



British Irish
Chamber of Commerce



Brexit Review

Going, going, not quite gone.

With a number of deadlines missed and cliff edges avoided, uncertainty prevailed throughout 2019 as the UK and EU searched for an agreeable form of Brexit that could be ratified in the UK Parliament. Although we end the year with the UK still part of the EU family; following this month's UK General Election, hopes are high that the path is now clear for ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement, and that the Brexit process will finally move into the next phase of future trade talks early next year.

It has been another busy year for the British Irish Chamber of Commerce as we continue to support our members and advocate on their behalf on all things Brexit. We began the year by intensifying our advocacy campaign in support of the Withdrawal Agreement that was negotiated between former Prime Minister, Theresa May's Government and the European Commission, emailing every sitting MP in the UK Parliament requesting them to vote for the deal.

This set in motion a busy advocacy agenda for the Chamber as we held numerous Brexit meetings with MP's, TD's, MEP's, Peers and Senators throughout the year. This was in addition to meetings with officials from relevant offices and departments including the British Embassy in Dublin and the Irish Embassy in London; the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Taoiseach, and Business Enterprise and Innovation in Dublin; the Departments for Exiting the EU, Businesses, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Cabinet Office in London.

Highlights included a business Roundtable with Richard Harrington, UK Minister for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and a pre-budget lunch with Paschal Donohoe TD, Irish Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform. The Chamber continued to participate in the Tánaiste, Simon Coveney's Brexit Stakeholder Forum and also joined the Business and Trade Union Panel of the UK Government's Business and Trade Union Alternative Arrangements Advisory Group. Finally, the Chamber attended the [Conservative Party Conference](#) in October where we engaged with Cabinet Members and MPs on possible Brexit developments.

The British Irish Chamber of Commerce also spent much of 2019 looking to the future relationship between the UK and EU, setting the tone for much of the Chamber's work this year. On 29 January, we hosted our "[We need to talk about services: a discussion on future UK-Ireland trade in services](#)", which examined the potential issues that might arise for trade in Services as a result of Brexit. This continued the work of the Chamber's Services Sub-Group and the output from this event has helped inform the Chamber's upcoming significant policy paper on this issue.

With event sponsor Ulster Bank, the Chamber hosted a *#BusinessBeyondBrexit* series that looked at Brexit preparedness and trading opportunities for UK and Irish firms arising from Brexit. The series featured economic updates from Ulster Bank economists and first-hand testimony from business case studies outlining how they have prepared for Brexit including the opportunities they have found. Insight was also provided by representatives from the UK Department for International Trade, Irish Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland and the British Irish Chamber of Commerce. Events were held in [Cork](#), [Dundalk](#), [Galway](#) and [Dublin](#).

The future UK-Ireland relationship was also highlighted in the Chamber's "[Priorities for the Next European Parliament](#)" publication that was sent to all candidates running in the European elections last May. In the document, the Chamber called for candidates to support a comprehensive trade deal between the United Kingdom and the European Union and to advocate for the establishment of an EU-Wide Brexit Mitigation Fund.

In the Chamber's [Pre-Budget Submission](#), we advocated for temporary exemptions from State Aid Rules to enable assistance for those businesses most vulnerable to Brexit and repeated our call for the setting-up of an EU-Wide Brexit Mitigation Fund. We also called for the establishment of a €1 billion Brexit Response Fund to assist businesses and restore confidence in the Irish economy. The Chamber welcomed the announcement of the *Brexit Contingency Fund* in Minister Donohoe's Budget Day speech.

