

INDUSTRY PARTNERS FORUM

21st September 2017

Note of Meeting

Chair: An Tánaiste and Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Frances Fitzgerald T.D.

Industry Partners

- Susan Dargan, State Street International (Ireland)
- Aisling Hassell, Airbnb Ireland
- Martin McVicar, Combilift
- Sean O'Driscoll, Glen Dimplex Group
- Louise Phelan, Paypal Europe
- Dave Shanahan, Adagio Life Sciences

Apologies:

- Liam Casey, PCH International
- Ciaran Harvey, Pramerica
- Eamon Keane, Xpreso
- Heather Reynolds, Eishtec
- Donal Dennehy, Nutricia Infant Nutrition
- Michael O'Donnell, Biomarin International
- Linda Nolan, Mybio
- Chris Martin, Musgrave Group

Introduction

The Tánaiste welcomed the attendees, set out the background for APJ 2018 and outlined the process. She set out the need for both sustainable jobs and job creation, and thanked the group for their ongoing partnership with the Department, mentioning the forthcoming invitation for the Farmleigh High Level Consultation Forum.

The discussion centred on Brexit readiness and Access to finance.

Brexit

- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provided an overview of progress to date on Brexit negotiations and the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation provided an update on its work to improve readiness for Brexit at a strategic and operational level.
- The main Brexit related issues raised were:
 - ⊖ Raising awareness of the challenges created by Brexit in light of the severe impact of the Euro/Sterling fluctuations.
 - ⊖ Need to improve access to working capital to companies whose supply chains are impacted by Brexit.
 - Brexit creates a need to move up the value chain. Product and services innovation is absolutely critical and support, including grant support is essential.
 - Strengthen SME strategic and financial know-how, to improve ability to plan for Brexit. In some instances, stabilisation plans will need to be put in place by enterprises. Businesses in the agri-food sector need to integrate further in the UK market. New strategies such as acquisition need to be explored.

Access to Finance

- The Department of Finance and the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) provided an overview of initiatives to improve access to finance and current priorities.
- The discussion focused on changing demand for funding, barriers to growth and ways to address them including:
 - New sectors (e.g. servicing the new economy/digital economy) are less capital intensive; many SMEs still need to reduce their indebtedness; and Brexit related uncertainty dampens demand for credit.
 - The reluctance of Irish businesses to explore equity financing options is apparent in the results of the SME Credit Demand Survey.
 - The need to facilitate alternative vehicles for lending (e.g. capital markets; fund managers).

Other issues discussed

- Addressing skills shortages – competitiveness and attractiveness dependant on the availability of suitably qualified employees. Re-training schemes should be made available to those working in potentially vulnerable sectors.
- Prioritising middle management training – SMEs and companies seeking to scale up need to address the challenge.
- Promote regional locations for business investment.

Also in attendance:

- Dr Orlaigh Quinn, Secretary General, DBEI
- Declan Hughes, Assistant Secretary, DBEI
- Philip Kelly, Assistant Secretary, DBEI
- Ronan Gargan, Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade
- Eric Dargan, Department of Finance

- Nick Ashmore, Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI)
- Anne Ribault- O'Reilly, DBEI
- Fran Atkinson, DBEI
- Katherine Griffin, DBEI
- Jean Carberry, DBEI
- Máire Flanagan, Department of the Taoiseach
- Gillian Smyth, Department of the Taoiseach
- Maria Ginnity, DBEI