

AUTUMN 2020 Volume 1  
Issue 10

# THE **b**ISME

THE BUSINESS OF IRISH SMEs

## People, innovation & looking ahead.

Enterprise Ireland's CEO Julie Sinnamon talks about the challenges facing businesses and the help available

### **MAKING SME VOICES HEARD**

Trade associations working together to support business

### **6 REASONS WHY SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE BEST THING TO HAPPEN TO SMES**

Tips on how social media can work for you

### **HR UPDATE**

Redundancy - avoiding an unfair dismissal claim

### **STRIVING FOR POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH**

Small changes we can all make to improve our wellbeing

**iSME**

# Credit where it's due.

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Having trouble getting a business loan from your bank?  
Have your credit facilities been reduced or declined?

**We're here to help.**

**Talk to the credit experts on 1850 211 789  
or visit [creditreview.ie](https://www.creditreview.ie)**

Credit Review



Volume 1 Issue 10  
Autumn 2020



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# July Stimulus, Pre Budget Submissions, COVID support & more

Hello readers,

It's hard to believe that COVID-19 could have caused a bigger downturn than the Great Recession a decade ago, but it has.

We have watched in fascination over the last four and a half months to see how the State would assist the SME sector, and we have found them wanting. While wage subsidies and unemployment payments have kept a huge number of the population on economic life support, the underlying jobs in the real economy remain under existential threat. The Government's main solution for business has been debt, which both we, our members and the banks have told Government simply won't work.

The [July Stimulus](#) doubled down on this folly, expanding the Credit Guarantee Scheme which has been of little interest to SMEs to date. Worse came when the details of the [EWSS](#), which will replace the TWSS in September, emerged. Proprietary directors were excluded, without any justification. Matt Cooper rightly called out senior officials in the Civil Service and the Revenue as being 'hostile' to small business owners.

However, a valuable lesson as learned from this fight. Paschal Donohue executed a U-turn within 24 hours of the publication of an open letter to him from Richard Jacob, owner of the Idaho Café in Cork. ISME pushed it as hard as we could, and it went viral in the hospitality community. For an insight into how it's done, Richard's letter is worth looking at [HERE](#).

While I appreciate that few of you have a Taoiseach and two cabinet ministers in your constituency, it is still possible to exert moral pressure on the political system. If you or your business are on social media, tag your local representatives on everything your business does locally. It's about raising awareness for them and showing the contribution that our sector makes in their constituency. It is noticeable that even our so-called 'left' politicians are sensitive to the need to maintain jobs locally- make sure you stay in contact with ALL of them, you'll find their details [HERE](#)



Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive, ISME.

We published our pre-budget submission to the new Government, which you can read [HERE](#). Your feedback on anything you think we should include in future is always welcome.

It's not all bad news though! Our business minister Leo Varadkar likes the ISME proposal for a tax-incentivised basic business qualification for all business owners and managers. We have a lot of work to do on this, but I hope Adam Weatherley will be bringing us some good news in the autumn. Read more about this on [page 29](#).

Our call for Expressions of Interest from the insurance sector on the formation of captive insurers has also closed. I will update you later in the year on where this is going, but it will be good news for many of you, members and non-members alike, where there are only single providers of underwriting in employer liability or public liability insurance.

Stay tuned.  
Neil McDonnell

Chief Executive, ISME

Sign up to regular updates from The ISME CEO

[Click here >](#)

# Future Growth Loan Scheme

Low-cost long-term funding to grow your business



**SMEs INCLUDING FARMERS AND SMALL MIDCAPS**

## Key features of the Scheme

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- €25,000 up to €3 million for eligible applicants in the Primary Agriculture sector
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- Term ranging from 7 years to 10 years
- Loans unsecured up to €500,000

*\*Variable interest rates are subject to change*



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For further queries on the Future Growth Loan Scheme and assistance with the Eligibility Form please contact [applications@fgls.sbc.gov.ie](mailto:applications@fgls.sbc.gov.ie), call **1800 804482** or visit [www.sbc.gov.ie](http://www.sbc.gov.ie)

## USEFUL EVENTS FOR SMES

### Equity Advisory Clinic - Online

Thursday 3 Sept. Time-slot will be assigned between 8.30am & 3.30pm

[Book here](#)

Thursday 10 Sept. Time-slot will be assigned between 8.30am & 3.30pm

[Book here](#)

Thursday 17 Sept. Time-slot will be assigned between 2.00pm & 5.45pm

[Book here](#)

### Funding Advisory Service Trilogy of Funding Webinars 2020 – Ireland

Thursday, 8 Sept, 10:00am  
Wednesday, 21 Oct, 10:00am  
Tuesday, 8 Dec, 11:30am

[Book here](#)

### Go to Tender Workshops - Online

Tuesday, 22 Sept, 9.00am - 5.00am

[Book here](#)

### Manufacturing & Supply Chain Ireland Online Conference & Exhibition

Wednesday, 30 Sept,  
10.00am-5.00pm

[Register here](#)

### Woman's Inspire Network Annual Conference

Wednesday, 21 October,  
9.00am-4.30pm

[Book here.](#)

## DOWNLOAD THE COVID-19 TRACKER APP

Despite the Government's €7 billion action plan, tough times are still ahead for SMEs and we will still need you to keep the pressure on your local representatives. It can't be underestimated the power of each and every one of us in keeping Coronavirus down and the economic recovery up. Show leadership in your community and in your business, wear a face mask, keep your social distance and continue to promote good hand hygiene.

If you have not already done so then please download the COVID Tracker app, this will help us to protect each other and slow the spread of COVID-19. Read more and download [here](#).

## COVID-19 Workplace Inspections



The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is the Government agency charged with primary responsibility to ensure employers are compliant with both of these, and has been inspecting workplaces to ensure employers are providing a safe place of work in light of COVID-19. ISME have a full guide to preparing for a workplace inspection that includes possible questions that will be asked and areas that may be looked at.

View or download the guide, available in the Members Area [here](#).

