI Research Centres, which have been at the core of transformational change in how we help research across the HEIs – with a drive to undertake excellent research with economic and societal impact. The 16 SFI Research Centres have been part of Ireland’s success at drawing down EU Horizon 2020 funding.

Careers, Education Support, Informal Learning

- Science Week 2020 ran from 8-15 November 2020 and celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2020, moving to a virtual festival, with the theme *Choosing our Future*, focusing on how science can improve our lives for today and in the future. 13 Science Week Festivals, assisted under the SFI Discover Programme also took place virtually across the country in Cork, Cavan / Monaghan, Sligo, Galway, Limerick, Tipperary, Mayo, Wexford, Kilkenny, Kerry, south east and the midlands.
- 331 primary schools nationwide received an SFI Discover Primary Science and Maths Award. The programme aims to increase interest in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) among primary school students and teachers. The Awards recognise the achievements of children and teachers in the application of STEM in their curriculum.

ENTERPRISE IRELAND INNOVATION INVESTMENT AND ACTIVITY

Enterprise Ireland provides RD&I measures for companies to develop new technologies and processes that will lead to job creation and increased exports. By the end of 2020 Ireland had drawn down more than €1bn in funding under the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme (2014-2020). In June eight Irish start-ups and SMEs were awarded €31m in funding under the Horizon 2020 Accelerator Programme.

Strengthening existing in-company Research, Development and Innovation capacity

In 2020, Enterprise Ireland approved 194 RD&I approvals over €50,000 to client companies. Enterprise Ireland rolled out a suite of webinars aimed at increasing awareness of RD&I funding and collaborative measures. In addition, they launched the first tranche of Innovation Roadmaps in line with their Strategy to develop an Innovation Roadmap for each of their clients that is consistent with their capabilities and ambition.

COVID-19 Products Scheme

The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in an urgent need across the EU and globally for medical and public health research and development, products and solutions. The COVID-19 Products Scheme has been developed following the amendment of an EU Temporary State-Aid Framework, to provide grant aid to Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta clients. IDA Ireland operates a similar scheme for their clients.

This scheme is composed of three measures:

- Measure 1: COVID-19 relevant research and development activities by companies coupled with the creation of useful Intellectual Property.
- Measure 2: The construction and upgrade of testing and upscaling infrastructures that are utilised to develop COVID-19 relevant products.
- Measure 3: Increased production of products needed to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. These outputs should be achieved as quickly as possible.

Driving increased collaboration between Industry and Academia

During 2020, 936 collaborative projects between companies and Irish HEIs were assisted by Enterprise Ireland. This figure includes 477 small €5k Innovation Vouchers redeemed, 405 industry funded Technology Gateway Industry projects completed at Institutes of Technology across Ireland and 54 Innovation Partnerships approved. These projects provide companies with new commercial opportunities, cost savings or increases in their innovative capability.

Technology Centre Programme

During 2020, 1,228 companies engaged with the network of Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Technology Centres. While this more than double the number engaged in 2019, this includes companies newly engaged with the centres through their year-long series of webinars.

Independent economic analysis has found that Enterprise Ireland /IDA Ireland Technology Centres will achieve between a 6 to 20-fold return on the State's investment. In addition, based on an analysis for Enterprise Ireland's Annual Business Review Data, clients in Technology Centres, compared to RD&I performing clients that are not in Technology Centres, have higher Turnover, Export Sales, Domestic Sales, Full time Employees and RD&I Spend.

To scale up the operations of Enterprise Ireland/IDA Ireland Technology Centres, in 2020 additional five year investments were announced for the Microelectronic Circuits Centre Ireland (€10m) and the Dairy Processing Technology Centre (€14m).

Technology Gateway Programme

The 2018-2022 Technology Gateway Programme funds 15 Gateways operating across the 11 Institutes of Technology. The Gateway network also comprises three Sectoral Clusters of Gateways namely: IoT Cluster (Internet of Things), EMD Ireland Cluster (Engineering, Materials and Design) and Irish Food Tech Cluster.

In 2020, €9m was spent on expanding the *Capital Equipment Programme* – providing SMEs/industry with access to critical, leading-edge equipment and infrastructure through Technology Centres and Technology Gateways, building on the €6m spent in 2019. Access to the new equipment will help companies in Ireland to innovate and adapt and remain competitive on a national and global level.

High Potential Start-ups

12 new High Potential Start-ups were created from research outputs from the Higher Education System in 2020.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER IRELAND

Knowledge Transfer Ireland (KTI) helps business to benefit from access to Irish expertise and technology, by making it simple to connect and engage with this research base in Ireland.

In 2020, KTI began its series of '*Unlocking Knowledge Transfer*' webinars every month with the aim of raising knowledge transfer awareness while taking an in-depth look at how it can benefit enterprise. The webinars covered issues such as: Harnessing the Value of Your IP; Accessing World Class RD&I through Ireland's Technology Gateways; and Leveraging Artificial Intelligence Expertise. All of KTI's past webinars are available through their website www.knowledgetransferireland.com.

COVID-19 Non Exclusive Royalty-Free Licence

In 2020 KTI announced the creation of a dedicated COVID-19 Non-Exclusive Royalty-Free (NERF) Licence. KTI worked with the Technology Transfer Offices in the Irish higher education sector nationwide to produce a simple two page agreement that is aimed at speeding up the dissemination of critical COVID-19 related intellectual property from Irish universities and institutes of technology to companies.

The NERF Licence is the result of a desire by HEIs nationwide to assist the search for, and the development of, new technologies to help bring the COVID-19 pandemic to an end. Under normal circumstances, IP is licenced through a process of negotiation between both parties under which royalties and exclusivity of use are clearly detailed and agreed. The COVID-19 NERF provides cutting edge IP free of charge to organisations engaged in critical research and development activities for the sole purposes of diagnosing, preventing, containing, treating and/or minimising the impact of the virus.

The COVID-19 NERF Licence will remain in place until such time as the World Health Organisation declares the current COVID-19 pandemic to have ended.

In response to COVID-19, in 2020 the *KTI Impact Awards* included an award for the '*COVID-19 Response Award*' recognising innovative activities in the Higher Education Institutions that rose to the various challenges presented by the pandemic and that required the skills of the Technology Transfer Office to assist delivery.

HEALTH INNOVATION HUB IRELAND

Health Innovation Hub Ireland (HIHI) is a joint initiative of this Department and the Department of Health. The aim of the initiative 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 February 2020, HIHI's call for COVID-19 related products generated 197 submissions over 11 weeks, many of which proved to be valuable solutions which were fed into the HSE or directly to healthcare facilities and nursing homes.

In July the results of HIHI's annual national call for innovations addressing any healthcare need and a focussed call on Supporting the Self-Management of Chronic Disease (cardiovascular, respiratory and diabetes) were announced. Of the 48 applicants, 23 were selected to pitch their product and 15 were selected for pilot and validation studies.

EU FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME FOR RESEARCH & INNOVATION - HORIZON 2020

Ireland continued its excellent performance in Horizon 2020, the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Ireland based researchers and innovators have won €1.09bn in competitive, EU funding from the programme up to the end of 2020. Secondary or higher education accounted for €614.4m of the total. Private for profit companies (excluding education) won €383.4m with €266.4m of this going to SMEs. Enterprise Ireland leads the Irish Horizon 2020 support network.

Negotiations on the 9th Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon Europe regulation and budget concluded in December 2020. The final agreed budget for Horizon Europe is €95.5bn with a €5bn boost from Next Generation EU. The first calls for Horizon Europe are expected to launch in April 2021.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

The Department continued to strengthen Ireland's participation in international research collaborations and 2020 saw the first Irish student participating in the new Irish Research Council European Southern Observatory (ESO) Studentship Programme. ESO is the foremost intergovernmental astronomy organisation in Europe and the world's most productive astronomical observatory.

In 2020, the Irish Centre for High-End Computing launched its Academic Flagship and SME Accelerator programmes, following its designation as Ireland's national EuroHPC Competence Centre.

Quantum Computing is a rapidly-emerging area of technological development that is of significant interest to the Department. The acquisition of a Quantum Learning Platform in 2020, hosted by the Irish Centre for High-End Computing, will facilitate application development, research and innovation, training and education in the field of Quantum Computing, contributing to Ireland's smart economy.

Ireland will also participate in the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) Association, which was formally established late in 2020. The goal of EOSC is to provide a trusted virtual environment for researchers to store, manage, analyse and re-use data for research, innovation and educational purposes. This will help give the EU a global lead in research data management. It will also facilitate open science and innovation by offering every European researcher the possibility to access and reuse all publicly funded research data in Europe across disciplines and borders.

US-IRELAND R&D PARTNERSHIP

The US-Ireland R&D Partnership is a tri-jurisdictional alliance which was officially launched in 2006. Its aim is to promote collaborative innovative research projects which create value above and beyond individual efforts. The Partnership steering group met on 10 March 2020 in the US State Department in Washington DC and via video link from the InterTradeIreland offices in Newry.

Since the March 2020 annual meeting, seven additional projects have been approved, one in Nanotechnology, three in Centre to Centre, two in Health and one under the Energy and sustainability priority area. A total of 65 projects are approved to date, representing \$126m/£89m/€106m. The number of projects funded under each priority area are: 16 Nanotechnology, 14 Health, 11 Energy & Sustainability, nine Sensors, seven Centre to Centre, five Agriculture, and three Telecommunications. The portfolio continues to perform well with National Institutes of Health applications achieving a success rate of 17.1%, National Institute of Food and Agriculture applications 18.5% and National Science Foundation applications showing a particularly healthy success rate of 32.2%.

At the March meeting, it was commented that the US-Ireland R&D partnership model is now used as a model for collaborations with other countries. The updated terms of reference were approved by all departments and an amendment to the Memorandum of Understanding to include the new cybersecurity priority area had been signed by partners in December 2019. The Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland is currently undertaking a review which will consider, among other matters, how the impact of research and the wider US-Ireland partnership is best measured. This will be a key consideration for the partnership – how best to measure both quantitative and qualitative impacts that will add value to the partnership in terms of promotion and wider public engagement. USDA are leading a tripartite review of the agriculture pilot which should be completed in 2021.

Work has commenced on a second US-Ireland R&D Partnership video case study. In relation to the newest priority area, Cybersecurity, the first transatlantic collaborative webinar took place on 2 December 2020. This was the first webinar of the series of meetings to promote the new Cybersecurity theme and to facilitate formation of new collaborations.

EU SPACE POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

In December 2020, the European Council and the European Parliament reached agreement on the regulation establishing the EU space programme for 2021-2027, paving the way for the €13.2bn space programme to start work in 2021.

European Space Agency (ESA) contracts were secured by 20 companies up to end Q3 2020. Six of these companies were first-time ESA contractors demonstrating the progression of Irish industry in this developing sector. The total value of industry contracts placed by ESA in Ireland up to end Q3 2020 was €5.15m. A further €1.25m in contracts were secured by the Irish research community, bringing the total value of ESA contracts placed in Ireland in 2020 up to Q3 to €6.4m. Additionally, five new start-ups were approved for the Irish ESA Business Incubation Centres (BICs) in 2020. The ESA BIC works with entrepreneurs to turn space-connected business ideas into commercial start-ups companies. In 2020, Ireland invested €19.8m in its membership of ESA.

TYNDALL NATIONAL INSTITUTE

Tyndall National Institute (Tyndall) is Ireland's largest dedicated research centre, specialising in Information and Communications Technology hardware and systems. Tyndall received a total of €9m from the Department in 2020.

In January 2020, Tyndall launched their new strategic plan *Tyndall 2025* laying out their ambition to significantly scale the Institute, doubling both the physical space as well as their

research capacity. *Tyndall 2025* seeks to ensure that Tyndall will stay at the forefront of new technologies and build on its successful industry engagement model while enabling it to respond to evolving ICT-related technology opportunities in a fast changing and competitive environment. Responsibility for Tyndall moved to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science along with other academic led research with effect from 1 January 2021.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

The EU Commission launched its Intellectual Property (IP) Action Plan Roadmap in 2020. This was developed around five pillars;

1. Update the IP protection system which includes the evaluation of the industrial designs legislation and to make IP protection more effective in the supplementary protection certificate system;
2. Promote strategic use of IP by businesses, and in particular to make the IP system more effective for SMES;
3. Facilitate IP valorisation and licensing;
4. Reduce IP infringement through enhancing the effectiveness of initiatives to combat counterfeiting and piracy; and
5. Improve global fair play.

COPYRIGHT

Post Enactment Report for the Copyright and Other Intellectual Property Law Provisions Act, 2019 (No. 19 of 2019)

The Copyright and Other Intellectual Property Law Provisions Act, 2019 ('the 2019 Act') was signed into law by the President on 26 June 2019. In accordance with Dáil Standing Order 164A (adopted in 2016), twelve months following the enactment of a Bill, the Government or Minister of State responsible for the implementation of an Act is required to produce a report on the functioning of the Act and submit the report to the Parliamentary Library of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

A post-enactment report for the 2019 Act was prepared by the Department and laid in the Parliamentary Library of the Houses of the Oireachtas on 18 June 2020.

Certification of Copyright Licensing Scheme for the use of copyright protected material by educational establishments

In July 2020, the Tánaiste certified four new copyright licensing schemes for the Primary, Post-primary, Higher Education and Further Education sectors that are applicable for the academic year 2020/21 onwards. The new schemes, operated by the Irish Copyright Licensing Agency, allow schools and other educational establishments to make use of copyright protected works (including print and digital works) for educational purposes.

