
IEA Submission: DETE Statement of Strategy 2021-2023

*Irish Exporters Association submission to the Department of
Enterprise, Trade and Employment*

6th November 2020

Overview of the Irish Exporters Association

The Irish Exporters Association (IEA) is the leading independent representative body and voice for exporters based in Ireland. The IEA represents exporters and supply chain operators across the country and works at regional, national, and European level, representing its members in front of legislators to create a regulatory and legislative framework that supports, drives, and fosters Irish exports.

We assist our members to grow their exports to world markets and drive the growth and development of all exporting businesses based in Ireland. We provide a set of highly relevant business services and products to assist our members with international trade.

- We **represent** the needs of members in the development of policy, lobbying, intervention at Government and EU level and in the media. Brexit and the Diversification of Export Markets, Trade Compliance, Climate Change & Sustainability and their impact on Irish exporters are core to our work.
- We offer **trade services** in the form of practical training, support, and advice right across the supply chain including our Certificate in International Trade, customs awareness, GDP, export and import compliance, consular, business travel support (visa and export documentation), route to market and general assistance with trade related queries.
- We have created **knowledge networks** among our membership to support our members in exploring new markets, route to market scenario planning, understand customs and supply chain challenges and provide thought leadership through a series of events and webinars. Networking and connectivity remain an important part of membership benefits. Our Export Industry Awards programme is our flagship event that celebrates the achievements of exporting companies and highlights the importance of the export sector to Ireland.

The IEA represents the whole spectrum of companies within the export industry including SME's who are beginning to think about exporting for the first time right through to global multinational companies who are already extensively exporting from Ireland as well as the providers of key services to the sector. The IEA is the connecting force for Irish exporters, providing practical knowledge and support across the Island of Ireland and in foreign markets.

Introduction

The IEA welcomes the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's (DETE) call for feedback to its Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023. The IEA remains open and committed to working with DETE and the wider Government in the interest of Irish exporters and importers alike and the success of the wider Irish economy. The business community is grappling to work through the pandemic and the economic fallout that has ensued. Businesses are also preparing for the UK's departure from the EU's single market and customs union on 1st January 2021 and playing its part in addressing the ongoing climate crisis. There is much to be done and we, the leading representative body and voice of exporters in Ireland, will play our part and continue to partner with Government to ensure that trade continues to flow through these challenging times.

The department's Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023 comes at a time when the business community needs certainty. Delivering positive outcomes in the interest of enterprise, trade and employment is in the national interest and we believe that continued strong and effective engagement with stakeholders through the well-established stakeholder groups set up under the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation is paramount to the department's success.

We would like to thank the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment for his call for feedback on the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021 – 2023. We submit our recommendations to ensure that Irish exporters are key to the Department's important work. We look forward to continuing to work with the Department in the years ahead.

Recommendations to Statement of Strategy 2021-2023

- **Continue stakeholder engagement:** The IEA actively contributes to several Government stakeholder groups and believes that engagement is mutually beneficial. Our participation on Government stakeholder groups has been particularly important in terms of assisting our members prepare for Brexit and supporting members throughout the pandemic.
- We call on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to continue its strong engagement with stakeholders through continuing established stakeholder groups under its remit and setting up stakeholder groups to deal with new challenges businesses are facing. We encourage the setting up of stakeholder groups that need cross-Departmental coordination and cooperation to address issues effectively.
- **Resume and continue the Export Trade Council:** Since 2011, the Export Trade Council has played an important role in advancing Ireland's trade agenda through cooperation and coordination amongst a range of Government departments and the private sector. We value participating in the Export Trade Council and encourage DETE to resume the Council

as soon as possible given that the effects of Brexit will be known in January 2021 and changes to global trade in the wake of COVID-19.

- **Continue Enterprise Forum on Brexit and Global Challenges, stakeholder group on Enterprise Skills Needs and Enterprise Forum on COVID-19:** We value our membership of Government stakeholder groups and believe that we make a positive contribution. The stakeholder groups have been important for us to raise members concerns and communicate the Government's work to our members, particularly throughout the pandemic and in advance of the end of the transition period.
 - There is a need for the department to continue its Enterprise Skills group to look at the new working environment and what that means for businesses. In terms of climate action & sustainability, businesses want to be part of the solution to this global challenge but need the means and measures as well as the leadership to ensure that they can transition to more sustainable practices and financial support and incentives are needed to achieve this.
 - We call on DETE to continue its stakeholder groups and welcome that the Tánaiste has arranged meetings of the groups since taking up the position of Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment. It is crucial to the success of the economy that stakeholder's input is encouraged and stakeholder groups are an important means for businesses concerns to be heard and addressed.
 - **Establish synergies with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC):** Efforts at EU level to address the ongoing climate crisis through the EU Green Deal is welcomed. Business want to be part of the solution and play its role. We know that EU legislation is coming down the line and we need to prepare our members for the inevitable changes. It is imperative that Irish businesses adopt sustainable practices to meet EU targets, contribute to the aims of the SDGs and meet consumers' and wider societal demands.
 - We believe that DETE should establish a business focused joint stakeholder group with DECC to call out the challenges and find opportunities for businesses. This group should bring together business representative bodies. The establishment of such a stakeholder group would be beneficial to both businesses and the country's work towards meeting EU climate targets.
- **Supporting sustainable practices in indigenous businesses:** Sustainable trade and investment is key for indigenous Irish companies, particularly given that the EU's Green Deal will serve as a green economic recovery plan. As a country we should embrace the opportunities that addressing climate change and sustainability brings, to underline our credentials globally as a