## HSA Online Courses

Two free courses from the HSA are available to businesses including:

### Return to Work Safely Induction

This course has been developed by the HSA to help you to understand the Return to Work Safely (RTWS) Protocol requirements for returning to work. One of these requirements is that workers must complete induction training. Your employer will provide additional information, advice and training on COVID-19 measures in your workplace, including an outline of their COVID-19 Response Plan, and points of contact for addressing COVID-related matters during work.

The Return to Work Safely Induction course will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, and a certificate is available on completion.

### Lead Worker Representative

This short course has been developed by the HSA to help those appointed as a Lead Worker Representative. Under the Return to Work Safely Protocol at least one Lead Worker Representative must be appointed in the workplace. The Lead Worker Representative course will take approximately 25 minutes to complete, and a certificate is available on completion.

Find out more [here](#).

## JULY STIMULUS

In July the Government announced the long-awaited July Stimulus package and below some commentary from ISME about the supports:

### **A new Employment Wage Support Scheme will succeed the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and run until April 2021.**

- The extension of the wage subsidy scheme and the rates waiver is very welcome and will help businesses minimise their cash burn during this period of restricted trading. The TWSS is being reduced in scale, which will transfer a great burden for wage maintenance to the employer.

### **€2 billion COVID-19 Credit Guarantee Scheme**

- The €2bn Credit Guarantee Scheme is an extension of an existing facility which has not proved popular among businesses to date, with only a 13% draw-down since 2012.

### **Restart Grant for enterprises is being extended and expanded**

- An increase of €300 million in grants is too small, given ISME estimated an €11 billion hole in the balance sheets of SMEs. This grant remains tied to rates, so non-rateable businesses do not qualify. We wanted to see a far larger deployment of grants, at a scale similar to the German Federal Government.

### **VAT reduction**

- VAT reduction of the 23% rate is temporary - we believe the top rate is too high in the base case and this should be permanent. In any case, this reduction is only activated in October.

### **Corporation tax**

- The early carry-back of 2019 corporation tax is good, but most SMEs don't generate a lot of corporation tax anyway.

In summary, of the €7.4 billion in the July Stimulus, €2.6 billion is worker income support, €2 billion is debt, and €1.6 billion are tax/rates measures. Grant assistance is an additional €300 million, or 4% of the total. We believe this to be far too low.

## ISME MEMBERS – WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

### BREXIT

“It is important for Irish SMEs to understand that the end of the transition period on the 31st of December 2020 marks the beginning of a new customs and trading reality between Ireland and the UK. Preparing promptly for this is critical. There are steps that can be taken now to reduce any negative impacts and drive competitive advantage”

MARTIN AGNEW,  
DIRECTOR, ACROSS  
BORDERS CONSULTING

### COVID-19

“eCommerce has evolved into a \$2.8 trillion global market, where increasingly customers say “we want this now”. COVID-19 has accelerated that growth and put the online delivery business into super drive. To respond to this, Zendesk have improved their operations by intelligently leveraging new technologies and processes to improve efficiencies and reduce delivery costs for SMEs.”

DECLAN MURRAY,  
CEO, ZENDFAST

“Due to the evolution of communications during the Coronavirus, it is believed that employees are wasting 60 minutes a day navigating between apps for basic work communications. Many SMEs have contacted us about this, asking if we have a platform that can help them, our answer is that yes we do”

PAUL HOGAN  
MANAGING DIRECTOR,  
SYNCTIVE

We are endorsing the

## NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS RECOVERY PLAN

**ENDORSED**

[www.smerecovery.ie](http://www.smerecovery.ie)

## SME Recovery Petition

Backed by a broad church of stakeholders including ISME, the National Small Business Recovery Plan calls for a more extensive range of supports including a business compensation fund, business stabilisation supports, an extended mandate for the SBCI and measures to boost demand.

Find out more about the plan and sign the petition [here](#)

## CONTENTS

## Wellbeing @ Work: A Brave New Era

A wellbeing guide for HR  
leaders to support their team  
returning to the workplace



## HR Leader's Playbook

As ISME's Health and Wellbeing partner, Laya Healthcare understand the complexity that employers and HR professionals are feeling in creating and implementing your Return to the Workplace Strategy. To support you through this Laya healthcare are delighted to offer their first Playbook, the focus of which is supporting employees in their return to the workplace. This is a unique document that they have created, which forms part of a series of Playbooks that will be made available to you throughout the rest of 2020.

Read more [here](#).

## Boost my Business initiative for SME sector from RTÉ

With over 5.5 million unique browsers per month, the profile, trust, and reach of RTÉ.ie makes it a hugely valuable digital channel for businesses. It is also the primary online resource for the diaspora in terms of Irish news and content. A new, dedicated section of the [website](#) will feature a range of Irish businesses and specialist resources.

The website will showcase some of the businesses that sustain our local communities; from emerging artisan food companies to generational local barbers, to medium size enterprise with global ambition. The details of how to be considered for inclusion are available [here](#).

The website will also offer information and resources aimed at supporting Irish businesses with advice, case studies, interviews and information pertaining to the challenges and opportunities faced by small to medium sized businesses in Ireland - particularly during the COVID pandemic.

## Failte Ireland make guidelines available for reopening your tourism business

As tourism businesses have reopened their doors, how you open in a way that is safe and effective will differ depending on the sector you operate in - with specific advice for hotels, self-catering businesses, B&Bs, caravan and camping businesses, activity providers, attractions and restaurants, amongst others.

Fáilte Ireland, in collaboration with industry groups, has created a series of guidelines for re-opening tailored to the various sectors of the Irish tourism industry. The guidelines are designed to support business owners and management in every step as they tackle the challenges specific to their industry.