Amendments to the District Court Rules for Intellectual Property to facilitate access of intellectual property claims to those courts

The 2019 Act contained amendments to the legislation governing the Circuit Court and District Court that provide for easier and lower-cost access to the courts system for Intellectual Property infringement claims. In 2020, as a direct result of these provisions, the Courts Service/Department of Justice, with the assistance of this Department, oversaw the signing into law of the District Court (Intellectual Property) Rules 2020 (S.I. No. 284 of 2020) which facilitate the expansion of intellectual property infringement claims to that court. This now reduces the cost of pursuing intellectual property infringement claims in instances where monetary awards sought are within the jurisdiction of the District Court.

Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC

The EU Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market was negotiated and agreed under the Digital Single Market strategy between September 2016 and May 2019. The intention of the Directive is to craft a modern copyright legislation to respond to the needs of all European citizens in an increasingly digitalised society. This Directive allow for wider access to and use of copyright protected works benefitting the creative sectors, press publishers, researchers, educators, cultural heritage institutions, and citizens. It provides a framework for the creation of modern European copyright legislation to take account of technological developments in the digital age while continuing to ensure that creators are remunerated for their creative efforts.

Following the publication of the Directive, the Department carried out a series of public consultations seeking the views of all interested stakeholders on the transposition of the Directive into Irish law. Work on the transposition continued throughout 2020 with the Department carrying out a detailed analysis of the large number of submissions received to the consultation process. The Department intends to transpose the Directive by the deadline of 7 June 2021.

SECONDARY LEGISLATION IMPLEMENTED IN THE AREA OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

1. S.I. No. 275 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Primary Schools) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020. Published in 'Iris Oifigiúil' of 4 August 2020.
2. S.I. No. 276 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Post-Primary Schools) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020. Published in 'Iris Oifigiúil' of 4 August 2020.
3. S.I. No. 277 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Higher Education Institutions) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020. Published in 'Iris Oifigiúil' of 4 August 2020.
4. S.I. No. 278 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Further Education Providers) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020. Published in 'Iris Oifigiúil' of 4 August 2020.

The above Orders, certified by the Tánaiste pursuant to section 173 of the Copyright and Related Rights Act 2000, provide for new copyright licensing schemes for the Primary, Post-primary, Higher Education and Further Education sectors. The new licensing schemes were required as a result of the provisions contained in section 15 of the Copyright and Other Intellectual Property Law Provisions Act 2019. The licensing schemes enable educational establishments to make use of copyright protected works for educational purposes. The licensing schemes are operated by the Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited and are applicable for the 2020/21 academic year onwards.

STANDARDISATION

Due to COVID-19 restrictions worldwide Standards meetings migrated to on-line platforms, which had a positive impact of making meetings accessible to Committee Members who may not have the time or the resources to attend international meetings.

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** – NSAI were appointed to lead a Government of Ireland Top Team on AI standards. The team was established to realise opportunities presented by technological changes and the move to a low carbon economy. It forms part of the overall national AI Strategy which aims to ensure our research centres, businesses and the public sector exploit AI technologies to secure greater levels of productivity and wellbeing.
- **European Standards+Innovation Award** - NSAI blockchain committee member took home the European Standards+Innovation Award at the 2020 CEN and CENELEC Standards+Innovation Awards, Fiona Delaney, Technical Committee member and founder of Origin Chain Networks was awarded for her contributions to European and international blockchain Standards. Ms Delaney submitted a unique agri-food application of blockchain called Universal Farm Compliance to the 'Blockchain and distributed ledger technologies' Standards Committee. The case will allow blockchain to be used creatively worldwide and puts Origin chain networks, NSAI and Ireland on the map for Innovation.
- **Contributing to Standards** – The importance and benefit of participating in standards development was formally recognised by Engineers Ireland during 2020 through acknowledging Standards Committee Participation for Continuing Professional Development purposes.

Goal 4: DELIVER POSITIVE WORKPLACE RELATIONS SUPPORTS, WELL-FUNCTIONING DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISMS, ROBUST ENFORCEMENT OF EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS AND A SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

In addition to workplace supports, including safe and healthy places of work, dispute resolution and the enforcement of rights, the Department is also responsible for economic migration policy and for managing the employment permits regime.

In October 2020, following the transfer of functions from the Department of Social Protection, responsibility for employment rights and redundancy and insolvency policy transferred to this Department along with some other responsibilities. The primary role of these two policy areas is to ensure that the State's suite of employment rights and redundancy and insolvency legislation remains fit for purpose and is updated to reflect both national and international developments, including at European Union, Court of Justice and International Labour Organisation level and to advise the Minister and serve the political system on matters relating to these areas. The work of these units will be reflected in the Annual Report 2021.

STATUTORY SICK PAY

The Tánaiste has committed to introducing a statutory sick pay scheme to bring Ireland in line with other wealthy OECD countries. Work is well underway in this regard, with a full public consultation running between November and December 2020, which received 118 submissions from a wide range of stakeholders. The Tánaiste intends to bring forward draft legislation on the scheme in 2021 with a view to having the scheme up and running by the end of the year.

RIGHT TO DISCONNECT

In the light of an increasing digital working environment and in the context of the commitment in the Programme of Government, the Tánaiste requested the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to consider the development of a Code of Practice for employers and employees on the Right to Disconnect. The Tánaiste made this request to the WRC in accordance with the provisions of section 20 of the Workplace Relations Act, 2015. The purpose of this Code is to provide practical guidance and best practice to employers, employees and their representatives in relation to the Right to Disconnect. Codes of Practice are written guidelines, agreed in a consultative process, setting out guidance and best practice for employers and employees with respect to compliance with employment legislation. The Code complements and supports employers' and employees' rights and obligations under the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997, the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005, the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018 and the Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994 – 2014. While failure to follow a Code prepared under section 20(1)(a) of the Workplace Relations Act, 2015 is not an offence, in itself, section 20(9) provides that in any proceedings before a Court, the Labour Court or the WRC, a Code of Practice shall be admissible in evidence and any provision of the Code which appears to the court, body or officer concerned to be relevant to any question arising in the proceedings shall be taken into account in determining that question. The Code of Practice was finalised in Q1 of 2021.

WORK SAFELY PROTOCOL (RETURN TO WORK SAFELY PROTOCOL)

As a result of the Public Health restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, a Government decision to partially reopen the economy from 18 May 2020 was accompanied by the introduction of the Return to Work Safely Protocol. The Protocol set out in a clear and comprehensive way, the steps and processes that businesses needed to take to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. It was developed and agreed in consultation with the members of the Labour Employer Economic Forum, a forum for high-level dialogue between government, union and employer representatives on labour market issues. Participants in this process included Ibec, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Chambers Ireland and the Construction Industry Federation. It is the result of a collaborative effort, led by this Department and involving the Health and Safety Authority, the Department of Health and the HSE.

The Protocol was revised and relaunched as the Work Safely Protocol in November 2020 still containing information and practical advice on a range of topics such as the management and control of outbreaks, selection of hand sanitisers, wearing of masks, ventilation of workplaces and symptoms. The revision brought together knowledge developed in these areas as the pandemic continued and it was considered important that the guidance reflected the most up to date public health advice available.

The Health and Safety Authority has acted as the lead Agency in co-ordinating compliance with the Work Safely Protocol. It has been assisted in this role by 700 inspectors from a range of other Government Departments and State Bodies (Workplace Relations Commission; Environmental Health Officers; Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Department of Education; Sea Fisheries Protection Authority and Tusla).

Over 24,000 COVID-19 inspections on compliance with the Protocol were carried out between May and the end of December 2020. Returns from all inspectorate bodies have indicated compliance levels of over 90% with the protocol. This has provided an assurance to employers and workers in relation to the ability of businesses to remain open during the period of the pandemic.

ECONOMIC MIGRATION

Implementation of the recommendations of the 2018 Review of Economic Migration Policy continued to ensure that the State's employment permits system remains sufficiently flexible to react to changes in the labour market and be fully supportive of emerging labour needs. Work continued on developing new consolidated and amended Employment Permit legislation.

The first review of the twice yearly review of the employment permit critical skills and ineligible occupations lists was finalised in October 2020, taking account of the current economic environment and the impact of COVID-19 on the labour market. No changes were made to the Employment Permits Occupations Lists apart from two small technical amendments simplifying the occupation description of nurses and adding the Japan/EU 'Vulcanus' in Europe Programme (Ireland) to the list of Exchange Agreements that are eligible for the Exchange Agreement Employment Permit. The second review commenced in October 2020.

The Employer Consultative User Forum which is jointly chaired by this Department and the Department of Justice and Equality met in September.

EMPLOYMENT PERMITS

Over the course of 2020, Trusted Partner applications, which account for 74% of all permit applications and are regular users of the service, were consistently being processed in 1-2 weeks. Similarly, standard applications, which account for 26% of all applications, were consistently being processed in a 3-4 week timeframe. Both of these figures are within the very ambitious customer service targets.

In 2020 there were a total of 16,290 applications for employment permits, a 13% decrease from 2019. At the same time there was a 12 year high in the amount of permits which were granted, 16,419, a 1% increase over 2019.

In March 2020, the Department implemented a COVID-19 contingency plan to ensure that the employment permit regime could continue to operate throughout the crisis. Since 30 March, the employment permit system has been operating fully remotely and online. Agreement was reached with the Immigration Service Delivery in the Department of Justice on arrangements to introduce, on a temporary basis, a type of 'e-employment permit' and a similar soft copy process to transition to permanent residence permission.

Processing of employment permit applications for medical personnel were prioritised and, from mid-March until the end of 2020 some 4,490 employment permits issued to medical personnel.

The second phase of a Business Process Review which will result in the development of a new IT processing system which will take advantage of all the new technologies available, including full digitisation, is ongoing but progress during 2020 has been slow as a result of the pandemic. Development of the new system is expected to commence during 2021.

In 2020, 50% of all employment permits issued were in respect of Critical Skills Employment Permits, the employment permit designed to target shortages in highly skilled occupations in high demand; and the following sectors received the most employment permits:

- Health & Social Work Activities (31%)
- Information & Communication Activities (28%)
- Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing (11%)

SECTORAL EMPLOYMENT ORDERS

The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 provides the legal basis for Sectoral Employment Orders (SEOs). An SEO can set the pay, pension or sick pay scheme for workers in an economic sector.

In June 2020, the High Court declared the Electrical Contracting Sector SEO (S.I. 251 of 2019) to be invalid and of having no legal effect. Furthermore, the Court ruled that the provisions for the making of SEOs under Chapter 3 of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2015 was unconstitutional as it unlawfully delegation law making powers to bodies outside the Oireachtas. The decision of the High Court has been appealed to the Supreme

Court and a ruling is expected in 2021. The judge of the High Court placed a Stay on the declaration of unconstitutionality pending the determination of the Supreme Court appeal.

Two SEOs remain, and minimum rates of remuneration for the Construction sector increased on 1 October 2020.

JOINT LABOUR COMMITTEES AND EMPLOYMENT REGULATION ORDERS

There are three active Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) in the Contract Cleaning, Hairdressing and Security sectors.

A JLC is composed of equal numbers of representatives of employers and workers in an employment sector. The Committee meets under an independent chairman, an Industrial Relations Officer of the WRC, appointed by the Minister to discuss and agree proposals for terms and conditions to apply to specified grades or categories of workers in the sector concerned.

An Employment Regulation Order (ERO) is an instrument drawn up by a JLC, adopted by the Labour Court and given statutory effect by the Minister for Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment. The ERO fixes minimum rates of pay and conditions of employment for workers in specified business sectors: employers in those sectors are then obliged to pay wage rates and provide conditions of employment not less favourable than those prescribed.

An ERO was drawn up by the JLC and adopted by the Labour Court for the Contract Cleaning Industry in 2020. This Order, S.I. No. 608 of 2020, was given statutory effect by Minister English on 10 December 2020.

An ERO is in place for the Security Industry since 2017. That ERO is under challenge in the High Court. The Security Industry JLC met in 2020 regarding the proposal for a new ERO. The Court will consider this proposal in 2021.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2019

The Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2019 was signed by President Michael D. Higgins on 7 July 2019. This Act has amended the Industrial Relations legislation to allow access to the services of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and the Labour Court for the Garda representative associations. The Act came into effect on 1 February 2020.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ENVIRONMENT

There were approximately 21,704 days lost to strike action in 2020.

NEW CODE OF PRACTICE FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES ON THE PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION OF BULLYING AT WORK UNDER THE SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELFARE AT WORK ACT 2005

A new Code of Practice, which came into effect on 23 December 2020, replaces the previous Code of the same name issued by the Health and Safety Authority in March 2007 and the 'Code of Practice Detailing Procedures for Addressing Bullying in the Workplace'

issued by the Labour Relations Commission in 2002, effectively combining them into a single operational Code.

This revised dual Code, which applies to all employments in Ireland irrespective of whether employees work at a fixed location, at home or are mobile, provides practical guidance on the management of workplace bullying complaints and on the prevention of workplace bullying, in line with the requirements of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Further information is available on www.hsa.ie.

NOTIFYING AUTHORITY ROLE

Product safety has been largely regulated through EU harmonised law which covers about 70% of products on the EU market.

The Department is a Notifying Authority under several EU Directives and has specific responsibility for Directives concerning Machinery; Personal Protective Equipment; Transportable Pressure Equipment; Pressure Equipment; Lifts and Safety Components for Lifts and, also, Equipment for Use in Potentially Explosive Atmospheres (ATEX). The Department is also the Notifying Authority for certain Consumer Products and Weights and Measures.

During 2020, one application and one withdrawal were processed by the Department for UK notified Bodies establishing in Ireland. This will bring the number of notified bodies appointed by the Department to ten, with three Recognised Third Party Organisations under the Pressure Equipment Directive. The majority of these companies were former UK Notified Bodies which relocated or established new operations in Ireland due to Brexit. The Notified Body appointments will allow these companies to continue to operate within the EU post-Brexit.

CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

During 2020, the Department and the Health and Safety Authority continued to co-operate closely with SOLAS and the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on ensuring the viability and relevance of safety training schemes for the construction sector, with a focus on modernising the delivery of training supports to the construction sector by SOLAS. The SafePass and Construction Safety Certification Scheme, co-ordinated by SOLAS, have proven over many years to have improved awareness, competence and safety in the construction sector.

Minister Breen introduced an amending S.I. to the Construction Regulations, to extend the period of validity of all existing SOLAS Safe Pass cards issued from 1 March 2016 beyond their prescribed expiry date of 29 February 2020 until such a time as the COVID-19 emergency has lifted and Safe Pass training is available from SOLAS again. This derogation remains in place. It is estimated that over 30,000 SafePass card holders benefitted from the introduction of the derogation up to the end of December 2020.

WORKPLACE FATALITIES

There were 53 workplace fatalities reported to the Health and Safety Authority in 2020 last year compared to 47 in 2019. With 20 of these fatalities in the agriculture sector, farms

remain the place of work with the highest rate of accidents and fatalities. Construction fatalities increased from 12 in 2019 to 14 in 2020, with 58% of all fatal injuries taking place in the first six months. Falls from heights was the leading cause of construction worker deaths in 2020. Many of the fatalities involved small companies and self-employed tradespeople. A downward trend between 2015 (56 fatalities) and 2020 (53 fatalities) still exists. However, a continuous focus is needed by employers and employees to ensure that this downward trend continues.

FARM SAFETY

A Protocol between this Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in relation to Farm Safety has been put 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 Protocol will assist in ensuring that a collaborative approach is taken by all parties to achieve this goal and seeks to optimise the use of the resources available to both Departments. The Protocol will also help to ensure joined-up messaging relating to health, safety and welfare matters targeting the agriculture sector. The overall objective of this Protocol is to ensure that working together, 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.

IRISH NATIONAL ACCREDITATION BOARD/ACCREDITATION

A review of the structure and operation of Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB), a committee of the Health and Safety Authority, was completed in 2020. INAB has an expanding mandate via a number of EU Directives which require accreditation of bodies within a regulatory framework, examples of upcoming areas of activity would be in the area of cyber security and data protection.

CHEMICALS POLICY

At the beginning of 2020, the Health and Safety Authority published the Chemical Agents Code of Practice, which, in conjunction with S.I. No. 592 of 2019 transposed three EU Directives relating to exposure to carcinogens in the workplace, keeping Ireland fully in line with EU standards in this area.

In June 2020, the EU published Directive (EU) 2020/739, adding the agent responsible for COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, to the Biological Agents Directive, which had recently been updated by Directive (EU) 2019/1833. Given the urgency of the pandemic, Member States were given just five months to transpose Directive 2020/739 into national law (in addition the transposition date for Directive 2019/1833 was moved from November 2021 to November 2020 to be in line with Directive 2020/739). Both Directives were fully transposed on time via S.I. No. 539/2020 and the 2020 Biological Agents Code of Practice, published by the Health and Safety Authority. The Code of Practice sets out the risk levels of certain biological agents and the precautions required for each risk level in different workplaces.

In 2020, the Department continued to liaise with the Attorney General's Office to progress the settlement of a revision to the Detergents Regulations under the Chemicals Acts 2008 & 2010.

Following on from collaboration with the Health and Safety Authority and the Irish National Accreditation Board (INAB) in 2019, the Department transposed two Codified EU Directives (2004/9/EC and 2004/10/EC) on Good Laboratory Practice (GLP), which require that any test facilities carrying out tests on chemical products shall comply with the OECD Principles of Good Laboratory Practice. The new regulations were transposed on 23 January 2020 via S.I. No 18 of 2020.

DANGEROUS SUBSTANCES LEGISLATIVE REGIME

In 2020, 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.

In 2019 two new sets of regulations replacing 1979 petroleum storage and retail regulations were also finalised and published:

- the Dangerous Substances (Flammable Liquids and Fuels Retail Stores) Regulations, 2019 (S.I. No. 630 of 2019); and
- the Dangerous Substances (Flammable Liquids and Fuels Distribution and Commercial Supply Stores) Regulations, 2019 (S.I. No. 631 of 2019).

Both sets of new regulations came into force on 1 April 2020. Following their publication, the Department received advice from stakeholders and reviewed the 2019 Regulations for clarity. Revised Regulations will be published in 2021.

In April 2020, S.I. 147/2020 was published, which declared flammable liquids as dangerous substances under the Dangerous Substances Act. This S.I. allows for diesel only stations to be licensed under the Dangerous Substances Act, as that was not required previously. The Department is also pursuing an amendment to the Dangerous Substances Act to further emphasise this change, through the Industrial Development (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill.

A draft S.I. updating the 1979 Licensing Fees Regulations has been prepared and sent to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for review before being sent for signature. The Department is currently awaiting feedback.

The Department is also continuing to liaise with the Local Government Management Association and other stakeholders on developing a new organisational and operational framework to oversee the implementation of the new Regulations by the Local Authority sector. To date the Business Case for this new licensing regime has passed the Public Sector Reform Oversight Group and a peer review group. Lead Local Authorities have been selected through competition for each region, and the Department will be working with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to bring a Memo to Government.

WORKPLACE RELATIONS COMMISSION

The Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) is an independent, statutory body which was established on 1 October 2015 under the Workplace Relations Act 2015 (No. 16 of 2015).

The Adjudication service received some 18,969 specific complaints in 2020: pay, redundancy, unfair dismissal and hours of work accounting for three quarters of cases received. While the number of complaints and specific complaints received showed a decline from 2019, it represented the highest total received in any other year since establishment.

The Adjudication Service held a mix of 2,000 virtual and in-person hearings in 2020 and issued some 1,629 decisions.

Similarly, conciliation and mediation were provided, primarily remotely over a variety of platforms but also in-person as circumstances allowed. In this regard, the Conciliation service chaired some 735 conciliation conferences and 242 facilitations in relation to collective disputes during 2020.

The Inspection service undertook a total of 7,687 workplace inspections resulting in €1.7m in unpaid wages recovered during 2020. As part of the National Return to Work Safely Protocol, WRC Inspectors carried out 5,202 inspections involving checks for compliance with the Protocol and employment law, with 87% of the employers inspected found to be in compliance.

In 2020, WRC dealt with 52,726 calls and 6,895 emails seeking information on employment rights, equality, industrial relations and employment permits to both employees and employers. In addition, the WRC website (www.workplacerelations.ie) had over 2.6m web views.

LABOUR COURT

During 2020, the Labour Court received 940 appeals and referrals, representing a 20% decrease on the number of referrals (1,182) received in 2019. The Labour Court issued 337 recommendations/determinations/decisions, in addition, it investigated 61 cases that were settled prior to or at a hearing. The number of cases withdrawn by the parties prior to hearing was 396.

Goal 5: ENSURE THAT OUR BUSINESS REGULATION FACILITATES BUSINESS INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, COMPETITION IN THE MARKET PLACE, HIGH STANDARDS OF CONSUMER PROTECTION AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND PROVIDES IRELAND WITH A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE GLOBAL MARKET

COMPANY LAW, COMPETITION AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

During 2020, the Department built on work previously done on the successful development of a stable, transparent and modernised company law framework in Ireland and continued to develop and shape responses to new and emerging challenges in company law, competition and consumer policy at EU and at national level in particular on Brexit and COVID-19. This work was done in collaboration with stakeholders, the Department's Offices and Agencies and other Government Departments to achieve the best outcomes in line with our high-level goal.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

During 2020 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.

This included rapid agreement by Member States on the amendment to the Regulation on European Companies (EC 2157/2001) extending the time for holding general meetings due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMPANIES (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) (COVID-19) ACT 2020

The Act, which was enacted 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. The interim period was extended to 9 June 2021 following Government approval on 15 December and was provided for by two Government Orders:

- S.I. No. 672 of 2020 Companies Act 2014 (Section 12A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 671 of 2020 Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893 (Section 14A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2020

PROPOSED LEGISLATION ON THE RESALE OF TICKETS

The General Scheme of the Sale of Tickets (Cultural, Entertainment, Recreational and Sporting Events) Bill 2020 was referred on 5 February 2020 to the European Commission and other Member States in accordance with the requirements of Directive (EU) 2015/1535 on the procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical regulations and of rules on information society services. No issue of compatibility with EU law or the Internal Market was raised by the European Commission or Member States in the course of the scrutiny of the Scheme.

The General Scheme of the Bill was approved by the Government for drafting on 29 September 2020. The Bill's main provision is a prohibition on 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. It includes also a ban on the unauthorised resale of tickets for matches and events taking place during the EURO 2020 football championship which is now to be held in 2021.

Pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill by the Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment took place on 9 December 2020 and publication of the Bill and its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas is a priority in 2021.

GENERAL SCHEME OF THE COMPANIES (CORPORATE ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITY) BILL

The General Scheme of the Companies (Corporate Enforcement Authority) Bill establishes the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) as an agency, in the form of a Commission, to be called the Corporate Enforcement Authority. Changing the structure of the ODCE from an office in the Department to a statutory agency will provide it with greater autonomy and flexibility to adapt to the challenges it faces in its investigation and prosecution of increasingly complex breaches of company law.

Pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill did not conclude before the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil, it began again under the new Joint Committee on Enterprise, Trade and Employment in December 2020. Finalising and publication of the Bill awaits the conclusion of pre-legislative scrutiny which is anticipated in early 2021.

REVIEW OF THE INDUSTRIAL AND PROVIDENT SOCIETIES ACTS

Following a root and branch review of the existing, largely Victorian era legislative framework, the Department continued work on a General Scheme of a Co-operative Societies Bill. This is a very comprehensive and lengthy piece of legislation and is intended to consolidate existing provisions and provide a modernised and effective legislative framework suitable for the diverse range of organisations using the co-operative model in Ireland.

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 CLRG was heavily engaged in the Department's response to the impact of COVID-19 on business from a company law perspective and submitted two reports in this regard during 2020. Its June 2020 report on 'Measures to address company law issues arising by reason of the COVID-19 pandemic' dealt with emergency legislative amendments required to ensure the normal operation of the Companies Act 2014 during the pandemic. The recommendations contained in the report informed the Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) (COVID-19) Act 2020 as set out above. The CLRG also considered in an accelerated timeframe, medium-term stabilisation measures to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19. In its October 2020 report, it made recommendations for a rescue process suitable for small companies. Following receipt of the report, the Department considered the recommendations and began the necessary work to develop the proposal with a view to drafting a General Scheme in early 2021.

There is a strong focus on insolvency in the CLRG Work Programme 2020-2022. The Corporate Insolvency Committee of the Group commenced 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.

The CLRG is also mandated, as part of its work programme, to examine and make recommendations on whether it is necessary or desirable to amend company law in light of Brexit. In this regard, the Group's June 2020 '*Report on certain company law issues arising under the EU Central Securities Depositories Regulation 909/2014 (CSDR)*' informed Part 4 of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2020 (further information below).

In December 2020, the CLRG presented its '*Report on potential impact of artificial intelligence on company law in the context of corporate governance*'.

MIGRATION OF SECURITIES

Settlement of securities trades - whereby securities are transferred by the seller to the buyer and funds are transferred from the buyer to the seller - are typically made in a securities settlement system operated by a Central Securities Depository (CSD).

Part 4 of the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2020 which was enacted on 10 December 2020 provides miscellaneous amendments to the Companies Act 2014 to facilitate the operation of a substitute securities settlement system, compatible with the law of the European Union, after the transition period. Part 4 commenced on 15 March 2021, the date identified by the Irish Stock Exchange as the migration date.

To ensure that there would be no disruption in CSD services for EU operators using a UK securities settlement system, the European Commission granted equivalence to UK CSDs until the end of June 2021. The Companies Act 1990 (Uncertificated Securities) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 were thus amended to provide continued recognition for UK CSDs approved by a competent authority in the UK for the equivalence period concerned.

EU DIRECTIVES/REGULATIONS

➤ 2017

Directive as regards the encouragement of long-term shareholder engagement

The European Union (Shareholders' Rights) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 81 of 2020) came into operation on 30 March 2020 giving effect to the provisions of Directive EU [2017/828](#) as regards the encouragement of long-term shareholder engagement. The Regulations inserted several Chapters into Part 17 of the [Companies Act 2014](#) dealing with the subject matter of the Directive. Certain provisions related to transparency requirements for institutional investors, asset managers, and proxy advisors.

➤ 2019

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

Directive (EU) [2019/1](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2018 to empower the competition authorities of the Member States to be more effective enforcers and to ensure the proper functioning of the internal market was published on 14 January 2019. The Directive must be transposed into Irish law by 4 February 2021 and it is intended to transpose the ECN+ Directive by primary legislation.

The Bill will deliver 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.

The central aim of the ECN+ Directive is to ensure that National Competition Authorities (NCAs) have guarantees of independence, sufficient resources and appropriate powers of enforcement, including the ability to issue fines, for breaches of Articles 101 and 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Alongside the application of Articles 101 and 102, the Directive also covers the parallel application of national competition law to the same case and the application of national competition law on a stand-alone basis. The Directive sets rules on mutual assistance to ensure close cooperation within the European Competition Network (ECN).

The Directive has the following specific objectives:

1. ensuring NCAs have effective investigation and decision-making tools;
2. ensuring that NCAs are able to impose effective deterrent fines;
3. ensuring that NCAs have a well-designed leniency programme in place which facilitates; applying for leniency in multiple jurisdictions; and
4. ensuring that NCAs have sufficient resources and can enforce EU competition rules independently.