leader in sustainable trade and investment. We call on DETE to ensure that its work is in line with EU climate targets, objectives, and ambition.

- **Attracting sustainable foreign direct investment (FDI):** In terms of continuing to attract foreign direct investment, it is a perfect time to commence repositioning Ireland as a hugely attractive place for sustainable FDI. We believe that continued flows of FDI will go a long way to reaching the aims and objectives of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), once the investment is sustainable. While achieving the UN SDG’s is a common responsibility for the international community, there needs to be a leader, and Ireland can bring that leadership.
- Having attracted flows of FDI for some time, Ireland retains its attractiveness and now is the time to build upon our green island international branding and reconfigure our approach to ensure that investments achieve social, economic and environmental objectives. The Government’s economic recovery strategy is an opportunity to deliver on sustainability and we believe FDI has an important role here. We call on DETE to continue positioning Ireland as a hugely attractive place for FDI that has sustainability at its core.
- **Supporting blended working arrangements:** We welcome the publication of results from the department’s recent public consultation on guidance for remote working, to which we made a submission. The results serve as a baseline for DETE’s future work on the new working environment, which seems to be moving towards a blend of home and office working arrangements (depending on the sector). We call on DETE to address issues that businesses are facing under new working arrangements, in particular:
 - **Supports for digital marketing:** As a consequence of COVID-19 and its impact on the working arrangements, businesses will need to increase and sustain a stronger digital footprint. The success and survival of businesses will hinge on how well they can adapt to a digitally driven working environment. Businesses will need continued support in this space and we believe that DETE will need to put a plan in place to ensure that businesses can continue to grow and prosper in the face of an ever changing business and trading environment.
 - **Transitional tax relief:** As some businesses move away from traditional working arrangements, we are calling on DETE to look into possible supports needed to help businesses transition from a central office based working environment to a potentially long term blended or full-time remote working arrangement. This support could take the form of transition tax relief to support businesses that will continue to remote work for some time and may even adopt remote working as a company working arrangement. Such tax relief may be needed to assist businesses with commitments made prior to the pandemic, such as rental agreements and other office expenses, that are now disused and redundant.

- **Expediate the roll out of high-speed fibre powered broadband and expand hub network:** We call on DETE to expediate the roll out of high-speed fibre powered broadband throughout the country. Considering the changed working arrangements and to aid regional development, the roll out must be accelerated. The expansion of the hub network with high speed broadband connectivity should be considered as a feasible remote working solution for employers and employees. We call on the Department to consider the further expansion of the hub network.
- **Continued partnership with Government agencies:** We welcome our continued work with Agencies such as Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, National Standards Authority of Ireland, Competition and Consumer Protection Commission and the Health and Safety Authority. We call on DETE to ensure that stakeholders are kept up to speed on the work of agencies under its remit and that agencies continue their strong participation in the various stakeholder groups.
- **Intensify cooperation and collaboration with the EU and international fora:** We call on DETE to play an active role in bringing relevant EU legislation and policy proposals to the attention of the business community early on in the EU legislative process to ensure that input is fed in from the start. We believe that such an approach would lead to a swifter transposition of EU legislation. An early alert system would also raise awareness well in advance of policy changes coming down the line and businesses will be able to factor changes into future planning.
- **Brexit:** Undoubtedly the impact of Brexit on the business community is an evolving issue. We call on DETE to take a flexible approach when addressing Brexit given that the expected fallout will be wide reaching. Relations with the UK will continue, and trade will continue to flow between Ireland and the UK, albeit under different arrangements. DETE must assume a leadership role in this regard and ensure that its Statement of Strategy is Brexit proofed.

Conclusion

We would like to thank the department for the opportunity to feed into its Statement of Strategy 2021-2023. The IEA has actively and constructively worked with the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and stands ready to continue work with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. We look forward to expanding upon our recommendations in the interest of Irish exporters, importers and the wider business community.

On behalf of the IEA,

Simon McKeever
Chief Executive

6th November 2020