Read in full [here](#)

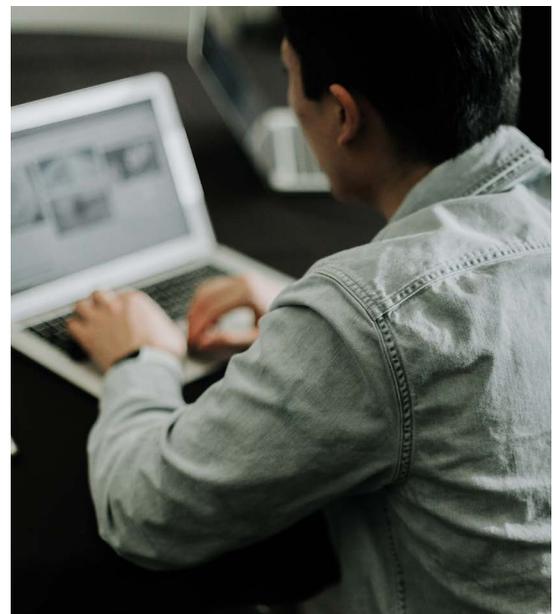
## Solas Leadership & Management programme aims to upskill supervisory staff

SOLAS and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) have developed a new Leadership and Management training initiative, in collaboration with employers, IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the Regional Skills Fora. The highly subsidised training is available to upskill staff during COVID-19.

The programme is part of the national Skills to Advance Further Education and Training initiative, which supports businesses to develop their workforce. It is being rolled out by the ETBs nationwide.

The Leadership and Management programme aims to upskill supervisory staff in areas including change management, motivating workers, digital skills and remote working.

Further information is available at [www.skillstoadvance.ie](http://www.skillstoadvance.ie) or by contacting your local Education and Training Board.



# 6 reasons why social media is the best thing to happen to SMEs

**Samantha Kelly - "Tweeting Goddess",  
Social Media Strategist & trainer**

We all know the usual negative headlines about the lack of support for small to medium business owners. But there is one huge shift that has happened in the past few years and small businesses are taking advantage of it and rocking it! Years ago, you had to have a big marketing budget and a big team to make an impact. But not now.

Since the arrival of Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram, finally small business owners have an advantage over the big guys. Social media is social. It's global. Used correctly, you can now reach a global audience getting more sales than ever before. You could even become an influencer in your niche by sharing your knowledge and passion for what you do. It gives the normal person a piece of the pie (especially as the bigger companies don't quite get social media and the fact that it's all about people and it's also about how you make people feel).

People - yes people are behind these businesses. And guess what? people buy from people they know, like and trust. Using Twitter and other platforms effectively means you can build a whole community around you, add value and show that you are the expert. You don't have to go through several departments to get approval as you own the boardroom!

Social media is the easiest way to 'meet your customers face to face' online, and small businesses are taking advantage of this and actually engaging with their customers. They understand that online sales can be driven via social media and they also understand that people want to see behind the scenes - the human side of running a business.

I know I would rather buy from a small business owner as I know I will get the service and the little extra bit of nurturing when I order something such as a personal message or note. I also know that they will share MY content for me as a thank you. I always post a photo of products that a business owner has sent me. This 'user generated content' is hugely valuable for the business owner.

Social media is already becoming a small business owners' best friend. But there are some who still don't understand the benefits and are of the attitude that "Ah sure we've always done this" or "word of mouth works for us." Well social media is word of mouth on speed.

## Why Social Media is an SME's best friend

1. It's Free mostly - you can use Twitter and LinkedIn to show you are the expert and add value
2. You are in charge of your message. If you are a good people person you will thrive on social media as it's all about engagement, adding value and how you make people feel
3. People buy from people - if your customers knows, like and trusts you they will Share or RT (retweet) your content
4. Your customers are at your fingertips so you can get to know your customers' needs by asking questions, doing polls etc.
5. Nowadays most people have phones which can take great photos and videos - videos are very powerful especially behind the scenes, and people on social media want experiences, things that will make them feel good or inspired, and they want to learn. So, share your knowledge to show you are the expert and the sales will come
6. There are so many tools and apps out there to help you. Most are free so use the tools available to you. There are image creation tools such as [Canva](#). Video tools such as [Xrecorder](#) app. Scheduling tools such as [Feedalpha](#) or get training from someone who knows (like me)

Be ahead of your competitors. You have a huge opportunity here to enhance your customer's experience via social media and show you are the most innovative, engaging business or person in your field. You could actually end up TALKING to your customers! Imagine that...

Samantha Kelly is a social media strategist, author, speaker and trainer. Known as the "Tweeting Goddess", with a following of over 53k engaged followers, she is also founder of the Women's Inspire Network - a global support network for female-led businesses.

**Find out more on  
[tweetinggoddess.com](http://tweetinggoddess.com)**



# Remote Working and Digital Transformation with Radius Technologies

**Social distancing measures and regionalised lockdowns has made working from home a priority area for many businesses. Here, ISME Reporter, speaks to John Gleeson, Director at Radius Technologies, on what has become the new norm for many.**

For some, it will be the new way of working, for others it will be an inconvenience they need to bear for a while longer. But whether you are working from home or in the office, having your IT function and systems aligned with the changing needs of your business, has never been more important. According to John Gleeson, Director at Radius Technologies, “now is the time to assess the status of both your communications and Information Technology infrastructure. Using the past months as a “trial run”, companies can now assess what worked for them and more importantly, what didn’t.

For the past number of years, people might have heard the term “Digital Transformation” and perhaps not understood the concept. The global research firm Gartner, defines digital transformation as anything from IT modernisation (for example, cloud computing), to digital optimisation, to the invention of new digital business models.

*“What we have seen over the past number of months is an acceleration of the Digital Transformation of businesses in the SME space. While many progressive businesses had already embraced cloud computing, voice mobility and remote working, they were ready to work from home the next working day when the lockdown kicked in. The vast majority of the SME’s were only starting to look at it. Covid-19 accelerated Digital Transformation, for everybody the world over”.*



*“Large enterprises and corporates have dedicated IT teams and security specialists planning and implementing remote working solutions, sometimes taking months and years to do. With the Pandemic, SME’s had to put in place temporary workaround solutions overnight. Radius currently supports close to 500 SME clients nationally, and as you can imagine our engineering team and helpdesk were quite busy”.*

*“Everything has changed, from the way we answer the office telephone, to when and where we access our company information. At the time, it was a fast response to an immediate problem, but now as the dust settles we are advising companies to reassess the*



way they work and more importantly, how they want to work. We are also advising companies to ensure whatever temporary solutions were implemented by their technology partner at the time, make sure it's secure, robust and is a long term, best-fit solution for their business. So, Cloud Computing, Remote Working and Cloud Telecoms platforms are not the future, they are the present, and have been for several years now. Covid-19 has merely accelerated some company's transformation".