In March 2020, the Department convened a Project Group comprising of the NCAs⁷ and other relevant parties⁸ to draft a General Scheme for the Heads of a Bill to transpose the ECN+ Directive. The Heads of Bill also included additional powers for the NCAs, addressing a number of competition issues such as Bid Rigging and Gun Jumping. The draft General Scheme also benefited from extensive legal advice from the Attorney General's Office on those elements that would have possible constitutional implications. The General Scheme will become the *Competition (Amendment) Bill 2021*.

A Memo for Government seeking approval for the priority drafting of the *Competition (Amendment) Bill 2021* was subsequently approved on 22 December. The Bill has been included as a priority for both Publication and Enactment in the first half of 2021.

Regulation laying down rules and procedures for the market surveillance and compliance of products

Regulation (EU) [2019/1020](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on market surveillance and compliance of products and amending Directive 2004/42/EC and Regulations (EC) No 765/2008 and (EU) No 205/2011 was published on 25 June 2019.

The Regulation aims to strengthen enforcement powers of market surveillance authorities, particularly on products sold online and to strengthen controls at external borders. The Regulation also aims to cover new supply chains and address online sales as well as improving compliance with EU law. Some of the provisions in the Regulation will apply from 1 January 2021, while the rest will apply from 16 July 2021.

Directive on the use of digital tools and processes in Company Law

Directive (EU) 2019/1151 amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132 on digital tools was published in the Official Journal on 11 July 2019 and entered into force on 31 July 2019, with a transposition date of 1 August 2021. The Directive is part of the EU Company Law Package: making the best of digital solutions and providing efficient rules for cross-border operations. The objective of the Directive is to apply digital solutions to allow online access to business registers, for companies registering and providing information, as well as access to such information for third parties. EU Company Law Expert Group meetings on transposition and an Implementing Act continued throughout 2020. The Directive must be transposed by 1 August 2021.

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 specific areas of insolvency law 'early restructuring' opportunities (for businesses in financial difficulties which may not, or not yet, be insolvent)

⁷ The Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and ComReg, the Courts Service and the Director of Public Prosecutions

⁸ Department of Justice and Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment

and ensuring a 'second chance' for 'honest entrepreneurs' who become insolvent without any fraud or malpractice.

The Department of Justice, which has responsibility for transposing elements of the Directive which relate to personal insolvency, and this Department continued during 2020 to engage in preparing for the transposition of the Directive. However, towards the end of 2020 it became the shared view of both Departments that the 17 July 2021 deadline could not be achieved given the disruption and additional legislative requirements arising as a result of COVID-19. The Commission was notified on 23 December 2020 of the State's intention to avail of the one-year extension as provided for under Article 34 paragraph 2. The Directive must now be transposed by 17 July 2022.

Directive on cross-border conversions, mergers and divisions

A Directive ([2121/2019](#)) amending Directive (EU) 2017/1132 on cross-border conversions, mergers and divisions was published in November 2019 and aims to simplify cross border rules and enhance the EU Single Market while providing for appropriate safeguards that discourage abuses and protect the legitimate interests of workers and other, minority shareholders and creditors. Transposition is due within a three-year timeframe by November 2022.

Enabling the enforcement of ecodesign regulations

The [EU Ecodesign Directive](#) is designed 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 are being added under the Directive.

The enforcement of (European) Ecodesign Regulations was enabled in S.I. No 625 of 2020. The S.I. replaces the Schedule contained in S.I. 454/2013 with an updated list of products and the associated (European) Regulations These include the following:

- Servers and Data Storage Products Regulation (EU) No 2019/424;
- Electric Motors Regulation (EU) No 2019/1781;
- External Power Supplies Regulation (EU) No 2019/1782;
- Small, Medium and Large Power Transformers Regulation (EU) No 2019/1783;
- Welding Equipment Regulation (EU) No 2019/1784;
- Light Sources Regulation (EU) No 2019/2020;
- Electronic Displays Regulation (EU) No 2019/2021;
- Household Dishwashers Regulation (EU) No 2019/2022;
- Household Washing Machines Regulation (EU) No 2019/2023;
- Refrigerators with Direct Sale Function Regulation (EU) No 2019/2024.

➤ 2020

Directive to Empower Qualified Entities to take Representative Actions on Behalf of a Group of Consumers to Provide for Redress in Cases of Mass Harm

Directive 2020/1828 was published in the Official Journal on 4 December 2020 and proposes a modernised system of representative actions, building on the existing Injunctions Directive (Directive [2009/22/EC](#)).

The agreed Directive proposes a modernised system of representative actions by:

- expanding the scope of the old Directive to cover other horizontal and sector-specific EU instruments relevant for the protection of collective interests of consumers in different economic sectors such as financial services, energy, telecommunications, health and the environment;
- allows non-profit making qualified entities such as consumer organisations or independent public bodies, which have been designated in advance by Member States, to take either domestic or cross border representative actions to defend the collective interests of consumer in cases of mass harm;
- requires Member States to ensure 'due expediency' of procedures and to avoid procedural costs becoming a financial obstacle to bringing representative actions;
- requires that Member States shall lay down the penalties applicable to non-compliance with decisions issued within the representative action, that they shall take all necessary measures to ensure that they are implemented and shall ensure that penalties may take the form of fines; and
- enables qualified entities to bring representative actions seeking different types of measures as appropriate, depending on the circumstances of the case i.e. interim or definitive measures to stop and prohibit a trader's practice or to eliminate the continuing effects of the infringement. The latter could include redress orders establishing the trader's liability towards the consumers harmed by the infringement.

The Department is considering these issues and working to ensure this Directive is transposed into Irish law by December 2022, as required.

CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTS ACT, 2013 – REGULATION OF PAYMENTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION CONTRACTS AND STATUTORY ENTITLEMENT TO ADJUDICATION

During 2020 there were 54 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.

The Chair of the Construction Contracts Adjudication Panel, Dr. Nael Bunni, submitted the fourth Annual Report on the implementation of the Construction Contracts Act, 2013 to Minister English in August 2020 and this report is available on the Department's website.

INSURANCE

➤ ACTION PLAN FOR INSURANCE REFORM

The Programme for Government sets out a range of commitments to reform the insurance sector. As the issue of insurance concerns a number of Departments a Sub-group of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Recovery and Investment chaired by the Tánaiste was established by Government in September 2020. The Sub-group is meeting on a regular basis to oversee and implement reform and consider the progress that each Minister is making in implementing the specific actions for which they have responsibility.

Arising from the work of the Sub-group, on 8 December 2020, Government published the first [Action Plan for Insurance Reform](#) to make Ireland's insurance sector more competitive and consumer-friendly, assisting enterprise and job creation. The Plan sets out 66 actions across Government to bring down the costs for consumers and business; introduce more competition into the market; prevent fraud and reduce the burden on business, community and voluntary organisations.

Actions will be undertaken and delivered by Ministers in this Department and the Departments of Finance and Justice over the next 18 months. The Sub-Group will meet regularly, engage with stakeholders and publish progress of the actions every six months.

➤ OFFICE TO PROMOTE COMPETITION IN THE INSURANCE MARKET

Following work undertaken by the Department in collaboration with the Department of Finance, 'The Office to Promote Competition in the Insurance Market' was established in December 2020 under the responsibility of the Minister of State for Financial Services, Credit Unions and Insurance, Seán Fleming T.D.

This new Office comprises officials from the Department of Finance assisted by officials from this Department, with regular input to be provided from other relevant Departments, Agencies and stakeholders. The Office has been established to advance Government's work on insurance reform so as to encourage greater competition in the Irish insurance market and follows a commitment contained in the Programme for Government. The new Office will provide a coordinated Government policy approach to promote competition in the insurance sector.

➤ PERSONAL INJURIES ASSESSMENT BOARD

Since its establishment in 2004 the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) has delivered major benefits by providing a low-cost, quick and fair option in injury compensation. The Central Bank's National Claims Information Database 2nd Motor Report (November 2020) shows that the legal costs involved in going to litigation on claims for up to €100,000 are more than 15 times greater than through settling claims through PIAB. The report also shows significant differences in the time taken to resolve claims where they cannot be agreed directly between claimants and respondents. For claims settled through PIAB, the average time from date of accident to award was 2.9 years, whereas if settled via litigation it was 4.7 years.

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 2020,

work has progressed between the Department and PIAB to examine options to enhance and reform the agency. A public consultation on the enhancement of PIAB took place in March 2021 with the enhanced role, including legislative proposals, to be put in place by June 2021.

➤ **COMPETITION AND CONSUMER PROTECTION COMMISSION STUDY ON THE PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE MARKET**

On 23 December 2020 the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) published its market study on the public liability insurance market. The study found that the functioning of the public liability insurance market is a significant concern. It found that the incidence of high premiums is spread across all sectors, while availability issues seem to be primarily impacting certain segments of the market (community and sports organisations in particular).

The CCPC study recommends the adoption of a strategic approach to the reform of the insurance market, improved data availability, measures to enhance competition, supports for business and consumers and reform of the PIAB. This study will be an important input to the work of the Cabinet Sub-group on Insurance Reform as it works to implement measures across Government to reform the insurance sector. The majority of the recommendations in the CCPC study are reflected in the Action Plan for Insurance Reform.

TRADE LICENSING AND CONTROL

The Department administers EU and national Export Controls to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to assist regional stability and to protect human rights. This regime is a key component of the business regulation framework for companies trading internationally from Ireland. Despite difficulties posed by the global pandemic, activity in this area continued to be strong during 2020 with achievements including:

- 873 export licences for controlled goods were issued, with a value of almost €3.8bn;
- 17 licenses were issued between March and May 2020 related to the implementation of EU Export Controls for Personal Protection Equipment, which was introduced to ensure adequacy of supply of such products in the EU during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- 300 licences for imports of certain steel and aluminium products from third countries were issued up to May 2020, when EU surveillance requirements in this area were discontinued;
- Outreach and compliance visits to exporters were conducted when restrictions allowed. These were complemented with desk-based audits and virtual meetings; and
- 25 Statutory Instruments were enacted to give full legal effect to EU sanctions.

MEDICAL DEVICES CERTIFICATION

In early 2020, the Medical Devices Division at NSAI were approved for designation to the new EU Medical Device Directive. After two and a half years working towards this designation, NSAI became the 11th notified body in the world to be designated to the new regulation. The achievement represents a significant endorsement and global recognition for the organisation as the only Irish notified body in the medical technology space.

NATIONAL METROLOGY

Early 2020 saw the National Metrology Laboratory (NML) being awarded the Calibration/ Testing Laboratory of the Year Award at the Irish Laboratory Awards, recognising the importance of NML to the sector.

During 2020, NML remained operational and providing critical and essential measurement services to Irish industry throughout the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Demand for NML's calibration services remained strong during the year with the laboratory issuing over 4,600 calibration certificates for the year.

While the ability to provide training courses in-house was greatly curtailed, NML did deliver 12 courses to 21 companies, with six delivered on-line through recreating a virtual laboratory environment. NML also produced three on-line presentations relating to metrology issues important to industry.

LEGAL METROLOGY

COVID-19 restrictions had a significant impact on the on-site inspection activities carried out by NSAI legal metrology inspectors, particularly during periods of Level 5 restrictions. However, inspectors visited 2,504 traders (59% of 2019) and inspected 13,599 (92% of 2019) instruments during the year. Six inspections campaigns were undertaken in the business sectors of Fisheries, Licenced Premises, Truck Mounted Oil Meters, Weighbridge, Truck Mounted Waste Weighers, Milk Metering Systems.

During the year the Legal Metrology Service secured a guilty verdict against a taxi service for operating two unverified taximeter and removing a security seal. In addition to a penalty and contribution to NSAI's legal fees the probation Act was also applied.

Legal Metrology introduced an online Taxi Trader Information for taxi meter installers which delivers improved records management for installers, notifies the taximeter owner/operator of their legal obligations regarding taximeter verification, while also improving environmental sustainability. In addition, new security sealing arrangements for taximeters to replace the old tamper proof sticker with a wire and plastic locking mechanism.

Goal 6: WORKING AMBITIOUSLY ACROSS GOVERNMENT WITH OUR EU AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO ACHIEVE PROGRESS IN EU AND INTERNATIONAL FORA, ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF INTERESTS, INCLUDING BREXIT

ENGAGEMENT AT EU LEVEL

The varying effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to play a central role for the majority of 2020. In addition to the effective shutting down of large swathes of the EU economy, the scheduling of the range of physical meetings was significantly impacted. Faced with these continued exceptional circumstances, the affected EU Presidencies and the European Commission sought to ensure that as much business continued to take place in as many fora as possible. Videoconference meetings in respect of Ministerial Council meetings, as well as the Trade Policy Committee in its various formations, continued to be the dominant feature. A notable exception was the informal Council meeting of Trade Ministers on 11 September which took place in Berlin and which the Tánaiste attended.

During 2020, Minister Humphreys, the Tánaiste and Ministers Breen, Troy and English represented Ireland's interests at the Trade and Competitiveness (Internal Market and Industry) and Employment and Social Affairs (EPSCO) Councils. COVID-19 impacted the organisation of Council meetings with only one physical meeting of the Competitiveness Council held under the Croatian Presidency while six other meetings during the Croatian and German Presidencies were held virtually.

The Competitiveness (Internal Market and Industry) Council considered the European Green Deal and adopted Council Conclusions on Better Regulation at its only physical meeting. The focus of other meetings was on the impact of COVID-19 on EU industry and the Single Market, the Commission's Recovery Plan and on building a resilient competitive Europe with an emphasis on deepening the Single Market and on delivering on the green and digital transition.

