

Note on 15th ENTERPRISE FORUM ON BREXIT AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Wednesday 7 October 2020

Attendees:

Leo Varadkar	Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise & Innovation
Damien English	Moss for Business, Employment and Retail
Robert Troy	Moss for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation
Giles O'Neill	Enterprise Ireland
Kieran Donoghue	IDA Ireland
Michael Ryan	Science Foundation Ireland
Mark Redmond	American Chamber of Commerce
Aisling Carney	American Chamber of Commerce
Ian Talbot	Chambers Ireland
Emma Kerins	Chambers Ireland
Paul Sweetman	Financial Services Ireland
Paul Kelly	Food Drink Ireland
Simon McKeeever	Irish Exporters Association
Anne Marie O'Brien	Irish Exporters Association
Oliver O'Connor	Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association
Danny McCoy	Ibec
Pat Ivory	Ibec
Neil Willoughby	Ibec
Neil McDonnell	ISME
Cormac Healy	Meat Industry Ireland
Duncan Graham	Retail Excellence Ireland
Arnold Dillon	Retail Ireland
Tara Buckley	RGData
Sven Spollen-Behrens	Small Firms Association
Claire Hayes Curtin	Department of An Taoiseach
Nick Barwise	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Hazel Sheridan	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
David Walsh	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Eddie Burke	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
Niamh O'Brien	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
Ray Ryan	Revenue
Linda Slatterly	Revenue
Declan Hughes	DBEI
Anne Coleman Dunne	DBEI
Nina Brennan	DBEI
Stephen Curran	DBEI
John Hughes	DBEI
Eugene Lennon	DBEI
Matt Lynch	DBEI
Cathy Madden	DBEI
Thomas Murray	DBEI
Paul McMahon	DBEI
Caroline Savage	DBEI
Helen Pyke	DBEI
Siobhán Murphy	DBEI

Item 1: Minutes from 13th meeting

- The Tánaiste welcomed all attendees.

Item 2: State of Play of EU/UK Negotiations on the Future Trading Relationship with the UK

- The Tánaiste acknowledged that businesses are facing the twin challenges of COVID-19 and Brexit but stressed the need to ensure that Brexit does not slip off the agenda and ensure members are prepared.
- Whilst the Tánaiste is optimistic that a slim FTA could be agreed, there will be change on 1st January 2021.
- Anne Coleman Dunne from the Brexit Unit in DBEI noted that the last scheduled round took place last week with gaps and differences remaining. The European Council is meeting next week which was originally seen as a watershed moment by the UK. However, in the last week this language has softened.
- It was acknowledged that, for businesses in particular, the earlier we can get clarity the better. Whilst time is short, whether a deal is reached or not, we know the realities of customs and SPS checks and issues around the landbridge and supply chain.

Item 3: Brexit Readiness Action Plan and Business Readiness

- The Tánaiste informed attendees that he will be sending out a letter to all businesses registered with the Companies Registration Office which will include an updated Brexit Readiness Checklist listing the things businesses need to do to be ready for January 2021 and the contact information for key Government Departments and Agencies who are on hand to help companies.
- Revenue's trader engagement programme was also highlighted, noting the series of webinars that took place earlier this week in which DBEI and DAFM participated.
- DBEI's agencies are also doing webinars and the message is "we're here to help".

Item 4: Tour de Table

- The Tánaiste asked the DBEI agencies in attendance to provide updates on their readiness work.
- In a recent survey of their clients Enterprise Ireland noted that 82% of those surveyed are focussed on Brexit but only 40% deem themselves Brexit ready. EI are doing a number of things to try and increase that number including through the provision of the Ready for Customs grant and a new communications campaign which was launched at the weekend. In addition, EI will launch a Brexit Readiness Checker this week which will provide participants with an individual company report with actions they need to take and the supports available. EI noted that International Markets Week is taking place this week and consultants are available to speak with companies. EI have revised all their Brexit supports and the material on the prepareforbrexit.ie website.
- IDA noted that the vast majority of their clients consider themselves well prepared for Brexit. Some issues arising from their clients include sterling/euro exposure, supply chain, Landbridge and bilateral data flows.
- SFI noted the importance of continued collaboration within the research community. SFI have several partnerships with the UK and are currently in discussions to deepen those partnerships. Discussions are also taking place regarding the development of an all island of Ireland research eco system.
- The Tánaiste invited participants to raise any particular issues of particular concern with their readiness plans. These included:
 - the confluence of the challenge of COVID-19 and Brexit;
 - the importance of reaching businesses that do not engage with any representative group;
 - regarding groceries, there is a concern that some smaller suppliers to larger retailers are not as prepared as the retailers themselves. This is also a concern for SMEs across the retail sector;
 - the impact of tariffs on the food and drink industry;
 - the need for Ireland to have a state backed credit insurance scheme which would increase Ireland's competitiveness in the global market;

- data flows through the UK and equivalence agreements;
- the need to monitor whether the supports in place are reaching the target audiences and how to increase access to finance for small business;
- customs preparation and the need for training on the new systems from Revenue and DAFM;
- alternative routes to the Landbridge;
- standards, certification and rules of origin and who will bear the cost of compliance and intermediation;
- access to new medicines produced in Ireland was noted.
- DTTAS spoke to the need for companies to examine their supply lines, assess direct routes and talk to their shipping companies regarding their asks. There is sufficient capacity in direct routes. DTTAS informed the group that the IMDO will be revisiting their previous study to test assumptions made. The study will be updated with a view to publish it in due course.
- Revenue highlighted that the new import system is available now and traders can use it to get familiar with the procedures. DAFM also highlighted the guidance available on their website on how to complete the documents for the TRACES system. They are examining training in this area.
- Revenue noted the concern around the level of preparedness for Brexit. The pressure the companies are under was acknowledged. There is nothing simple about customs; it's a complex area and there are no shortcuts. To assist companies in understanding these issues, Revenue hosted 18 back-to-back webinars in the last two days. To make sure businesses aren't hampered on 1st January, they need to engage with the information that is available.
- DAFM highlighted the level of resources already available, also at EU level. We need to ensure businesses are engaging with what is available. It was highlighted that SPS is commodity specific which adds another layer of complexity. If anyone is unclear, DAFM are available to speak with them.

Item 5: AOB

- Minister English noted the culture and practice of distribution models might need to be updated and changed. He is happy to engage with members on this.
- Minister Troy asked members to put forward suggestions as to how we can reach those companies who do not engage via business representative groups or are not client companies of the agencies.
- The Tánaiste stressed to members that Brexit is still very high on the agenda. He highlighted the crucial role that forum members play in getting the message out to their clients and thanked them for their work to date.