According to John "budget is also going to be a big issue for most companies. What Radius have found over our 25 years in business is that successful SME's are progressive. They look at what's best for their businesses, the most efficient systems and the best way of working, and only then look at costs. When the Covid 19 lockdown began, Progressive companies had already implemented the technologies and were setup for remote working, they kept working with minimum downtime or interruption".

When I asked John what advice he would give a company looking to digitally transform he said:

"Firstly, look at your business from the helicopter or top-down view. Look at the bottlenecks, the inefficiencies, the time-consuming tasks and where the pain points are. The way you have always done things may no longer be the best way. Then look at your customers and what they want from you and finally look to your team and what their needs are and only then look at technology as the enabler. When we speak to new clients the first thing we ask is, where can we help? To fully utilise technology, you must understand the issues within your business processes and then companies like Radius can add value with the options and solutions".

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# People, innovation & looking ahead

**Julie Sinnamon, CEO, Enterprise Ireland**

**Plases talk us through your career(s) and what has led you to this point?**

After college I worked in the financial sector, starting in Trinity Bank, before joining the IDA. Back then the IDA had responsibility for indigenous and foreign investment and start-up enterprises. I began working with Irish companies and I got a real buzz out of working alongside small businesses and helping start-up companies to grow and mature.

Seeing how entrepreneurs that we supported could dramatically change the landscape in Ireland, was really exciting and important to me. In 1994, when the precursor of Enterprise Ireland was established, it was an easy decision for me to continue working with indigenous Irish companies, particularly in the food sector.

Enterprise Ireland has given me tremendous opportunities. I relished working with Ireland's remarkable food brands, I led our commercial evaluation unit and I also managed Enterprise Ireland's equity portfolio, one of the largest equity portfolios in Europe in terms of deal flow.

Then, 15 years ago, I began what was meant to be a short stint in the new change management team and since then I've been proud to shape Enterprise Ireland's strategy, becoming CEO in 2013.

**What do you enjoy about your role?**

People. I have the honour of leading an organisation that has people of tremendous talent and commitment. One of my main responsibilities as CEO is to ensure that the culture of Enterprise Ireland values these qualities and that the organisation has the appropriate structures to allow people achieve their potential.

Of course, working closely with Ireland's business sector, especially the start-up and small businesses sector, also inspires me in my role. I know the enormous sacrifices that entrepreneurs and small business owners make and to be there to assist them on that journey is a privilege.

**Talk to us about Enterprise Ireland and the work it does?**

Enterprise Ireland is here to help Irish businesses increase exports, break ground in new markets and have access to the knowledge and insight they need to be world beaters in their sector.

We invest directly in start-up companies that have great potential. We work closely with established companies who are expanding into new markets and we continually use our networks to promote Irish businesses abroad and strengthen links between innovation and Irish business at home.



**What support and response has Enterprise Ireland given to businesses during the COVID-19 crisis?**

Enterprise Ireland has a range of supports to assist Irish businesses during this unprecedented time. From direct grants to liquidity support, we have supported more than 1100 companies with over €25m approved to date.

For example, our Online Retail Grant recently provided 185 companies with funding of up to €40,000 to revamp their online presence, a critical move every business has to consider as COVID-19 changes how consumers behave. A new call was announced in August.

At the beginning of the crisis we introduced financial planning grants to assist companies identify their short to medium term liquidity requirements to enable them to trade through the crisis. This particular form of assistance has been utilised by over 600 clients and has been a tremendous help to clients to secure funding from Enterprise Ireland, bank or private equity sources.

Importantly, recent changes to our COVID-19 funding support mean we now offer a non-repayable element. 50% of liquidity funding is non-repayable, up to a cap of €200,000.

For information on Enterprise Ireland COVID Supports I'd urge ISME members to contact our dedicated COVID-19 Business Response Hub on 01-7272088 or email [businessresponse@enterprise-ireland.com](mailto:businessresponse@enterprise-ireland.com)



Enterprise Ireland has a range of supports to assist Irish businesses during this unprecedented time.

**What are your thoughts on Brexit and the impact it will have on business in Ireland and what help is available?**

In just over four months Irish businesses will have to cope with the largest structural change to trading with the UK in over fifty years. My message now is Get Ready for Brexit. Even if EU/UK talks result in a trade deal there will be very significant changes in relation to customs, regulatory alignment and the transfer of data, for example.

Help and expert advice is available. Enterprise Ireland, and our colleagues in the Local Enterprise Offices, have a range of supports available from readiness checkers to financial grants to assist businesses prepare for Brexit. Don't delay, Brexit is a reality, so get the advice you need and start implementing your plans in place now.

**With all the challenges facing Irish business over the next few years, what advice would you give the Irish business community?**

Obviously, Brexit and the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic are going to impact Irish business significantly. However, I would urge Irish businesses to look to the long game.

Shifting our economy to a more sustainable, low carbon future is critical. Consumers demand it and businesses need to do it. Over the medium term this will be an important pillar of Enterprise Ireland's work.

So, my advice is to make time to consider where you want your business to be in five to ten years and imagine what your business and your sector will look like. Then imbed that long-term thinking into your current business plan.



**My three pieces of advice are:  
Value your team, Be open to change &  
Think big and celebrate success**

**What plans and supports does Enterprise Ireland have over the next few years and in particular for SMEs?**

Enterprise Ireland's strategy for the medium term is to Build Scale, Innovate and Expand Reach. For SMEs that means that we are there to support them at the outset, or as they expand their business with equity investments, mentoring or leadership programmes. We can also assist them with grants for research and development and we are facilitating a closer relationship between Irish business and innovation, particularly in our third level sector.

