

**Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee  
Business Support inquiry  
Dublin visit  
26 November 2018**

### **Enterprise Ireland**

**Meeting hosted by: Kevin Davoren, Eoghan O'Brian, Mark Christal, Gearoid Mooney, Helen McMahon**

**Members in attendance: Jackie Baillie, Gordon MacDonald and Andy Wightman**

### **Overview of EI and EI's role in governance of LEOs**

EI generally support manufacturing and internationally trading companies who employ more than 10 people. They currently support 5,000 companies which is a relatively small proportion of SMEs. EI aim to attract foreign direct investment and promote Ireland overseas to students as a study abroad destination. Most export products don't remain popular for longer than 3 years, so continual innovation is crucial.

The 'missing middle' is still a factor in the Irish support system as it is in Scotland. Domestically focused companies with more than 10 employees receive little support.

EI has a strong regional impact, supporting 210,000 jobs. The majority of these are outside Dublin.

Businesses are encouraged to export very early in their life cycle. 50% of Irish businesses export and it is hugely important to the businesses ability to scale. Diversification of sectors exporting builds resilience in the economy. 34% of current Irish exports are to the UK, worth approximately €7.62 billion to the economy. EI run a lot of events to meet overseas buyers and connect with market intelligence opportunities.

The [Irish Advantage](#) website includes case studies and a client directory.

The service level agreements define the business support governance roles and are renewed every 3 years. The LEO coordination unit looks at monitoring, evaluation and budget. It employs 11 people. Annual metrics are reviewed every quarter on indicators such as jobs, financial assistance, training, LEAN initiatives and transfers to EI.

Retaining staff knowledge and expertise is critical for the success of the LEOs. The national turnover of local authority staff is a challenge. EI feel that staff knowledge should be revisited in the next service level agreement. This wasn't an issue initially as the majority of staff had transferred to LEOs from County Enterprise Boards. That original retention of knowledge has since diluted.

LEO staff are generalists. Expert advice is obtained through mentors and consultants.

The introduction of a new CRM system is strategically important. It is hoped that the standardisation of systems and processes will place less emphasis on individuals and bring greater consistency.

### EI's role in supporting in-house innovation and collaborative innovation with HEIs

EI supports 5,000 companies, but around 20 are large (with a turnover of more than 250k). Constant innovation is crucial in maintaining market position. Innovation is key to building resilience through market upset. Research and development is therefore a big focus.

Start-up incubators have been introduced in all educational institutions. Peer to peer promotion is important.

### Skills

EI facilitate skills needs workshops as it's often difficult for businesses to identify and articulate skills gaps. Workshops help to clarify the asks from businesses and look at successes. Many skills programmes look at immediate gaps rather than identifying a longer-term strategy. There is no point in identifying a strategy unless you have the resource for implementation.