

All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit

Sectoral Dialogues

Building on the inaugural plenary meeting of the All-Island Civic Dialogue on Brexit hosted by the Taoiseach on 2 November, the Government launched a series of Brexit sectoral consultation events. These all-island events are an important opportunity for Ministers to engage directly with stakeholders on the implications of the Brexit process for their sector.

Fourteen sectoral dialogues have been hosted by Ministers, in a range of locations across the country. Over 1100 industry and civic society representative groups from across the island participated in this consultation process.

This report outlines the key themes from each consultation and a full list of the events held.

Summary of Sectoral Dialogues

Agri-Food

Minister Michael Creed T.D. hosted over 60 representatives from the cattle, sheep, dairy, pigs and poultry sectors in Meath on 15 December.

Key Themes

- Concerns include: the particular exposure of the sector to **customs checks, tariffs and currency volatility**; risk that UK might support a cheap food policy; the negative impact of any change to rules on country of origin; labour-supply uncertainties.
- Uncertainty about the future **EU-UK trading relationship** is negatively affecting business confidence.
- Need to maintain an **all-island approach** to animal health/disease issues.
- Need to address the broader question of **national competitiveness**.
- Irish Government should press for a commitment/clarity on transitional arrangements.
- Need to ensure Government Departments are adequately resourced for the task of negotiation.

Summary of Sectoral Dialogues

Seafood

Minister Michael Creed, T.D. hosted over 100 representatives of the Seafood sector in Dublin on 1 February.

Key Themes

- The seafood and fishing industries are uniquely exposed, given the **sharing of fishing grounds with the UK**. Key concerns include the potential loss of access to fishing grounds in the UK zone and possible attempts by the UK to increase its current quota share.
 - Links between **access, quotas and the broad trade agenda** were emphasised and maintaining those linkages in negotiations with the UK will be essential.
 - Irish businesses need to consider **market diversification** to reach ambitious targets set under Foodwise 2025.
 - The industry needs to be united, both nationally and across the EU, to **ensure fishing is a visible priority** going into negotiations.
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Prepared Consumer Foods, Horticulture, Cereals, Tillage, Animal Feed, Forestry

Minister Michael Creed T.D. and Minister of State Andrew Doyle T.D. hosted 80 delegates in Meath on 8 February, to discuss the implications of Brexit on forestry, prepared consumer foods, horticulture and animal feeds/cereals.

Key Themes

- Particular **exposure of the agri-food sector** to Brexit.
 - **Currency devaluation** and heightened **volatility** creates challenges for exporters.
 - Significant concern over Brexit's "**cost of doing business**": potential tariffs for agri-food exports, increased transport costs & time delays, border & customs processing costs, regulatory, labelling, packaging, and standards divergence.
 - **Market diversification** will be challenging, as the UK is the sole or major market for many in the agri-food sector. Shortage of **language and innovation skills** could hinder market diversification.
 - Uncertainty leading to the **postponement of investment** decisions.
 - Reliance on **migrant labour** in UK food industry - their future status needs to be clarified.
 - Sector should focus on a campaign in the UK to highlight the qualities of reliable, safe food in order to maintain their market share.
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Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Minister Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D. and Minister of State, John Halligan T.D., hosted over two hundred stakeholders in Carrick-on-Shannon on 30 January, to discuss the impact on jobs, enterprise and innovation.

Key Themes

- Challenge is to **grow our economy** while simultaneously continuing to **diversify markets**.
- The importance of **competitiveness and market reach** for companies and potential administrative burdens arising from Brexit.
- Significant concern over the imposition of a hard border, including impact of possible **tariffs**, restrictions on the **transit of goods** and the protection of **workers' rights**.
- Opportunities for Ireland in **financial services, pharma and technology**.
- Opportunities for **attracting researchers**.
- **Innovation** key to addressing challenges posed by Brexit; there are opportunities to build and deepen relationships both with the UK, and outside the UK.
- Need to focus attention on the impact of **Brexit on the Regions**.

Energy

Minister Denis Naughten T.D. met with over 65 representatives drawn from industry, community and academia in Roscommon on 6 February, to discuss the potential impact of Brexit on the energy sector.

Key Themes

- Risk to the **security of energy supply**; the negative impact of **uncertainty on energy investment decisions**; fear of **tariffs**; and concern over potential divergence of energy and climate policy between the UK and Ireland.
- Importance of **investment to reduce reliance on gas and oil** and the need to keep energy high on the agenda in the negotiations.
- **De-carbonisation** and a drive towards energy independence were suggested as potential mitigation strategies.
- Significant concern on the risks to the **All-Island Single Electricity Market** and there is a need to better communicate its importance to consumers. **Horizon 2020 funding** important for North/South cooperation on research into renewable energy.
- A number of **potential opportunities** for Ireland were considered including; exporting clean energy to the UK, becoming more self-sufficient in energy, and as a leader in innovation and research.