It also means we are there for SMEs who wanted to enter new export markets. Last year 402 Irish businesses established new overseas presences. It can be a hard and difficult road, but we are there to help Irish business on that journey.



*Julie Sinnamon, Tánaiste & Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Employment, Leo Varadkar, TD, and Dublin BIC CEO Michael Culligan at launch in August of the €12m fund to support Guinness Enterprise Centres. Photo Credit Maxwell's Photography.*

**What are the major challenges you believe businesses have overcome?**

In my role as Enterprise Ireland CEO I am always in awe of entrepreneurs and small businesses who have the belief to step out of their comfort zone. This can involve a range of initiatives such as product innovation, seeking out new markets or transforming their business model. Having the capacity to reflect, anticipate change and respond must be part of the DNA of any modern business and I know Irish entrepreneurs have that capacity in abundance.

**Do you have a business mentor? What three important pieces of advice would you impart to an SME business in today's competitive climate?**

Mentors help us visualise our goals and achieve them. I've had three significant mentors who were very influential in my development and who's advice I still rely on heavily. This is an important aspect for our clients also and last year our mentor network programme successfully matched 437 new, early-stage and established companies with a mentor.

My three pieces of advice are:  
Value your team  
Be open to change  
Think big and celebrate success

**Passion, planning and people are the three 'Ps' that many business owners attribute their success to. Would you agree with this mantra and what else makes a business successful?**

As mantras go that's not a bad one! Doing something you enjoy as an individual is key to success. After that, in my view, what makes a business successful is the people involved in the team, sharing a common ambition and having the belief in themselves to push their limits and take calculated risks. Really, that is the heart of any business. Having honesty, trust and respect embedded in the business culture and among the team, no matter how large or small the business, is critical.

For information on Enterprise Ireland's supports please click [here](#)

“The course is tailored to the needs of our business”



# Skills to Advance

## Highly subsidised Supervisory Management training

- To help team leaders and supervisors meet the business challenges of Covid-19
- To upskill in people management, digital and remote working

Contact your local Education and Training Board or visit [skillstoadvance.ie](https://skillstoadvance.ie)

# Member stories during COVID-19

**Louise McDonnell, author of Facebook Marketing, The Essential Guide & founder, SellOnSocial.Media**

*"I'm one of the lucky ones, COVID has been really good for my business. Now, more than ever businesses need to know how to use social media strategically to find new customers."*

McDonnell has been training businesses how to use social media since 2009. From her base in Enniscrone, Co. Sligo, Louise has trained over 16,000 people in the last 11 years including 8,000 online students over the last 12 months. She has witnessed an explosion in online learning during the pandemic. She is working with Local Enterprise Offices and Skillnet Ireland, from every corner of Ireland to deliver social media marketing workshops on the topics of Content Marketing, Developing Sales Funnels for Social Media, Instagram Marketing, and Facebook Advertising. She also runs an online membership programme for business owners and marketing professionals called, Social Media Academy. Members benefit from two live training sessions every month, group coaching calls and discounts on one to one coaching sessions. Membership of Social Media Academy has quadrupled during the Pandemic. McDonnell said,

*"During the pandemic I worked really hard to deliver as much value as I could to members. Not only do I understand social media, I also know what it's like to run a business, so I wanted to offer a resource that helped businesses as much as possible through unprecedented times. Members tell me they value not having to deal with the loneliness and frustration of figuring out social media marketing by themselves. They love that I show them step by step what they need to do, welcome the sense of community, and that they can join my training live, or watch it back at their own pace in their own time."*

With the risk of COVID-19 ever present, McDonnell predicts the move towards online shopping will continue in Q4 of 2020.

*"People will research online before making cautious instore visits, click and collect will also continue to grow in popularity and home deliveries will be the only option for cocooners. Now more than ever businesses need to understand how to optimise their online presence for conversions and to develop sales funnels using advanced remarketing techniques."*

Read about Social Media Academy [here](#) - a platform for business owners & marketing professionals.



**Siobhán Ní Gháirbhith, St. Tola Cheese, Clare**

When restrictions due to COVID-19 were first announced in Ireland I said to myself if we survived the last financial crisis in 2008 we'll survive this one. As 50% of our business is supplying the Food Service Sector I had to think quickly since all of this market sector shut down so suddenly and my cheese house, full of soft St. Tola cheese, was ready to sell in time for the tourist season to kick off or so we thought. Mid-March we were coming into goat's milk production on our farm which is when cheese production is at its peak. I immediately set about creating an online shop with the assistance of Sile Ginnane of Fluidedge Company who is my website designer. I knew I had to get it up quickly as CÁIS - The Irish Farmhouse Cheesemakers Association, (of which I am a committee member) at the start of the restrictions worked extremely hard with the assistance of An Bord Bia, to launch a PR media campaign to highlight to the public the importance of supporting Irish artisan producers like ourselves. I was fortunate to be interviewed by Brendan O'Connor on RTÉ Radio 1 and featured in many national newspapers the following few weeks as part of this campaign.



Following this publicity we were very busy with online orders for the first month. This helped us sell all the cheese which otherwise we would have had to dump due to its limited 6-week shelf-life. We also started to produce our St.Tola hard cheese which we can hold for years .By pivoting our business so quickly within the first 4 weeks of restrictions, and with the COVID-19 employment assistance, we have managed to stay in business and claw back our turnover slowly but steadily which had fallen by 75% by the end of March. Our online sales have now fallen back quite considerably as people are free to move within the country. We are still operating at 65% of turnover and the future is uncertain, but we remain positive, though we do expect a challenging autumn and winter.

Find out more about St. Tola Cheese [here](#)



If there is one positive thing the COVID-19 pandemic has done for the owners, managers, and employees of small businesses, it is to show them just how far SMEs are down the pecking order in Ireland. While income supports for the unemployed and those in jobs were quickly put in place, real liquidity support for businesses have yet to materialise. We in ISME sincerely hope this does not produce a harvest of insolvent businesses.