The Chamber also maintained its position as a leading source of analysis on Brexit developments. Through our [Brexit Views](#) column, we kept members updated on the twists and turns of Westminster voting and what the outcome meant for business and trade between these two islands. We also provided detailed analysis on some of the key developments this year including:

- The results of the three votes on the previous Withdrawal Agreement ([18 January](#), [15 March](#), [29 March](#))
- [Analysis of the UK's Tariff and Quota Schedule for 'No-Deal'](#) (15 March 2019)
- [Review of the Northern Ireland Department of the Economy Report on the Irish Land Border](#) (28 June 2019)
- [Analysis of the alternative border arrangements proposed by Prosperity UK](#) (5 July 2019)
- [Analysis of the UK Government Proposals for an Amended Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland](#) (4 October 2019)
- [Analysis of the updated Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration](#) (18 October 2019)

The Chamber continued its active engagement with, and support of our members throughout this year. We have kept our members informed of [supports available for businesses](#) from Irish, UK and EU agencies as they prepare for Brexit. We also published a summary of the [Irish Government's Contingency Action Plan for 'No-Deal'](#) as well as a summary of [UK, Irish and European Commission Contingency updates and supports](#). Furthermore, the Chamber provided a [Submission](#) to the Joint Committee on Business, Enterprise and Innovation on 'Brexit Preparedness'.

The Brexit Subcommittee continued its work guiding the Chamber's Brexit work under the Chairmanship of Pat Cambage from VW Ireland. The Subcommittee met quarterly in 2019 to discuss objectives for the Chamber to achieve on Brexit and to contribute to the policy direction of the Chamber on this vitally important topic. The group oversaw the development of the Chamber's policy paper on trade in Services and has contributed to the advocacy objectives of the Chamber.

During the year, the Subcommittee received briefings on latest Brexit developments from key figures such as Nicky Morgan MP and representatives from the British Embassy in Ireland. Opportunities to engage with public representatives and government officials on issues relating to Brexit were also available to members of this group.

This year also saw the establishment of an Importers' Forum to identify the issues facing importers as a result of Brexit and find solutions to these issues. The first meeting of this group took place on 24 October with a second meeting scheduled for January.

Some of the key Brexit policy positions taken by the Chamber this year include:

- In January, the Chamber [urged Westminster MPs to find a way forward that would avoid a 'No-Deal' Brexit](#);
- That same month, the Chamber also warned of the [economic cost of 'No-Deal'](#) for business trade and jobs;
- In April, the Chamber welcomed the [additional Brexit Extension](#) until the end of October;
- In May, the Chamber welcomed the [Memorandum of Understanding on the Common Travel Area](#) signed by the UK and Irish Governments;
- In July, the Chamber called for [renewed engagement to break the Brexit impasse](#) following Boris Johnson's appointment as Prime Minister;
- In October, the Chamber welcomed the Brexit measures announced in Budget 2020.

Sectoral Committee Review

The Agri-Food Committee

Whatever the final arrangement for the future relationship between the UK and the EU, the most impacted sector from an Irish perspective is the agri-food sector. The Committee set out to examine what impact the Withdrawal Agreement will have on: Irish exports to the UK; Irish imports from the UK; the All-Island Agri-food supply chain and UK exports to the EU. To ensure we received broad viewpoints on Brexit, in January the Committee welcomed Mella Frewen, Director General, Food Drink Europe as part of the Eversheds Sutherland Series. Mella gave a unique insight not only on the challenge Brexit brings to Agri-food on a European scale but also on the challenges the sector is facing from climate change to rural revitalization. In September, with the support of Covington & Burling LLP, the Committee welcomed Pamela Byrne, Chief Executive Officer of the Food Safety Authority of Ireland who spoke on the importance of protecting Irish food standards and the integrity of the Irish supply chain. In its contribution to the Chamber's [Pre-Budget submission](#), the Committee advocated for "Investment in recruitment and training of official agents with responsibility for ensuring compliance with food and drug safety rules and quality standards". In its submission to the Chamber's [European Parliament Manifesto](#), the Committee reinforced its support for maintaining the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget and to ensure CAP reforms help sustain Irish agriculture and put forward its opposition to any relaxation of food safety or Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) standards in any future trade agreements. The year concluded with Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine addressing Council Members of the Chamber and taking their questions on pertinent issues for the sector.