In October 2020, the coordination role for EPSCO transferred to the Department. Minister English attended two informal meetings in October and December which focused on the recovery from COVID-19 through the employment and social affairs lens.

Issues progressed by the Trade Council during 2020 included EU Trade Policy Review (which was launched in June 2020) which was discussed in September and again in November. A significant amount of time was also devoted to ensuring a consensus EU approach regarding the selection of the WTO Director-General post. EU-US trade relations continued to be a key topic throughout 2020 however, while discussions continued over the course of the year between the EU and US towards a return to more 'predictable' trade relations as equal partners, there were no significant bridging of gaps. The result of the US Presidential election was a notable development towards the end of the year.

Considerable work within the EU was also undertaken to further the WTO reform agenda. The Appellate Body of the WTO ceased to function as of 11 December 2019. In the interim, the EU with 24 other trading partners agreed to the establishment of the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA). The MPIA operates under the WTO framework,

based on a provision (Article 25) in the WTO's Dispute Settlement Understanding for dispute arbitration. It is based on the usual WTO rules applicable to appeals. Ireland also continued to work with our EU partners to address a number of trade irritants with the United States, most notably in relation to the imposition of tariffs on certain EU exports to the United States in response to the WTO findings in the 'Airbus' case, as well as the EU response to the WTO award in the parallel Boeing case. Furthermore, a second review of the EU's Steel Safeguard measures was undertaken whereby the quota levels were liberalised by 3%. The measures are due to expire in July 2021.

In addition to representing the Department's and Ireland's strategic interests at Council, the Department's key EU interests were also pursued at the cross-Government level via the Department of Foreign Affairs EU Senior Officials Group and the Interdepartmental Group on EU Affairs and Brexit, as well as, bilaterally through engagements with like-minded Member States and the European Commission.

The Department continued to engage remotely and via video conferencing facilities at EU Committee and Working Party level to communicate Ireland's position on issues of trade to ensure that the open, free and rule based multi-lateral trading system is assisted and upheld. In that regard, the team in Dublin and Brussels service multiple Committees and Working Groups, including Geneva insofar as the World Trade Organisation is concerned. We also take the lead role for Ireland in other international organisations' fora (UN, WTO) through its Permanent Representation Mission in Geneva, as well as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD).

The Ministers briefed our business stakeholders on International Trade developments through the Department's Enterprise Forum during the year.

In keeping with the Department's EU Oireachtas Scrutiny obligations, the Department informed the Oireachtas on 38 EU proposals across a range of policy issues, seven early warning reports and also met its obligation to submit two six-monthly reports on EU developments.

EU SINGLE MARKET IN SERVICES

Throughout 2020, the Department continued its engagement at EU level, including with the European Commission and with other Member States, and 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 newly established Single Market Enforcement Taskforce.

On the legislative front, the Department coordinated national positions on a proposal for a Regulation setting up a Single Market Programme within the EU's Multi-annual Financial Framework for the period 2021-2027, which was agreed later in the year. This new programme is an aggregation of six existing EU funding programmes which are currently assisted by 10 different EU budget lines, and which, at national level, fall within the policy remit of a number of Government Departments.

The Department also continued to manage the Irish Point of Single Contact website, which is an information and assistance resource for EU services providers seeking to provide

services in Ireland. It is part of a network of websites across the European Economic Area which aims to facilitate free movement of services within the Single Market. The Department continued to improve the quality of information available on the Point of Single Contact and address shortfalls previously identified by the European Commission.

The Department also managed Ireland's contribution to other EU networks that contribute to the smooth functioning of the Single Market, including the SOLVIT and Internal Market Information Systems. In 2020, the Irish SOLVIT Centre again scored well in the European Commission's Annual Report on the performance of national centres within the SOLVIT network.

INVESTMENT SCREENING

The EU European Union adopted the *Regulation for Establishing a Framework for the Screening of Foreign Direct Investments*. The Regulation (EU) (2019/452) came into effect in March 2019 and applies from 11 October 2020.

This Regulation establishes a framework for Member States to co-ordinate and share information in relation to the screening of foreign direct investment from 3rd countries. It came into force in October 2020. It also allows the Commission to issue non-binding opinions in cases concerning several Member States, or when an investment could affect a project or programme of interest to the whole of the EU.

The Investment Screening Regulation, and subsequent domestic policy developments, is a response to growing concerns amongst Member States regarding the purchase of, and investment in, strategic European companies and assets by foreign-owned firms (and in certain cases, state-owned firms) that may undermine a Member State's security or public order.

Under the Regulation, Member States are required to establish a National Contact Point (NCP) where information and enquiries can be exchanged between the Commission and Member States. The NCP is also responsible for fulfilling the various reporting requirements set out in the Regulation.

The Department acts as Ireland's NCP and we are an active participant on the European Commission's Expert Group on the Screening of Foreign Direct Investment which provides a valuable forum to share best practices on screening policies and which facilitates an exchange of views on trends and issues of common concern relating to foreign investment screening. In 2020, the Department undertook analysis including a series of bilateral engagements to inform policy development in this space. A public consultation was also undertaken to inform the Department on policy options in examining our response to the implementation of the Regulation.

Following the consultation, the issue was considered by Government and a decision was taken to introduce an investment screening mechanism in Ireland by way of primary legislation. Government approved the General Scheme of an Investment Screening Bill in July 2020 and the legislation is currently being drafted with the Attorney General's office. The Bill when enacted, will empower the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to respond to threats to Ireland's security and public order posed by particular types of foreign investment and to prevent or mitigate such threats.

BREXIT

READINESS PREPARATIONS

In 2020, the extensive coordination work continued across the Department and its Agencies on the Department's response to Brexit, including engagement across Government on Brexit readiness in preparation for all Brexit outcomes, including a no-deal outcome. There was also active liaison across Government to ensure that our national interests were taken into account in the context of the EU-UK negotiations on the future trading relationship.

The Department provided inputs to the Government Brexit Readiness Action Plan published in September 2020 and in the Brexit Omnibus Bill 2020. In December 2020, the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2020 (Brexit Omnibus Act) was signed into law by the President. The Omnibus Act, which was made up of 19 parts, complemented legal measures at EU level and continued the work of the 2019 Omnibus Bill by focusing on measures to protect our citizens and assisting the economy, enterprise and jobs particularly in key economic sectors. The Department's involvement included Parts 4, 5 & 15 of the Omnibus Act which focused, respectively, on issues related to Central Securities Depositories; adjustments to Work Permits legislation; as well as to the Protection of Employees (Employers' Insolvency) Acts. In addition to the Bill, complementary secondary legislation was also finalised before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.

Intensive engagement with the Department's stakeholders continued in 2020 with a view to assisting businesses to get Brexit ready by end 2020. This work involved Ministerial engagement through key stakeholder groups such as the Enterprise Forum on Brexit and Global Challenges and the Retail Forum, as well as with the Department's enterprise and regulatory Agencies.

CHEMICAL IMPORTS

Throughout 2020 the Department, in conjunction with the Health and Safety Authority, continued to support the Government's 'Getting Ireland Brexit Ready' initiative to highlight the potential impacts for Irish industry. In particular, potential impacts arising for industry in relation to the sourcing of chemicals and the importing of products continued to be highlighted throughout 2020, as industries might face increased regulatory duties and obligations.

MITIGATING MEASURES FOR SMES

➤ Brexit Loan Scheme

The Brexit Loan Scheme was launched in March 2018, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the European Investment Bank. The Scheme provides affordable financing to eligible Irish businesses with up to 499 employees that are either currently impacted by Brexit or will be in the future. The Scheme is open both to State Agency clients and those businesses that do not have any relationship with State Agencies. The Scheme is delivered by the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) through commercial lenders to get working capital into Irish businesses and was extended in 2020 to continue to make lending available to Brexit impacted businesses to the end of 2021. Together with the SBCI COVID-19 Working Capital Scheme, €337.5m of lending has been made available to help the liquidity needs of SMEs, as of the end of 2020, through these two

loan schemes. A further expansion is in progress to bring available lending up to €500m. To the end of 2020, 282 loans had progressed to sanction at bank level to a total value of €57.5m.

➤ **Future Growth Loan Scheme**

As referenced under Goal 1, the €300m Future Growth Loan Scheme, was launched in March 2019, to provide access to lending to eligible Irish businesses and the primary agriculture and seafood sectors to assist strategic long-term investment. The scheme was expanded in July 2020 to bring available lending to €800m. Finance provided under this scheme is easier to access, more competitively priced, and offered at more favourable terms than other lending for such businesses. Loan amounts are offered of between €100,000 (€50,000 for agriculture) to €3m with unsecured loans up to €500,000. Loans are for terms of between 7 and 10 years – addressing a gap in the market for longer term finance. The scheme is jointly funded by this Department and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the European Investment Bank.

This scheme has been well received in the market, such that at the end of 2020 there had been 2,742 loans progressed to sanction at bank level to a total value of €555m, of which 2,023 of these loans to the value of €415.1m were sanctioned in 2020 alone.

➤ **Microfinance Ireland Brexit Business Loan**

In November 2020, Microfinance Ireland launched its Brexit Business Loan. It is available to businesses with turnover of less than €2m and a maximum of 9 employees. Loans can be up for up to €25,000 and from 6 months to 3 years. Reduced interest rates from 4.5% and an effective interest free period of up to 12 months bring the cost of this loan down further for Irish businesses. It is expected that these loans will be utilised for importation reasons or changes to supply chains due to the size of the businesses involved.

➤ **Awareness**

The Department invested heavily in supporting enterprise and providing strong communications and awareness raising on Brexit. It gauges Brexit responses across the SME base by means of its series of Brexit SME surveys, which provide insights into the extent and type of Brexit responses implemented by businesses. Further monitoring, collation and dissemination of the levels of engagement with Brexit supports facilitates the development of insights into the impact of Brexit on business.

In addition to online resources, a number of leaflets and booklets have been produced to ensure that businesses are as prepared as possible for the impacts arising as a result of Brexit. These include the 'Quick Brexit Guide for Business: Customs, tariffs and duties, currency, imports, certification, working capital, financing' and 'Currency Risk Management for Irish SMEs.' Given the demand, the 'Quick Brexit Guide for Business' has been reprinted several times. Where appropriate, information has been updated to reflect the changing circumstances of the UK's exit from the EU. The Department's website has also been

updated to include guidance on Getting Your Business Brexit Ready, including information on appropriate measures for impacted businesses.

The Department also produced a comprehensive guide to the range of different measures available to businesses seeking financing, 'Access to finance supports for SMEs and microenterprise'.

ENTERPRISE IRELAND

With the support of the Department, Enterprise Ireland has continued its focus on assisting Irish business prepare for Brexit in 2020. This included:

- The launch of the *Ready for Customs Grant* – a €9,000 contribution towards the costs of recruiting new employees and software IT systems equipment to increase a company's customs capacity. By the end of 2020 €7.6m had been allocated, supporting 1,000 jobs in the sector.
- The launch of the *Brexit Readiness Checker* – an online tool that provides businesses with an individual assessment of readiness. More than 660 companies had completed the Checker by end 2020.
- *Extensive advertising and direct marketing campaigns* to the Enterprise Ireland client base and the wider business community to raise awareness of the importance of preparing for Brexit.
- A series of *five regional webinars* in early December 2020, with more than 1400 businesses registering. Post event follow-up included promoting on demand view options and the circulation of an extensive Brexit Q&A document.

Traffic to Enterprise Ireland's dedicated website *Prepare for Brexit* increased significantly, with more than 66,500 visits between September – December 2020.

IDA IRELAND

In 2020, IDA Ireland continued to work directly with its existing clients to help address the challenges while also seeking to maximise new Brexit-related opportunities.

The Agency has engaged with its client base, over several years, to help identify and mitigate Brexit-related risks that could impact on foreign direct investment in Ireland.

In addition, ever since the UK referendum in June 2016, IDA Ireland has sought opportunities to attract further Brexit-related investment to Ireland, securing 92 Brexit-related investments with an associated jobs potential of 5,900 in that time. The IDA has taken steps to diversify its source markets for foreign direct investment. The Agency has restructured its European operations to treat the UK as a separate market and will also deploy additional resources in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America.

IDA Ireland continues to emphasise the core elements of Ireland's value proposition for foreign direct investment. Our strengths – including our pro-enterprise policy environment, highly-educated English-speaking workforce and our membership of the European Union – remain attractive to international investors.

LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICES

Brexit measures through the 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) throughout the country are focused on information and awareness, market diversification, increased competitiveness and promoting innovation. As well as Brexit, related mentoring and training the LEOs have also delivered specific Brexit initiatives for micro-enterprises, including:

- 3,267 participants attended Brexit Information events aimed at core and non-core clients through the LEOs online training platforms;
- Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters Grants were available to incentivise clients to explore and develop new market opportunities. 1,072 clients were approved assistance under this measure in 2020 which is more than double the number approved in 2019.

INTERTRADEIRELAND

As the SMEs assisted by InterTrade Ireland (ITI) may be significantly impacted by Brexit, the Department once again provided additional funding to ITI in 2020. This enabled ITI to further enhance the:

- Brexit Advisory Service which provides a range of tailored measures. In total the Brexit Advisory Service engaged directly with over 3,897 SMEs across the island.
- 'Brexit Start to Plan Vouchers' valued at €2,250, to enable companies to obtain specialist advice on issues such as currency planning, tariffs and customs, regulatory requirements and taxation issues. In 2020 ITI received 962 applications for 'Start to Plan' Vouchers for SMEs and approved 856.