ISME is not proprietorial or insular in its outlook, and will happily work with others where it is to the benefit of our membership. For this reason, you will have seen us working with the Alliance for Insurance Reform on the insurance issue (the only multi-sector trade association to do so); and also, with the Local Jobs Alliance and the SME Recovery Plan to secure greater financial supports for business during the pandemic.

Despite this, we still believe the SME voice remains unheard at the Cabinet table. A significant number of sectoral trade associations crowd the SME representative space. They work hard and conscientiously on behalf of their members, but are rarely heeded. SMEs as a broad sector, are effectively ignored as an economic and social grouping.

ISME wants to change this. Our objective is to get as many trade and professional bodies as possible, which share the same values and goals, to align on a common platform, and where appropriate to seek ex-officio membership of relevant bodies such as:

- The Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF)
- The National Competitiveness Council (NCC)
- Skillnet Board

Our purpose in doing so is to explore those areas of common interest and policy where we can speak with a united voice. We have therefore launched the 'Belong' initiative, which will allow those sectoral trade bodies which want to affiliate with ISME to do so as loosely or as tightly as they and their members wish to. This can range from an entirely independent ad hoc relationship with no commercial aspect at all, to full membership with all the benefits that accrue.

Naturally, our own National Council has a set of economic and taxation policies which it asks ISME to pursue. We are happy to share these with interested sectoral associations to find points of agreement. We hope as many of you as possible are interested in sharing the journey with us.

In terms of policy position, those upon which the diverse memberships of ISME currently agree as a set of national priorities are.

1. Immediate liquidity supports for SMEs, beyond debt finance
2. Affordable access to an amended examinership regime

3. An operational plan for rebooting businesses post lock-down, with sub-elements:
  - Rational & reasonable health and hygiene measures (largely delivered)
  - Clarity on phases of return/reopening (largely delivered)
  - Assistance for direct costs incurred- e.g. PPE, consumables, cleaning (not delivered)
4. The business cost issue remains unresolved, especially insurance. We need a seat on the NCC. The cost of living for employees cannot be redressed by simply pushing up the NMW
5. The LEEF mechanism covers only 25% of the productive workforce. Government must have a standing SME engagement body to address this strategic blindness
6. While we acknowledge that a recession will now require significant levels of Government spending, we must heed IFAC and start to repay our excessive national debt as soon as we exit recession.
7. Equality of treatment for self-employed, in taxation and in social protection.
8. Our taxation system is long due overhaul, requiring:
  - Implementation of the 20 key tax recommendations made by the Irish Tax Institute.
  - Reduce the punitive 23% VAT rate to 21% (on a permanent basis).
  - Reform of taxes on property, commercial rates, LPT and inheritance.
9. Spending on infrastructure is at the levels we have previously sought, but we are concerned about value for money.
10. OECD and other studies have revealed significant training shortfalls and skills mismatches in SMEs. Our further education and training regime is inconsistent with activating a bigger workforce, or training the unskilled. We also acknowledge that our domestic SME base requires extensive training to improve its productivity. This should be incentivised in a manner similar to the Teagasc Green Cert.
11. We need a revised indigenous industrial policy, to reflect the importance of small enterprise to the domestic economy. We need a dedicated State Agency and line minister to oversee it, as the vast bulk of SMEs fall into the gulf between those managed by LEOs and those managed by EI/IDA.
12. We need a viable alternative to our pillar banks. Businesses, private citizens, and even the SBCL, are inappropriately dependent on the pillar banks for banking and access to capital.

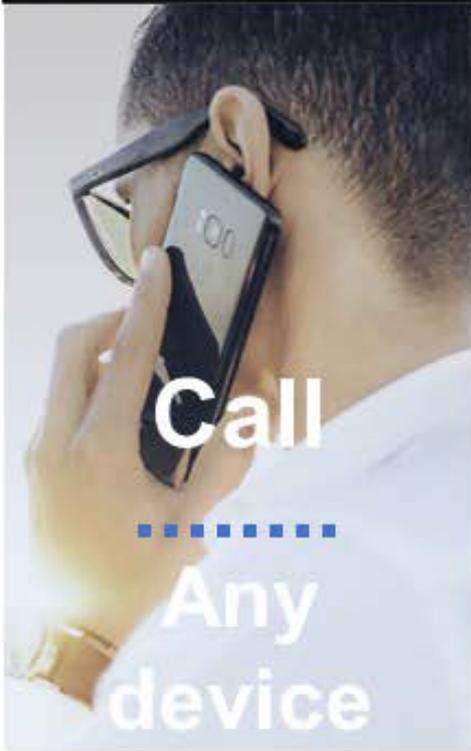
You can view ISME's lobbying activity [here](#) and media commentary [here](#). To discuss how you can get involved please contact ISME's CEO, Neil McDonnell on [neil@isme.ie](mailto:neil@isme.ie)



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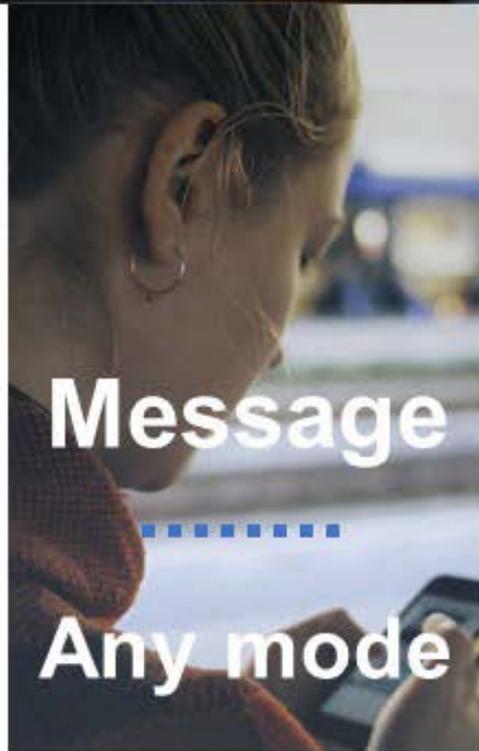
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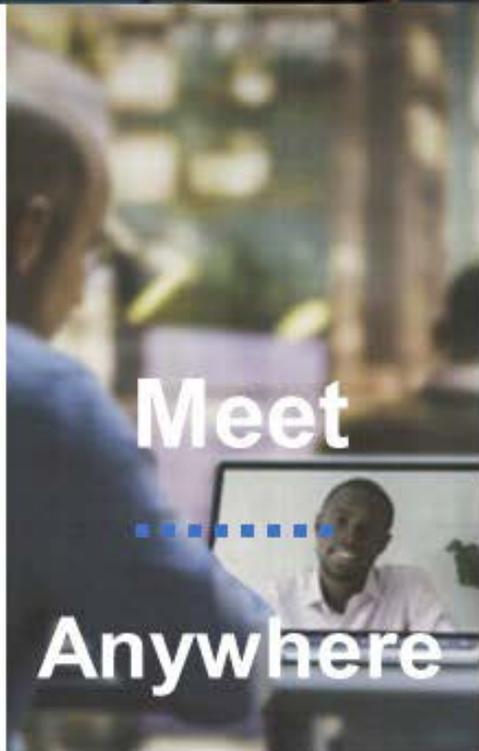
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# ISME COVID-19 Information and updates