Culture, Arts, Sports and Tourism (CAST) Committee

This year was a transitional year for the Committee as Garry Kelleher, Tourism Ireland stepped down as Chair and was succeeded in May by Susan Kirby, CEO of St Patrick's Festival. Susan has already hit the ground running organising a PechaKucha for each member of the Committee and a Strategy day kindly facilitated by independent expert facilitator Steve Griffiths. The Committee has now set out an ambitious strategy and plan for the next two years. The Committee also met with the Westminster Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to discuss the importance of all-island tourism and the synergies of marketing as one island.

The Energy and Environmental Committee

The Energy and Environmental Committee had yet another busy year. In March, the Committee worked with Energy UK to hold a Roundtable discussion with key UK and Irish stakeholders on '*The Future of the Single Electricity Market and the Internal Energy Market Post-Brexit*'. Keynotes were

delivered by Michael Manley, Assistant Secretary General with special responsibility for Energy, Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment; Lawrence Slade, CEO of Energy UK and Dara Lynott, CEO, Electricity Association of Ireland (EAI). Some key points raised at this meeting included:

- The Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration on the Future Relationship between the EU and UK establishes a framework in which the Single Electricity Market (SEM) can be protected.
- The UK remaining fully aligned to the Internal Energy Market (IEM) is in the best interests of Ireland, the UK & the EU.
- The UK should continue its participation in the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), or alternatively the domestic UK ETS should be linked to the EU ETS.
- Where possible, the UK should continue its participation in EU bodies and agencies.
- In the UK's absence from the Council of Ministers, Commission and Parliament there is an onus on the UK and Irish governments to increase bilateral engagement in this area.

The Report of this event is available to download [here](#).

In June, with the support of Ervia, the Committee hosted an evening seminar on *'The Energy Transition: The Opportunities and Challenges for British and Irish Business.'* Dan Sadler, Director of Sapphire Energy delivered the keynote address which focused on the role of hydrogen as a transitional energy.

The Committee also worked with the British Embassy for a *'Glencairn Conversation'* on *'Addressing the Climate Change Challenge: The role of Government, Industry and Society – a UK & Irish perspective.'* Nick Bridge, the UK Government's Special Representative for Climate Change was the keynote speaker at this discussion.

The Financial and Professional Services Committee

In January, the Committee organised the final of the Agenda series with KPMG and Ulster Bank on *'Asset Management UK and Ireland Post-Brexit'* which had a full house in Ulster Bank and speakers of the highest calibre including; Jane Howard, CEO Ulster Bank; Michael D'Arcy, TD, Minister for Financial Services and Insurance and Michael Hodson, Director of Asset Management and Investment Banking, Central Bank of Ireland. The event also attracted widespread media including articles in the [Irish Times](#), [Irish Independent](#), [the Irish Examiner](#) and the [Belfast Telegraph](#). In April, the Government published the *'Ireland for Finance Strategy'* which the Chamber made a submission to – [here](#). In September, the Committee invited Michael D'Arcy TD, Minister for Financial Services to discuss the

Strategy and take questions from members. The Committee has a strong working relationship with the Minister who has kindly spoken at Chamber events on many occasions. The next meeting of the Committee will take place in the offices of BNP Paribas in London on January 22, 2020. Some of the items for discussion include: Impact of General Election Outcome; the Next Steps for Financial & Professional Services in Ireland and UK; the Irish Government's Ireland for Finance Strategy and any other issues that members would like the Chamber to champion and pursue in 2020.

The Higher Education, Research and Industry Committee

One of the Chamber's most proactive committees continues to go from strength to strength. In February the Committee brought together research leaders from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to discuss future collaboration between the 'Celtic' countries in Iveagh House. All four nations' higher education sectors will be disproportionately affected by Brexit and therefore the onus is on them to work together to address shared challenges.

In September, the Committee held its first meeting outside of Dublin, kindly hosted by Professor Jonathan Seckl, Vice-Principal Planning, Resources and Research Policy at Edinburgh University. It was invaluable for Irish members to see how Edinburgh University operates and how they consider strategic partners.