Summary of Sectoral Dialogues

Transport

Minister Shane Ross T.D. hosted an All-Island Dialogue on the impact of Brexit on the transport sector in Dundalk on 23 January, attended by over one hundred industry representatives.

Key Themes

- Immediate **vulnerability of the sector** in terms of: currency exposure; the impact of uncertainty on business and investment decisions; access to labour; and the impact on regional development.
- Concerns about the **land bridge** with the UK and the status of **goods in transit**; the impact of customs checks on the cross-border transit of goods; and infrastructure challenges for ports.
- Concerns about future **air connectivity** with the UK, including the loss of aviation traffic rights and the right of certain major Irish airlines with majority shareholding in the UK or outside the EU to continue to operate in the EU.
- Need **acceleration of investment in infrastructure** and to communicate that Ireland is open for business.
- The need for **increased lobbying by industry** with their EU counterparts.
- Called on Government to be **proactive in building alliances** with other EU Member States to ensure that Ireland's unique concerns are understood.

Tourism and Hospitality

Minister Shane Ross, T.D. and Minister of State Patrick O'Donovan hosted over 100 participants to consider the implications of Brexit for the tourism and hospitality sector in Dundalk on 23 January.

Key Themes

- The preservation of the **Common Travel Area** should be the primary objective and the Government should campaign hard to ensure that there is no border on the island.
- To maintain **competitiveness and value for money**, there should be no additional tax or regulatory burdens on industry and there should be a reduction in key operating costs such as insurance and utilities.
- Importance of **all-island promotion of the tourism industry** and concerns that a potential loss of EU funding would undermine product development, particularly in the border areas. There was a call for **greater investment** in the tourism sector, including an increased marketing budget for tourism bodies.
- The need for **market diversification**, including an enhanced focus on European markets.
- Sustaining access, in particular as regards future **air connectivity** with the UK, is crucial.

Further Education & Training

Minister of State John Halligan T.D. met with representatives of the Further Education and Training Sector in Dublin on 14 December.

Key Themes

- Importance of the **Common Travel Area** for both students and staff.
 - Potential impact on recognition of professional qualifications, **student flows** in both directions (linked to EU funding), uncertainty for cross-border apprenticeships.
 - Importance of **EU funding** for cross-border education services, student exchange programmes, joint programmes and Erasmus engagement.
 - Need to **identify and deliver skills** required in a 'post Brexit' context, including languages, finance, legal, contract negotiation, to mitigate the potential impact on employment.
 - A long transition period is required, with the identification of both regions as a **single education sector** to facilitate continued mobility and co-operation.
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Higher Education & Research

Minister Richard Bruton T.D. met with representatives from the Higher Education and Research sector in Dundalk Institute of Technology on 19 December.

Key Themes

- Implications of Brexit for students and staff across the island, including **choice of institution and mobility**.
 - Need clarification on: **entitlement to education in the UK**, recognition of professional qualifications, fees and access to financial supports.
 - **Contribution of research to the economy and jobs** and the risks and opportunities for research funding, public and private, including EU funding.
 - Ireland should be promoted, within the EU and internationally, as a welcoming destination for researchers and students.
 - Opportunity to **promote the island as a Centre of Excellence** for research, project management and world-wide collaboration. Linked to this is the need to address key infrastructural needs, such as housing, childcare and other social factors.
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Summary of Sectoral Dialogues

Primary and Secondary Education

Minister Richard Bruton T.D. hosted a dialogue for the primary and secondary education sector in Dublin on 23 January.

Key Themes

- Concerns included mutual recognition of teaching qualifications; capacity of schools to cater for minorities; **pensions and employment rights** for staff living and working in different jurisdictions.
- Need curriculum amendments to meet **demands for modern languages** and better knowledge of citizenship and politics in school leavers.
- Access to UK 3rd level training is important to ensure a sufficient supply of teachers.
- Importance of **EU funding** (particularly InterReg and Peace Funding) in sustaining cross-border co-operation beyond the immediate term. EU funding plays a vital role in widening horizons, building stability and for Irish language programmes in Northern Ireland.

Human Rights under the Good Friday Agreement

Minister Charlie Flanagan, T.D. hosted over 90 delegates in Maynooth University on 13 February, to discuss the implications of Brexit for Human Rights under the Good Friday Agreement.

Key Themes

- The **importance of upholding the Good Friday Agreement chapter on rights**, safeguards and equality of opportunity, as an integral part of the Agreement as a whole.
- A **potential role for the Joint Committee of Human Rights Commissions** in examining/auditing the potential impact of Brexit on human rights under the Good Friday Agreement.
- An **important role for civil society and academia in contributing to audit and advocacy** on the rights implications of a UK withdrawal from the European Union. The value of seeking to maintain access for civil society groups to EU human rights NGO networks.
- The **value of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland** as referred to in the Good Friday Agreement, in mitigating some of the potential rights impacts of Brexit for Northern Ireland.
- The **value of a Charter of Rights** for the island of Ireland as referred to in the Good Friday Agreement. This would also support the provision in the Agreement on equivalence of rights on the island.
- The possibility that EU law (Articles 2, 6, 21 TEU) would support / require **the inclusion of provisions on human rights and equality in the European Council guidelines** for the EU-UK Article 50 negotiations and the future EU relationship with the UK as a third country. This may also be relevant for areas such as the UK's participation in EU police and justice co-operation measures and EU-UK cooperation on UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

Heritage, Culture & Rural Ireland

Minister Heather Humphreys hosted an all-island dialogue for over 100 stakeholders on the implications of Brexit on 'Culture, Heritage, Regional SMEs & the Impact on Border & other Rural Communities' in Cavan on 6 February.