## July Jobs Stimulus

A PDF of the July Jobs Stimulus document that was issued on Thursday 23rd July can be found [here](#).

## Face Covering

On 10 August, new [Public Health Laws](#) made face coverings mandatory for customers in shops, public buildings, cinemas, museums and more. Read full details on wearing face covering [here](#).

## Ireland's 'green list'

Government has agreed the locations be included as 'normal precautions' on the Department of Foreign Affairs' Travel Advice. The 15 countries are Malta, Finland, Norway, Italy, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Cyprus, Slovakia, Greece, Greenland, Gibraltar, Monaco and San Marino. This list is subject to change!. Read our news / updates on the topic [here](#).



## Wage Subsidy Scheme

The Government announced the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) on 23rd July which will replace the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) from 1 of September 2020. The scheme provides a flat-rate subsidy to qualifying employers based on the numbers of paid and eligible employees on the employer's payroll. You can view their guidelines to EWSS [here](#). It is expected to continue until 31 March 2021. Both schemes will run in parallel from 1 July 2020 until the TWSS ceases at the end of August 2020. More information on the scheme is available [here](#).

ISME will host **EWSS Explained - Live Q&A** with Karen Byrne, Assistant Principle Officer, Revenue Commissioners on Monday 7th September at 10.00am. Reserve your space and send questions in advance to [marketing@isme.ie](mailto:marketing@isme.ie)

## COVID-19 Supports

An FAQ booklet on COVID-19 Income Supports is available [here](#)

The government has a directory of supports available to view [here](#).

The government recently introduced the Restart Grant Plus Scheme. Grants of between €4,000 up to a maximum of €25,000 are available.

To qualify for the scheme, enterprises must have:

- 250 employees or less;
- Turnover of less than €100,000 per employee; and
- Reduced turnover by 25% as a result of COVID-19

Those that accessed funding through the previous round of the scheme are eligible to apply for a second top-up payment to a total combined value of the revised maximum grant level.

Under the Restart Grant Plus scheme, support will also be provided to enterprises that could not access the original grant scheme, including rateable sports businesses and trading charity shops. Non-rated B&Bs will be eligible for a grant payment of €4,000.

More information about the scheme can be found [here](#) and FAQs about the scheme can be found [here](#).

## Returning to Work

- The Department of Health has developed social distancing graphics to help you maintain distance in your premises. You can download them for free [here](#).
- The Health and Safety Authority have published checklists and templates to help employers, business owners and managers get their business up and running again. Available [here](#)
- The NSAI COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide guidance on workplace improvement and protection is available [here](#)
- The National protocols on returning to work [here](#)
- HSA guidance on COVID-19 and the workplace [here](#)
- ISME Employee Declaration template [here](#)
- ISME COVID-19 Risk Assessment template [here](#)

## ISME COVID-19 Webinars

ISME and ISME Skillnet are running a number of free, informative sessions to help SMEs navigate these uncertain times. You can view previous sessions [here](#) which includes:

- COVID-19 Supports Q&A
- Understanding Your COVID-19 Compliance Responsibilities
- Return to Work
- HR COVID-19 Q&A

View and register future webinars [here](#)

## Back to Business

Visit the [Back to Business portal](#) - an initiative ISME launched in June to provide Members with a platform to promote their business, network and get key information during the COVID-19 crisis.

You can view [Members ads & offers](#), [blogs](#), [advice](#), [webinars](#), [learning](#) and participate in our virtual networking events - [Pitch my Business](#), the next event taking place Wednesday 16th September at 10.30am.



**ISME HR Advisor - Cait Lynch**

As the impact of COVID-19 begins to become clear, many businesses are facing the prospect of making decisions regarding cost saving measures to get them through this difficult period. These measures can include making roles redundant, which may present a risk of an unfair dismissals claim arising. A successful unfair dismissals claim could result in up to two years' salary being awarded to a former employee. As demonstrated in case law, when a case regarding redundancy is taken, the burden of proof is on the employer to prove a genuine redundancy has occurred.

Employers faced with making roles redundant can protect themselves by

1. Ensuring that this is a genuine redundancy situation, as defined in the redundancy payments acts 1967 – 2007
2. Ensuring that the process is fair and transparent

### **Genuine grounds for redundancy**

There are five alternative definitions of redundancy contained in the redundancy payments acts 1967 – 2007. A dismissal due to redundancy may be justified where the circumstances giving rise to the dismissal fall within one or more of these five definitions as follows:

- The fact that the employer has ceased, or intends to cease, to carry on the business for the purposes for which the employee was employed by him/her, or has ceased or intends to cease to carry on that business in the places where the employee was so employed, or
- The fact that the requirements of that business for employees to carry out work of a particular kind in the place where s/he was so employed, have ceased or diminished or are expected to diminish, or
- The fact that the employer has decided to carry on the business with fewer or no employees, whether by requiring the work for which the employee had been employed (or had been doing before his dismissal) be done by other employees, or otherwise, or
- The fact that the employer has decided that the work for which the employee had been employed (or had been doing before his/her dismissal) should henceforward be done in a different manner for which the employee is not sufficiently qualified or trained, or

- The fact that the employer has decided that the work for which the employee had been employed (or had been doing before his/her dismissal) should be henceforward be done by a person who is also capable of doing other work for which the employee is not sufficiently qualified or trained.