In October, as part of the Eversheds Sutherland Series, the Committee welcomed Professor Hugh Brady, Vice-Chancellor of Bristol University and Former President of UCD to give an '*Expert Address*' on the sector. Professor Brady painted a stark picture of the funding gap between Irish universities and their UK counterparts. His address is available [here](#).

In November, the Committee hosted its second UK – Ireland Higher Education, Research and Industry conference. Generously supported by the HEA, Mazars and SFI, this conference tasked UK and Irish stakeholders with developing new ideas and mechanisms for driving UK - Irish collaboration across higher education, research and industry. This Conference is now an established "must attend" event across the higher education sector.

The Committee also worked with the British Embassy as part of the Glencairn Conversations on '*A Sustainable and Competitive Higher Education Sector: A UK and Irish Perspective*'. This conversation was headlined by the UK's former Universities Minister Lord David Willetts, who implemented wide range tuition fee and funding reforms of the UK Universities sector. The panel also included Professor David FitzPatrick, President of Technological University Dublin, Lorna Fitzpatrick, President of Union of Students Ireland, Jim Miley, Director General, Irish Universities Association and Professor Jane Ohlmeyer, Director Long Room Hub, Trinity College Dublin and Chair of the Irish Research Council.

For the Chamber's [Budget Submission](#), as well as advocating for increased funding, the Committee proposed the establishment of a '*UK - Ireland Bilateral Research Stream*' and a '*North – South Academic Corridor*'. At an EU level the Committee continues to advocate for making [International Research & Innovation a key pillar for EU research policy](#).

The year ended with great personal achievements for two of our members. Malcolm Byrne, formerly of the Higher Education Authority was elected to Dáil Éireann for Fianna Fáil in the Wexford Bye-Election, while our Committee Chair Professor Daire Keogh was appointed President-Designate for Dublin City University to succeed the current President Professor Brian MacCraith in July 2020.

The ICT Committee

As part of the Eversheds Sutherland Expert Series, the Chamber welcomed Sir Julian King, UK, EU Commissioner for the Security Union. Sir Julian spoke to attendees on the importance of Cyber Security for the European Union and in relation to the challenges Brexit will bring. The Committee made a substantive input to the Chamber's [Pre-Budget Submission](#) under the heading of '*Rebalancing the Economy*,' and suggestions were made in relation to Capital Gains Taxes, the R&D Tax Credit and the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP). In December, the ICT Committee convened a roundtable discussion on '*The Future of Data Transfers between the UK and EU*'. The purpose of the roundtable, which was hosted by LK Shields, was to bring together select stakeholders from the Irish digital sector to exchange views on the post-Brexit transfer of personal data from the EU to the UK. The Committee will now be taking this discussion to London in the first quarter of next year to feed into the UK - EU trade discussions.

The Infrastructure Committee

The Infrastructure Committee was busy throughout the year. In January under the auspices of this Committee, the Chamber hosted a '*UK- Ireland Ports and Transit Forum*' which we were joined by An Tánaiste Simon Coveney, TD, who delivered the opening remarks setting the context for the discussion. The purpose of this Forum was to bring together stakeholders from the UK and Irish Ports and Transit sectors to exchange views and ideas on how to prepare the sectors for the impending change that Brexit will bring. The output from this Seminar is available [here](#). In March, the Committee, with the support of Mace, welcomed Anne Graham, CEO of the National Transport Authority (NTA) who outlined the national transport plan and took questions that ranged from the impact of Brexit to BusConnects. In July, with the support of Indaver, the Committee convened a policy seminar entitled '*Delivering a Planning System for a Modern Ireland: Lessons to be learned, actions to be taken.*' The biggest take away from this seminar was the view that most planning delays were a consequence of judicial reviews and that delays in hearings were due to a lack of resources. Our Chair Sean Finlay

wrote an Op-ed following the event, which is available to read [here](#), while the event report can be downloaded [here](#). In October, as part of the Eversheds-Sutherland Series the Committee welcomed Andrew McDowell, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank, who spoke of the types of projects the Bank supports and the potential impact the UK's exit from the European Bank has on both the Bank and the UK.