NATIONAL STANDARDS AUTHORITY OF IRELAND

The National Standards Authority of Ireland's (NSAI) focus in terms of Brexit is to examine the risks and opportunities for businesses in terms of product certification and the application of EU, ISO, and British standards post-Brexit. During 2020 NSAI's Brexit Unit engaged extensively with businesses and trade organisations throughout Ireland, holding a series of roadshow events and issuing factsheets on specific sectoral areas. NSAI have developed information measures to help Irish businesses in their preparations to minimise the impact of Brexit, protect their supply chains and to maintain access to the UK market.

In 2020 the NSAI delivered on several Brexit initiatives including:

- Enhancing on-line access to Brexit materials through a Brexit portal;
- Frequently Asked Questions on Electrical Equipment and Product Certification;
- Fact Sheets for key sectors;
- Migrated Brexit Messaging to on-line platforms with;
 - 11 Brexit webinars including Irish Exporters Association, IBEC, Quantity Surveyors Association and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
 - Delivered a Brexit Live Autumn Series of webinars, to over 650 attendees,
 - Presenting at the Manufacturing Supply Chain and Electrical Manufacturers and Distribution Association conferences

- NSAI Brexit Unit facilitated the Irish Notified Bodies Network meetings with the addition of three new subgroups, Construction, Pressure Vessels and Electrical/Radio.

NSAI assisted the Government *Getting Ireland Brexit Ready* initiatives through presenting at the LEO's Lunch and Learn Series, Monaghan Co. Council's Construction Brexit Briefing and Dundalk Chamber of Commerce/ITI and Dundalk LEO briefings.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION

The Department leads on Ireland's engagement with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) ⁹, a specialist UN agency. Ireland is serving a 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 the Social Partners, to reflect the fact that the ILO is a tripartite organisation.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused severe disruption to the ILO's calendar of work. The GB meeting and International Labour Conference in March and June 2020 respectively were cancelled. However, the ILO continued to progress its work programme virtually through online mechanisms and the November GB took place remotely over a two week period. In July, an ILO Global Summit '*Building a better future of work*', which over five days was the largest ever online gathering of workers, employers and governments, discussed how to address the economic and social impacts of the pandemic. President Michael D. Higgins addressed the Summit on the Global Leaders Day.

TRADE AGREEMENTS AND TRADE MISSIONS

The Department, on behalf of Ireland, worked closely with the European Union Commission and Member States to bring several trade agreements to a successful conclusion.

The trade-facilitating package to eliminate or reduce customs duties for a small number of tariff lines was agreed between the EU and US in August 2020. This first agreement on tariff elimination between the EU and US in over twenty years was a notable achievement and can serve as a means of building much needed positive momentum in the EU-US trade relations and can serve as a means of building much needed positive momentum in EU-US trade relations.

On 1 August 2020 the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (FTA) entered into force, following its signing the previous year. On 28 April 2020, the EU and Mexico concluded the last outstanding element covering the reciprocal opening of public procurement markets, in the negotiation of the new EU-Mexico FTA. The new Agreement will expand the existing agreement to include regulatory cooperation, additional trade in agriculture and public procurement. The Agreement will provide a platform to increase Irish exports to Mexico,

⁹ In June 2017, Ireland was elected as Titulaire member of the ILO Governing Body (GB) for the period 2017-20. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the Titulaire period was extended to 2021. This is the first time Ireland has been elected to a Titulaire seat (one with speaking and voting rights) since we joined the ILO in 1923. Ireland concluded a term as Regional Coordinator of the ILO Western European Group in November 2020.

including for Ireland's important Agri-food sector especially for dairy, pork and beef products. Negotiations for separate FTAs with Australia and New Zealand continued in 2020 with the expectation of reaching an agreement in both negotiations in 2021.

The EU and China signed a bilateral agreement to protect 100 European Geographical Indications (GIs) in China, including Irish Whiskey and Irish Cream and 100 Chinese GIs in the European Union against usurpation and imitation. The Agreement will enter into force in 2021. In addition, at the end of 2020, the EU and China concluded negotiations in relation to a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) that once ratified will improve market access for Irish and European investors to the Chinese market of 1.4bn people across economic sectors. Once ratified, CAI will be the most ambitious investment agreement that China has ever concluded with a third country. In addition to rules against the forced transfer of technologies, CAI will also be the first agreement to deliver on obligations for the behaviour of state-owned enterprises and comprehensive transparency rules for subsidies.

The Department also continued to work with the European Commission and Member States to ensure that Ireland's interests are promoted and safeguarded in other ongoing EU trade negotiations. Work continued on the evolution of EU trade defence instruments and other EU trade defence legislation including an amended Enforcement Regulation agreed in October 2020 and ongoing discussions on progressing the International Procurement Instrument which is considered to be a key legislative goal for the EU in 2021.

Following conclusion of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement negotiations in June 2019, an Economic and Sustainability Impact Assessment of the EU-Mercosur trade deal was tendered for by the Department in December 2019 in conjunction with Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine. The impact assessment is due to be concluded in early 2021.

WORKING CLOSER WITH OUR AGENCIES TO ACHIEVE TRADE AND INVESTMENT GOALS

Growing protectionism in international trade markets, the weakening of the multilateral trading architecture, major global trade disputes, the decision by the UK to withdraw from the EU by 31 December 2020 and the challenges posed by COVID-19 continued to require the development of appropriate inputs from the Department throughout 2020. Effective coordination between the Department and its Agencies resulted in the development of strategic policy responses in the areas of enterprise development, innovation, trade policy and negotiations, while seeking to sustain existing levels of inward investment and strong export performance.

Ministerial-led Trade and Investment Missions help the Government's major drive towards market diversification. In recent years these Missions have focused on promoting the innovative capabilities and competitive offerings of Irish companies to international buyers in sectors including internationally traded services, fintech, high-tech construction, engineering, ICT and life sciences. Trade Missions are just one part of a comprehensive programme of international trade events delivered by the Department's enterprise Agencies, giving Irish companies the opportunity to meet with potential buyers and network with key influencers in countries around the world.

A programme of promotional events, which had been designed to outline the benefits that such agreements offer to Irish exporters, had been planned for implementation in 2020. COVID-19 restrictions on meetings in indoor arenas, however, prevented effective delivery of this objective. As it became evident that the proposed stakeholder gatherings could not take place due to the health risks posed by COVID-19, the Department utilised the opportunities provided by web based and other social media platforms to increase awareness of the material that the Department, its Agencies and the European Commission had developed to promote the benefits that EU trade agreements offer to Irish exporters, including the Department's report on the role played by it and its Agencies in promoting trade and investment objectives in 2019. Promotion of our companies abroad continued through the work of our State Agencies, and, in particular, their offices located on the ground internationally.

In the final quarter of 2020, the Department engaged with its Agencies with a view to exploring if a Ministerial-led Trade Mission Programme could be developed for delivery in 2021, having regard to the growing increase in the number of COVID-19 cases detected around the globe. The 2021 Trade Mission Programme will contain a mix of virtual and in person trade missions, however its implementation will be contingent on the latest public health travel advice.

As well as the global efforts assisted by our Agencies, key to our success in growing exports in recent years has been our commitment to trade liberalisation in order to open new markets for our indigenous sectors. As noted, the EU has successfully concluded a number of important trade agreements with trading partners and is in the process of negotiating or upgrading its agreements with many more.

EU DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET STRATEGY

A new EU medium-term digital strategy entitled *Shaping Europe's Digital Future* was launched on 19 February 2020. For the next five years, the Commission will focus on three key objectives to ensure that digital solutions help Europe pursue its own way towards a digital transformation that works for the benefit of people through respecting European values. These objectives are: Technology that works for the people; A fair and competitive digital economy; and Open, democratic and sustainable society. In September 2020, the Commission President proposed a key initiative for 2021 - *Communication on Europe's Digital Decade: 2030 Digital Targets*. This proposes a common plan for digital Europe with clearly defined goals towards 2030 with a focus on data, artificial intelligence, digital platforms and connectivity.

Following a meeting of the D9+ countries in Warsaw in December 2019, the D9+ subsequently prepared a non-paper for the European Commission in May 2020 on the Digital Services Act Package. The D9+ is a Ministerial level group of like-minded countries, including Ireland, based on their position on the Digital Economy and Society Index that meet to discuss Digital Single Market issues. It comprises the nine top-ranked European countries in the European Commission Annual Digital Economy and Society Index plus a small number of other countries who share similar ambitions for the Digital Single Market. The D9+ met virtually in June 2020, where the focus was on the EU Whitepaper on artificial

intelligence. In October 2020 the D9+ provided a non-paper to the European Commission on innovative and trustworthy Artificial Intelligence.

NATIONAL METROLOGY LABORATORY

NSAI's National Metrology Laboratory (NML) is a partner in the European Metrology Programme for Innovation and Research (EMPIR) which coordinates research projects to address large scale challenges in health, energy, environment and industry in addition to building research capacity throughout EU member states. NML participated in three EMPIR projects in 2020. The joint research project VersiCaL, which is being coordinated by NSAI, is now in its final year.

NSAI was also a co-author of presentations at two international conferences and of a paper published in the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Transactions on Instrumentation and Measurement. Arising from the project, a digital impedance bridge has been constructed at NML and is undergoing validation. In future, it should allow NML to realise a reference scale for electrical impedance without relying on extensive external calibrations.

During 2020 NML's Time & Frequency calibration capabilities further enhanced as its primary cesium frequency standard was officially accepted by the International Bureau of Weights and Measures (BIPM) Time Department as an atomic clock now contributing to the calculation of International Atomic Time (TAI) and Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) through Circular T 394.

The NML now maintains an internationally recognised National Timescale (UTC (NSAI)) traceable to Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) and will investigate disseminating this timescale to interested Irish entities during 2021. This Primary Standard provides for direct traceability to the S.I. definition of the second.

Goal 7: INVEST IN AND SUPPORT OUR STAFF TO FURTHER ENHANCE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CAPACITY, ENSURE HIGH STANDARDS OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND OPTIMISE ALL OUR RESOURCES TO DELIVER OUR STRATEGY, MISSION AND GOALS

The Corporate functions covered under this goal include cross departmental areas of Governance, Human Resources, IT, Finance, Communications, Facilities Management (including Health & Safety) and Internal Audit.

INTERNAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Corporate functions played a leading role in supporting the Department and its Offices to continue to function and deliver enhanced services throughout the pandemic. Some highlights include:

- All staff were equipped to work from home within days of Government direction and ICT systems were enhanced and upgraded, including video conferencing, to ensure all services continued to be delivered;
- Our buildings were made safe in line with public health guidance with signage, PPE and protocols to ensure social distancing and safety of staff who had to do essential work onsite;
- Systems were put in place to redeploy staff quickly to areas of urgent need to respond to the needs of enterprise – staff showed great flexibility to move into and create new roles;
- Our Department's Vote doubled during 2020 reflecting the exponential ramp up in existing and new schemes to meet the needs of business;
- Our internal and external communications approaches moved online with a big increase in our social media presence and internal communications systems – innovative ways were found to engage staff at all levels and ensure high levels of connectivity;
- A new Enterprise Information Centre was established as a dedicated resource for information on the wide range of assistance available to business initially dealing with COVID-19 but then expanded to include Brexit information - the Centre responded to over 11,200 calls and emails in 2020.
- Following a survey of staff an internal COVID-19 Working Group involving 40+ staff from all grades and areas of the Department was set up to help inform steps that were taken to support staff working from home and the future blending working being planned;
- Promotion competitions and learning and development for staff moved online – this involved a redrawing of processes and procedures and new approaches including to onboard new staff and support staff mobility;
- We launched our first Wellbeing Framework on 1 May 2020 which included a series of new initiatives to support the physical, mental and social wellbeing of all staff.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO SEEK EFFICIENCIES AND IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE

The Department's internal ICT service was significantly impacted by COVID-19. In response to the first lockdown, the Department had to shift at short notice from a predominantly office-based operating model to full remote working for all but a minority of staff who were needed on site. This involved the successful deployment of over 800 staff, using a mix of laptops and desktops, to remote working. In addition, video conferencing services were ramped up substantially to facilitate ongoing collaboration between staff, particularly in light of significant increases in many workloads in response to the crisis.

A number of improvements were made to the Department's networks during the year to keep up with increased network traffic arising from remote working. Because of the shift to remote working, and the need to continue service delivery to the Department's customers using remote delivery models, process improvements were rapidly rolled out in a number of business areas. These included employment permits processing and issue, processing of export licenses, and processes in the Labour Court.

Despite the need to respond rapidly to the crisis, a number of other initiatives were delivered during the year:

- a new ICT strategy was finalised and agreed for the Department, which sets out our ambitions for ICT service delivery and change out to 2025;
- the Companies Registration Office was assisted in the roll out of a very significant renewal of its customer facing and back office systems;
- in the Intellectual Property Office of Ireland, a consolidation of its public facing systems was delivered, which will enhance options for support;
- assistance was provided to the Workplace Relations Commission to deliver a new module to help mediation services;
- the Department continued its programme of moving services to the Build to Share shared services platform, including systems for risk management and internal helpdesk support;
- given the additional risks posed by the move to remote working, a continued focus was placed on cyber security education and awareness, including the roll out of a phishing awareness campaign; and finally
- a strong focus continued to be placed on delivering robust, secure and fit for purpose services, for both internal and external customers.

ADAPTING OUR ACCOMODATION ARRANGEMENTS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

In response to COVID-19, the Department and its Offices had to quickly implement a number of accommodation related measures to COVID-19 proof our locations for the health and safety of our staff and any visitors who were onsite undertaking any essential business. The Department and its Offices are based across 11 different buildings around the country. Typically, we share locations with other public bodies and/or with private sector companies

and so each location required a tailored response to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to each specific building. Measures in response included physical adjustments to office and communal areas to facilitate social distancing requirements, COVID-19 related signage, provision of certain PPE and new protocols regarding onsite presence in line with public health requirements.