Key Themes

- Reduced investment related to uncertainty in the markets; challenges for the agri- food and tourism industries; data protection issues; the importance of the €1.4bn Creative Europe Programme to the Arts Community, North and South; loss of other **EU funding**.
- Implications for **cross-border health** and education sector agreements and possible disruption to the work of **North-South Implementation Bodies** established under the Good Friday Agreement.
- Other issues relating to the border included: the transit of goods; increased complexity regarding VAT and other taxation; difference in labour market costs North & South; risk of rural de-population if any Brexit-related opportunities are confined to the Dublin area.
- Desirability of maximising engagement by the NI Executive & need for all-island solutions.

Children and Young People

Minister Katherine Zappone T.D. hosted an All-Island Dialogue on Children and Young People in Dublin on 30 January, attended by some 60 children and young people and representative bodies from across the island.

Key Themes

- Young people expressed concern about the potential **day-to-day impact of Brexit** and emphasised the importance of the **Common Travel Area** in maintaining family ties and educational and employment opportunities.
- Young people noted the importance of communicating our **commitment to the European Union** and the benefits of the Erasmus programme.
- Participants expressed concern over the **protection of the Good Friday Agreement** and its human rights provisions. The importance of **EU Funding** for all-island bodies was stressed.
- There was a call to guarantee the protection of **children's rights**, including through continued cooperation with the UK in the criminal justice sphere.

Social Insurance, Social Welfare Rights and Entitlements and Social Welfare Pensions

Minister Varadkar hosted a sectoral dialogue on Social Insurance, Social Welfare Rights and Entitlements and Social Welfare Pensions in Dublin on 16 February, attended by over 40 representatives from all parts of society: civil society and representative groups, business, trade unions and academia.

Key Themes

- The key area of concern was the impact of Brexit on the **current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance (which includes pensions) and social assistance (means tested schemes linked to residency rights) and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland**; this included impacts on current rights and entitlements and concerns as to the possible erosion of rights accrued into the future.
 - Concerns were also raised also with regard to the **future direction of social welfare policy and the potential for dissonance** with, on the one hand, Ireland moving forward as part of the EU27 and, on the other, having to negotiate and manage a relationship with the UK and Northern Ireland.
 - Possibility of a **hard border** presents real and present hazards for people, impacting on the fabric and reality of daily life for cross-border and frontier workers, students, commuters and for families. Contributors evidenced current impacts with regard to, for example, living standards and the impact that currency fluctuations has had on British Retirement Pension recipients.
 - Government focus must be on **ensuring that these social welfare rights and entitlements, which currently exist for Irish and UK citizens moving within the Common Travel Area on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and Britain, can be safe-guarded.**
 - The ‘interconnectedness of everything’ also presented opportunities across all of the different sectors but this will need strong Government-led communications, with clear and factual information provision the key. Opportunities exist to deepen existing alliances and build new ones given Ireland’s very good track record at EU level in the area of social policy and social security while preserving and developing our strong attachments to the UK; in addition, there is potential to attract more talent acknowledging the pressures that this could mean for social services generally.
 - Calls for Government to be joined-up in its thinking and approach and to be very clear that the social dimension remains to the fore during the negotiations: Ireland should be advocating that there is explicit articulation of social rights, entitlements and responsibilities in any agreement with the UK.
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List of All-Island Sectoral Dialogues

Date	Sector	Location	Lead
14 December	Further Education & Training	Dublin	MOS Halligan
15 December	Agri-Food	Meath	Minister Creed
19 December	Higher Education & Research	Louth	Minister Bruton
23 January	Transport & Logistics	Louth	Minister Ross
23 January	Tourism & Hospitality	Louth	Minister Ross
23 January	Primary & Secondary Education	Dublin	Minister Bruton
30 January	Children and Young People	Dublin	Minister Zappone
30 January	Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation	Leitrim	Minister Mitchell O'Connor
1 February	Seafood	Dublin	Minister Creed
6 February	Energy	Roscommon	Minister Naughten
6 February	Heritage, Culture & Rural Ireland	Cavan	Minister Humphreys
8 February	Prepared Consumer Foods, Horticulture, Cereals, Tillage, Animal Feed, Forestry	Meath	Minister Creed
13 February	Human Rights under the Good Friday Agreement	Kildare	Minister Flanagan
16 February	Pensions, Social Welfare Rights and Social Insurance	Dublin	Minister Varadkar