FOCUS ON STAFF WELLBEING DURING COVID-19

From the outset the Management Board was very conscious of the need to support the staff of the Department to deal with the professional and personal challenges associated with the pandemic. We did this by allocating functional responsibility for Wellbeing to a Unit in the Department and we developed and launched our first Wellbeing Framework on 1 May 2020 to coincide with National Workplace Wellbeing Day. The Framework spans the four pillars of Physical Fitness, Mental Fitness, Nutrition and Social Wellbeing and was developed in consultation with staff who volunteered to be part of our Wellbeing Working Group. Initiatives delivered include: Wellbeing resources on our Intranet and a monthly Wellbeing Newsletter, Lunchtime webinars with the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service and experts on various health topics, a book club, yoga/pilates classes online.

To fully support staff and make sure they had up to date information on all corporate developments related to COVID-19 we set up a dedicated section on the Department's intranet (Bob). In addition, the Secretary General issued an all staff email every day from mid-March until the end of June. From July, it moved to a weekly update and has continued since then as it has proven very popular with staff, connecting them and keeping them up to date with what the Department is doing to support enterprise through policy and programmes and what is happening at a corporate level.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Despite the significant increase in the Departments functions, many new schemes and a doubling of the Budget, the Department achieved all of this with a modest increase in staffing. Numbers serving in the Department were 927 (879.87 FTE) at the end of 2019 and 940 (895.51 FTE) at end 2020. With the change of Government in 2020, the Department saw changes in its structure and mandate with the transfer of some of its research functions to the newly established Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the transfer in of employment affairs related activities from the Department of Employment Affairs and trade functions from the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Human Resources (HR) functions were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020: the wholesale shift to remote working and the resource needs that emerged in response to the crisis became the primary focus for HR across the year and required re-prioritisation of certain work streams.

The evolution of remote working as the primary means of working throughout 2020 also created opportunities for the Department to use technology to further streamline and 'move online' where possible.

A staff survey conducted in June provided up-to-date data on staff needs and allowed for responsive actions to be taken.

Extra efforts were made by HR to engage with particular staff cohorts to ensure their needs were being met in light of the challenges of remote working and the pandemic. This included regular additional meetings with Unions through the Departmental Council, and one-to-one engagement with new entrants to the Department.



COVID-19 WORKING GROUP

The staff survey conducted in June led to the development of an action plan and establishment of a COVID-19 Working Group to oversee progress, led by HR and the Facilities Management (including Health & Safety) Units, with over 40 colleagues from across the Department participating from all Divisions and each of the Offices. 14 high-level actions were identified which were underpinned by close to 50 initiatives/activities. These span across five thematic areas of Equipment & Ergonomics, Managing Staff Remotely, Health & Wellbeing, Communications for Teams and Remote Working now and in normal times.

RECRUITMENT, ASSIGNMENTS AND WORKFORCE PLANNING

In light of COVID-19 restrictions, HR developed new methodologies for continued delivery of resource pipelines. Internal promotional campaigns and other competitions moved online. There were 16 internal competitions during 2020, comprising 218 applications; 15 of these competitions were managed virtually.

HR continued to liaise with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to recruit general grades from open and interdepartmental recruitment campaigns. The PAS also managed a further 10 campaigns on behalf of the Department to recruit for positions in the Workplace Relations Commission and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, and to acquire specialist legal skills for the Department.

As part of the Department's succession planning and to provide the ability to recruit specific skillsets in a timely manner, the Department applied for and secured a recruitment license from the Commission for PAS.

Using workforce planning and engagement with senior management, we ensured that a 'fit for purpose' workforce continued to be built, optimising skillsets and making the best possible person-to-post matches to deliver on the Department's goals. An additional 40 staff were approved to strengthen policy units across the Department and 10 additional staff were approved for the Workplace Relations Commission. The additional posts were approved to deliver new commitments set out in the Programme for Government and to assist the Department's response to COVID-19. Posts filled helped initiatives such as the design, development and rollout of vital schemes to assist businesses in Ireland impacted by the health crisis and a new Enterprise Information Centre.

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

- 95 new entrants;
- 92 exits, including 32 retirements;
- 78 internal transfers; and
- 36 promotions.

In line with Civil Service Renewal, the Department has engaged strongly with the Civil Service Wide Mobility Schemes for all participating grade levels since its inception.

The Department also continued to ensure adequate support for staffing in its nine Agencies and the State Boards under its aegis. There were 186 requests processed to deal with the filling of vacancies and establishment of new posts for Agencies, the large caseload partly attributable to the increased need for resources as a result of Brexit.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In line with the strategic reprioritisation arising from the pandemic, in mid-March the majority of staff in the Learning and Development Unit were redeployed to assist in the Department's response to COVID-19 and remained engaged in these activities for much of the year.

However, a portfolio of online training opportunities and learning resources was made available to staff throughout the Department. In the course of the year, over 300 staff attended a range of sessions related to the Department's remit including competitiveness policy, national standardisation processes, the new European Commission and the legislative process.

Through the Advance Payment of Fees Scheme, the Department funded the enrolment of 21 staff in academic courses in 2020 and maintained its assistance for 28 staff continuing their studies for qualifications from Diploma through to Doctorate level 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 were adapted to facilitate online delivery and continued to act as significant tools to help staff growth and development. Some 70 staff participated as either mentees or mentors in the mentor programme. Targeted at senior management, 16 staff at Assistant Principal and Principal level accessed a course of tailored one-on-one sessions with professionally certified external executive coaches.

Leadership development was further aided through staff engagement in the Principal Officer Executive Leadership programme and the Taking the Lead – Women in Leadership Programme. The Senior Management Forum, delivered in January 2020, provided a strategic focus on the challenges and opportunities of climate action.

Over the course of the year, OneLearning, the Civil Service Learning and Development Service, increased its online offering, providing almost 30 different course types through virtual classrooms. In 2020, Department staff completed almost 350 OneLearning courses, 311 of which were virtual, in areas including people management, communication and presentation skills and customer services. We also designed an action research programme 'Connected Teams', anticipating that blended working in home, hub or workplace is here to stay, the objective of the initiative is planned to identify and promote best practice remote and blended working behaviours which will be rolled out in the first of half of 2021.



FINANCE

Funding the Department's BREXIT and COVID-19 Response

The Revised Estimates Volume published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in December 2019 originally provided the Department with a gross allocation of €970.9m for use in 2020. The actual Estimate approved by the Dáil in June 2020 increased the Department's allocation to €1.453bn. This was subsequently increased to €1.907bn in the Further Revised Estimate approved by the Dáil in November 2020. This almost doubling of funding of the Department Vote was key to enabling the Department, our Offices and Agencies to roll out essential and timely initiatives to assist businesses and consumers as they sought to navigate through the very significant challenges of COVID-19 and Brexit. This required detailed analysis and delivery of appropriate schemes to assist business at every stage of the pandemic

Among the headline schemes launched by the Department in 2020 were the Restart Grant, the Sustaining Enterprise Fund, the COVID-19 Products Scheme, the Ready for Customs Scheme, and the Business Continuity Scheme. The increased funding also allowed the Department to broaden its suite of access to finance measures by extending the facilities available under the Future Growth Loan Scheme, the Working Capital Scheme, the Microfinance Ireland Loan Scheme as well as introducing the discrete COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme.

In addition to the new initiatives rolled out in 2020, the Department was also able to increase the funding to bodies such as the Local Enterprise Offices, Intertrade Ireland as well as

increasing the funding for existing Schemes such as the Online Retail Scheme and the Trading Online Vouchers.

The COVID-19 pandemic also required the Department to adapt its procedures to the remote working environment to ensure that it continued to successfully meet its obligations to its suppliers and employees.

COMMUNICATIONS

When COVID-19 restrictions were imposed in early 2020, it was no longer possible to promote Departmental policies through stakeholder events and press launches. A greater emphasis was therefore placed on using digital channels to communicate the work of our Ministers, policy and programme development and implementation.

Among the campaigns run on our digital platforms were those to assist business through the impacts of COVID-19 and Brexit, including: the COVID-19 Supports for Businesses campaign; the National Return to Work Safely Protocol; the Credit Guarantee Scheme; the Online Retail Scheme; Shop Safely campaign; and Brexit supports for Business.

This change in emphasis was met with a corresponding greater engagement on our digital channels, most notably on LinkedIn, which increased almost fourfold from a base of just under 10,000 followers, and increasing to almost 50,000 followers by mid 2021. Posts on our LinkedIn account had over 1.6m impressions during the year.

The Department's Twitter (*@DeptEnterprise*) following also grew, albeit more modestly than our LinkedIn engagement. The number of followers increased by more than a fifth to over 28,000 and our tweets received over 11.9m impressions. Engagement was primarily around COVID-19 supports for business, followed by Brexit supports, Shop Safely and the Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund.

The Department's website recorded over 2.4m sessions, from over 1.3m users in 2020. This was an increase of 36% and 83%, respectively, on 2019 figures. The most popular content being Employment Permits, COVID-19 business initiatives and the Work Safely Protocol. More traditional press engagement continued meanwhile, through the issuing of press releases and dealing with journalists' queries from across all media platforms.

Internally, remote working fundamentally changed how staff within the Department interacted. The vast majority of staff moved from seeing colleagues and friends in person, to video or phone calls. In the absence of that human interaction, the Department's intranet (Bob), grew in importance as a trusted source of corporate and social information. We found that those traditional occasions where we come together like Christmas, the celebration of retirements and our annual past members service were replaced with additional articles and high-quality video content on Bob. It was extremely positive that staff interacted strongly with these new photographic and video based social occasions, sharing personal stories of challenges faced and resilience they found when dealing with adversity and making the most of the year it was.

CHANGE OF NAME, TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS AND DELEGATIONS TO MINISTERS OF STATE

Following the change of Government, the Department's name was changed and with it were some changes to functions. Work was undertaken across the Department to effect the new name with changes including to branding, emails address, website domain name, social media and internal communications. Delegation Orders were arranged to provide for delegation of business, employment and retail functions to Minister English and trade promotion, digital and company regulation functions to Minister Troy. Significant work was undertaken to implement decisions around the transfer of functions in and out of the Department. This work was undertaken in line with procedures set out in the Transfer of Functions Guidelines and Best Practise Handbook and included defining the scope of responsibilities to transfer, identifying staff and financial resources to transfer and making arrangements for the effective dates and consequent changes to our Vote. There were five separate streams of work involved, four relating to new functions coming into the Department and one relating to transferring out existing work. Science functions, including responsibility for Science Foundation Ireland and the Tyndall Institute, were transferred out to new Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science with effect from 1 January 2021. Areas of work that transferred into the Department during 2020 included:

- Trade promotion from the Department of Foreign Affairs;
- Employment rights, redundancy and insolvency policy from the Department of Social Protection;
- The Low Pay Commission from the Department of Social Protection;
- Balance for Better Business Group from the Department of Justice;
- Trading Online Vouchers from the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

INTERNAL RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE ACTION CHALLENGE

Resource Efficiency Action Plan 2019/20

The Department's first *Resource Efficiency Action Plan (REAP)* was published in mid-2019 and is available on our website. It sets out numerous actions that we are undertaking internally across our buildings with a focus on 4 thematic areas of Energy, Waste Management, Water usage and Ecology/Plant life, with the second action plan due for publication in early 2021.

The *REAP* is driven by a very active internal 'Green Team' comprising over 40 members across the Department and its Offices who work collaboratively to raise awareness on 'Green' issues, implement initiatives and manage improvements in processes and buildings across the 4 thematic areas.

Since publication of the first *REAP* the Department's 'Green Team' has identified 78 specific actions, completing 40 of them, with 23 other actions ongoing and 15 additional actions planned for commencement in 2021. The major project successfully delivered in 2020 was a LED Lighting upgrade completed on the Department's headquarters at 23 Kildare Street, Dublin, as part of the *OPW Optimising Power@Work programme*.

Energy Performance

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's Annual Report 2020 on Public Sector Energy Efficiency performance shows that the Department has delivered 52.9% in energy savings since the baseline year (2009) well in excess of the initial 33% target set for public bodies and well positioned to deliver beyond the 2030 target of 50%.

Obligations to Monitor and Report on Green Public Procurement

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform Circular 20/2019 requires that starting with the 2020 Annual Reports each Department must report annually on its green public procurement (GPP).

Monitoring and evaluation of GPP is under consideration at EU level and most recently referenced in the EU Green Deal. 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 2020, valued at over €25,000 by priority sector, which have incorporated GPP.

CIVIL SERVICE RENEWAL

The Department has strongly supported the actions set out in the Civil Service Renewal Plan and has played a leading role on several projects, including the assignment of staff to support this agenda in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. . The third Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey launched in 2020, representing an opportunity for staff to have their say on how their own organisations have responded to the challenging findings of previous surveys.

The annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards were 'paused' in 2020. Instead, a Virtual Recognition Event was held on 26 November to formally recognise and showcase the initiatives developed in response to the COVID-19 crisis in a challenging and fast changing environment; the Department's considered a number of worthy projects and selected the project for the Contingency Plan to Ensure the Continuation of Ireland's Employment Permit System. The Offices of the Department submitted the WRC Remote Working Information and Customer Service lo-call phone service, and the Labour Court Virtual Courtroom. Other innovative projects included the Enterprise Information Centre and Remote Video Interviews.

Innovate@ETE

At the end of 2020, in line with the change in the Department's official name, the former 'dbeinnovation' steering group was re-branded 'Innovate@ETE'. In 2020, seven sub-groups of staff members carried out work programmes under the governance of the Innovate@ETE steering group. Key achievements in 2020 included:

1. Department's Decade of Centenaries Committee: "The 23 Kildare Street Talks - The Countess, Casualties and The Civil Service"
2. Innovation Culture: Webinar on opportunities and barriers to innovation
3. Knowledge Management: Roadmap for action
4. Manager Behaviour: Development of a paper on 'Coaching' culture in the Department

5. Mobility: Working with COVID-19 group on 'Principles of Remote Working' document
6. Wellbeing: Schedule of events and fortnightly newsletter to support staff wellbeing
7. Green Team: Awareness and information campaign; energy, heating and water upgrades

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

Action 6 of 'Our Public Service 2020' aims to 'Promote a Culture of Innovation in the Public Service'. The Department has been playing a central role in progressing this Action with Secretary General, Dr Orlaigh Quinn, and Enterprise Ireland CEO, Julie Sinnamon, acting as designated leads. Assistant Secretary Pauline Mulligan is the Action's Sponsor and is responsible for chairing the Action 6 team, established in May 2018 and comprising sectoral experts across the Public Service.

By end 2020 the group and its associated Project Management Office (PMO) in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform have delivered the following initiatives:

- Study on the maturity of our innovation system giving us a baseline for benchmarking progress;
- Drafting and adoption of the Public Service Declaration;
- Secondment of sectoral experts to the PMO;
- Establishment of the Public Service Innovation Fund;
- Establishment of the Public Service Innovation Network;
- Widening of Civil Service Excellence & Innovation Awards to the broader Public Service for certain categories; and
- Development and roll out of a range of innovation L&D offerings to build capacity and capability of staff to embed innovation in their day-to-day work.

The group aims to continue to support the ongoing Public Service reform agenda in 2021.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Department places great emphasis on strong and effective corporate governance. The Management Board is supported by the team in Governance, Information and Management Support Unit in ensuring best practice and adherence to all our obligations.

Governance Framework

The Department's Governance Framework sets out what we mean by governance, why it is important, how the Department does its work and how it operates to deliver on its mandate and functions. It ensures that the way the Department takes decisions and implements policies is more transparent to the public and, of equal importance, to the staff within the Department.

Compliance Framework

A Compliance Framework is in place and provides an overview of all compliance assurance activity in the Department and identifies where responsibility for each compliance obligation lies.

Risk Management

A series of risk awareness training sessions were provided during 2019 and 2020 for staff at Principal and Assistant Principal grades with two thirds of staff in those grades attending the sessions which were developed and delivered internally.

In March 2020, the final report of the Audit of Risk Management in the Department was received and the Audit Committee noted that the report provided assurance that good risk management practices were being adhered to and that the risk management structures in place in the Department were robust. The report found that there was a positive culture regarding risk management at senior management level in the Department.

In November 2020, the Management Board agreed a revised Risk Management Policy for the Department which included recommendations from the internal audit of risk, suggestions made by staff at the awareness and training sessions and a new risk scoring system to align with the eRisk application that is being developed by the OGCIO and is being introduced across the Department in early 2021.

INTERNAL AUDIT

The Internal Audit function provided assurance to the Secretary General and advice regarding the Department's financial and other internal processes and procedures during 2020, based on internationally accepted standards adopted for the Civil Service by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Internal Audit's role is to review the effectiveness of the internal controls in place across the Department and to evaluate how well risks are being managed by assessing the quality of risk management processes, systems of internal control and corporate governance processes, across the organisation.

Internal Audit Unit reviewed its annual work plan in 2020, in the context of the impact of COVID-19 on the Department's business operations and priorities and adopted a balanced approach towards progressing audit activity. Areas reviewed in 2020 included a review of the risk management framework, a review of compliance with GDPR and data protection requirements and oversight of a sample of agencies under the aegis of the Department. The table below includes a listing of audit reports completed during the year.

Audit Reports presented to the Audit Committee in 2020
Risk Management
GDPR Compliance
IDA Ireland – Liaison & Governance
Science & Technology Development Programme – Liaison & Governance
Irish Auditing and Accounting Supervisory Authority – Liaison and Governance

Review of Systems of Internal Control 2019
Subscriptions to International Organisations
Fixed Assets Management

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION

Throughout 2020, 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 addition to the standard training and information sessions delivered by our DPO for staff, a number of tailored training sessions were also designed and delivered to assist staff in dealing with additional data protection compliance requirements posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. A dedicated data protection mailbox was also administered by the DPO to deal with data protection queries from members of the public.

In 2020, the Department and its Offices received 40 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 2020 and is published on our website.

PROTECTED DISCLOSURES ACT, 2014

The Department published its Annual Report on Protected Disclosures for 2019 on the Department's website in June 2020.

PROMPT PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS ACT, 1997

During 2020 the Department published on its website quarterly payment performance reports for both the Department and for the bodies under its aegis.

GENDER BALANCE ON STATE BOARDS

The Department continues to commit to encouraging gender balance on all State Board appointments. Senior Management of the Department always reference gender balance in board member selection. The current gender composition of a board is always considered by Ministers on appointments/re-appointments.

IRISH LANGUAGE SCHEME 2019-2022

The Department's Third Irish Language Scheme, which was approved by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, 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 2020, 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

The Department's Customer Charter 2019-2021 is a public statement which sets out the standards and level of service customers can expect when dealing with our Department. The Customer Service Action Plan 2019-2021 details the ways in which the Department implements the key actions outlined in the Charter.

Throughout 2020, 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's internal Cross Divisional Monitoring Committee, which monitors the implementation of the commitments made in the Department's Customer Action Plan and Irish Language Scheme met regularly throughout 2020. This forum served to ensure that any challenges arising regarding meeting commitments that were due for delivery in 2020 were addressed.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The Department's Freedom of Information (FOI) Publication Scheme was first published in 2016 and updated in 2018 in accordance with Section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act 2014. The Scheme sets out information, under 6 headings, to assist members of the public in their understanding of the Department and its functions. In 2020 the Department received 218 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. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published the Guide to Periodic Critical Review of Non-Commercial State Bodies in September 2020. Due to the exceptional nature of 2020 and the Department's leading role in the whole-of-Government response to the COVID-19 crisis and in Brexit preparations, such PCRs for Agencies of this Department have been deferred to take place in 2022.

IRISH HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY COMMISSION ACT, 2014

In line with our obligations under this Act, 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 2020, a team with representatives from each Division was formed to progress the implementation of the Public Services Human Rights and Equality Duty.

Examples of the Department's work in the area of Human Rights and Equality include:

Workplace Relations Commission

The WRC is the independent body set up by law to investigate or mediate complaints of discrimination. The WRC is covered by the European Convention on Human Rights. Discrimination happens when a person is treated less favourably than another person is, has been or would be treated. Victimisation is also covered by the legislation.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is when businesses and other organisations integrate their social and environmental responsibilities into their mainstream business operations and business decisions are made with reference to wider sustainability issues. The Department provides the secretariat for the enterprise led CSR Stakeholder Forum which oversees the implementation of the actions in the National Corporate Social Responsibility Plan.

National Women and Girls Strategy

The Department is represented on the Strategic Committee of the National Women and Girls Strategy 2017-2020. We contribute to the common actions such as the development of in-house expertise in gender mainstreaming activities and considering gender impact in the development of new strategies.

National Disability Inclusion Strategy

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 takes a whole of Government approach to improving the lives of people with disabilities both in a practical sense and also in creating the best possible opportunities for people with disabilities to fulfil their potential. The Department is represented on and is progressing actions under both the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021 and Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024.

In 2020, the Department's Disability Consultative Committee (DCC) met once virtually and members were circulated with 18 emails throughout the year to provide updates on COVID-19. Members were also circulated with information on relevant workshops and seminars held during 2020. Membership of the DCC is comprised of representatives from the Disability Stakeholder Group, the National Disability Authority and staff from across the Department and its Offices and Agencies.

Other Relevant Legislation

In addition to the above, the Department operates within employment law and other relevant legislation that seek to ensure, amongst other things, human rights and equality, such as:

Civil Service Regulation Act, Public Service Management Act, Paternity Leave and Benefit Act, Equality Act, Industrial Relations Act, Workplace Relations Act, Data Protection Act, Employees (Provision of Information and Consultation) Act, Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, Maternity Protection Act, Carer's Leave Act, Organisation of Working Time Act, Unfair Dismissals Act.

CHILDREN FIRST ACT, 2015

The Department has a Child Safeguarding Statement in place which has been developed in line with requirements under the Children First Act 2015, the Children's First National Guidance and Tusla's Child Safeguarding: A guide for policy, procedure and practice. The Department is committed to the implementation of this Child Safeguarding Statement and

the procedures that assist our intention to keep children safe from harm while working with staff of the Department.

Appendix 1 **BILLS ENACTED IN 2020**

- Microenterprise Loan Fund (Amendment) Act 2020 was enacted 10 July 2020
- Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Act 2020 was enacted 24 July 2020
- Companies (Miscellaneous Provisions) (COVID-19) Act 2020 was enacted on 1 August 2020

Appendix 2

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS MADE IN 2020

- S.I. No. 2 of 2020 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 14 of 2020 European Union (Cooperation Between National Authorities Responsible for the Enforcement of Consumer Protection Laws) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 18 of 2020 European Communities (Good Laboratory Practice) Regulations, 2020
- S.I. No. 24 of 2020 Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2019(Commencement) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 42 of 2020 English Language Schools Joint Labour Committee Establishment Order 2020
- S.I. No. 64 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Venezuela) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 65 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Zimbabwe) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 66 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 67 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Central African Republic) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 68 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Burundi) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 69 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Syria) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 70 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Nicaragua) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 71 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Tunisia) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 72 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Republic of Guinea) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 78 of 2020 Microenterprise Loan Fund Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 84 of 2020 European Union (Control of Exports of Personal Protective Equipment) Regulations 2020

- S.I. No. 102 of 2020 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 147 of 2020 Dangerous Substances Act 1972 (Part IV Declaration) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 156 of 2020 Employment Permits (Amendment) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 159 of 2020 European Union (Control of Exports of Personal Protective
- S.I. No. 256 of 2020 European Union (Promoting Fairness and Transparency for Business Users of Online Intermediation Services) Regulations 2020 Equipment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 275 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Primary Schools) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 276 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Post-Primary Schools) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 277 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Higher Education Institutions) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 278 of 2020 Copyright and Related Rights (Certification of Licensing Scheme for Further Education Providers) (The Irish Copyright Licensing Agency Limited) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 325 of 2020 COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme 2020
- S.I. No. 359 of 2020 Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Section 31) (Workplace Relations Commission) (Designation) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 386 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Venezuela) (No.2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 387 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Nicaragua) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 388 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Iran) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 389 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Iran) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 390 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Central African Republic) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 391 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 392 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the

- S.I. No. 393 of 2020 Democratic Republic of the Congo) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Syria) (No.2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 510 of 2020 Employment Permits (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 514 of 2020 Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Section 29) (Labour Court) (Designation) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 515 of 2020 Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2020 (Section 31) (Labour Court) (Designation) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 519 of 2020 Business, Enterprise and Innovation (Alteration of Name of Department and Title of Minister) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 539 of 2020 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 579 of 2020 Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 580 of 2020 Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Delegation of Ministerial Functions) (No.2) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 586 of 2020 Research Policy and Programmes (Transfer of Departmental Administration and Ministerial Functions) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 608 of 2020 Employment Regulation (Amendment) Order (Contract Cleaning Joint Labour Committee) 2020
- S.I. No. 609 of 2020 Companies Act 1990 (Uncertificated Securities) (Amendment) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 615 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Burundi) (No.2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 616 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Central African Republic) (No.3) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 617 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures Against the Proliferation and Use of Chemical Weapons) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 618 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (No. 2) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 619 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo) (No. 3) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 620 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Syria) (No. 3) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 621 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning

- S.I. No. 622 of 2020 Venezuela) (No. 3) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 623 of 2020 European Union (Restrictive Measures concerning Iran) (No. 3) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 624 of 2020 European Union (National General Export Authorisation) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 625 of 2020 European Union (UN Firearms Protocol) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 626 of 2020 European Union (Ecodesign requirements for certain energy related products) (amendment) Regulation 2020
- S.I. No. 627 of 2020 Companies Act 2014 (Fees) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 628 of 2020 Companies Act 2014 (Forms) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 629 of 2020 Companies Act 2014 (Form and Content of Documents Delivered to Registrar) Regulations 2020
- S.I. No. 630 of 2020 Companies Act 2014 (Section 897) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 631 of 2020 Companies (Statutory Audits) Act 2018 (Commencement) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 633 of 2020 Companies (Amendment) Act 2019 (Commencement) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 671 of 2020 Credit Guarantee (Amendment) Act 2020 (Extension of Guarantee Date) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 672 of 2020 Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1893 (Section 14A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 674 of 2020 Companies Act 2014 (Section 12A (1)) (COVID-19) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 680 of 2020 Industrial Relations Act 1990 (Code of Practice for Employers and Employees on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work) Order 2020
- S.I. No. 680 of 2020 Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union (Consequential Provisions) Act 2020 (Part 5) (Commencement) Order 2020

Appendix 3 GREEN PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

Reference year 2020	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 no. 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	1	€88,000	1	€88,000
Cleaning Products & Services	1	€35,261	1	€35,261
Textiles	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
IT Equipment	3	€164,130.50	Nil	Nil
Paper	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Other				
Furniture Removal	1	€65,000	1	€65,000
Consultancy	4	€353,350	Nil	Nil
Research Study	1	€107,561	1	€107,561
Impact Assessment Study	1	€199,500	Nil	Nil
Legal Services	1	€132,612	Nil	Nil
Totals	13	€1,145,414.50	4	€295,822