### **Fair and transparent process.**

The rules of natural justice must apply when taking a decision to dismiss an employee on the grounds of redundancy. Employers must act reasonably in taking this decision. Employers must remember that a redundancy involves a role, and not a person. If more than one person is completing a role, and only one redundancy is proposed, all employees working in that role must be considered for redundancy. A redundancy is not a quick fix for performance or other issues.

An employer should assess whether the redundancy constitutes a collective redundancy which is defined as:

The making redundant within a period of 30 consecutive days, of a minimum number of employees, that minimum varying with the normal size of the establishment's workforce. The minimum numbers are:

- 5 employees in an establishment employing 21-49 employees
- 10 employees in an establishment normally employing 50-99 employees
- 10% of employees in an establishment normally employing 100-299 employees, or
- 30 employees in an establishment normally employing 300 or more employees

Employers should look at the average number employed in each of the 12 months preceding the date on which the first dismissal takes effect to calculate employee numbers.

If the redundancy is a collective redundancy the employer has additional obligations to

- engage in an information and a consultation process with employees' representatives and
- notify the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection of the proposed collective redundancy.

If the redundancy does not fall into the category of a collective redundancy, it is still important that an employer consults with the employee before confirming any redundancy. An employer should issue an "At Risk" letter to all employees currently working in the role. This letter should outline the number of redundancies proposed, dates for consultation meetings and details of what the consultation meetings will involve.

The consultation process should allow for discussions around any person interested in voluntary redundancy, and any alternatives to it which may include alternative employment, job share arrangements, changes to roles or salary changes. Alternatives which involve a loss of status or worsening of the terms and conditions of employment are not generally considered reasonable. Similarly, an offer that involves travelling an unreasonable distance to work may also be considered a justifiable reason to refuse an offer.

If an employee accepts a new contract or re-engagement with immediate effect and the terms do not differ from those of the previous contract, they will not be entitled to claim redundancy. This also applies if they refuse such an offer unreasonably. Any offer of alternative work should be given in writing and the employee is entitled to the full details of the offer. If no alternatives are offered or accepted, employers must implement selection criteria if there is more than one employee in the pool for redundancy. These should be objective, reasonable and be applied in a fair manner.

The most equitable way to apply redundancy selection is to develop a selection matrix to identify the capabilities required within the company in order to ensure that the reason for redundancy is objective.

Departure from an established procedure without special reasons justifying such a departure, will give rise to a claim of unfair selection for redundancy and ultimately a finding of an unfair dismissal. Employers must remember that a redundancy is not personal, and cannot be targeted at a specific employee if more than one employee works in the role being made redundant. All proposed redundancies should fall under the five grounds outlined in the Redundancy Payment Acts. Employers must document all the steps taken during the redundancy process, and make sure that they can stand over their procedures. They must ensure that all procedures and selection criteria are objective and transparent. Failure to follow fair procedure may result in an employee taking a claim of unfair dismissal in relation to their redundancy.

**For Member HR advice please contact**

**hr@isme.ie**

## HSA Return to Work Safely Online Courses



### Return to Work Safely Induction:

This course has been developed by the HSA to help you understand the Return to Work Safely (RTWS) Protocol requirements for returning to work. One of these requirements is that workers must complete induction training.

The Return to Work Safely Induction course will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, and a certificate is available on completion.

TAKE THIS COURSE

### Lead Worker Representative:

This short course has been developed by the HSA to help those appointed as a Lead Worker Representative. Under the Return to Work Safely Protocol at least one Lead Worker Representative must be appointed in the workplace.

The Lead Worker Representative course will take approximately 25 minutes to complete, and a certificate is available on completion.

TAKE THIS COURSE

Further information:



www.hsa.ie | 1890 289 389 | wcu@hsa.ie

To find out more and take the course click the buttons above or visit [hsa.ie/COVID19](https://hsa.ie/COVID19)

# Across Borders Consulting

## Your Brexit Readiness Specialists



### Who are we?

Across Borders Consulting is a Director led business with over 30 years' experience in the area of customs and international trade.

### What do we do?

We specialise in helping companies to plan for the impact of Brexit on their business. It is critical for companies trading with the UK to understand that the end of the transition period on the 31st December 2020 marks the beginning of a new trading reality and not simply a moment in time change. Preparing for this promptly is critical. We provide businesses of all sizes with tailored customs supply chain solutions to minimise disruption, reduce complexity, optimise costs and remove barriers to trade.

### Why use our services

At this time of trade disruption, it has never been more critical to be in control and understand your obligations and opportunities from a customs and trade perspective. We specialise in providing customs and international trade advice to enable companies to optimise costs and ensure compliance in their supply chains.

### Brexit Readiness Specialism

We support companies to assess the impact of Brexit in relation to their trade footprint and develop remediation plans for critical trade impacts to ensure they are fully Brexit ready. We can assist companies at every stage of preparedness through:

- Customs and excise training programs for relevant staff
- End to end supply chain impact assessments
- Developing bespoke Brexit readiness implementation plans
- Providing advice, guidance and assistance to access grants and funding to support Brexit readiness projects and planning
- Specific guidance on the cost benefit and implementation of customs registrations, licenses, guarantees and financial aspects required to facilitate imports/exports post-Brexit
- Advice on customs transit, AEO, customs warehousing and other related potential customs mitigation opportunities for Brexit

### Contact Us

E-mail: [info@abconsulting.ie](mailto:info@abconsulting.ie)

[www.abconsulting.ie](http://www.abconsulting.ie)



Martin Agnew

+353 (0) 87 787 8537



Ciarán McConigley

+353 (0) 85 729 4652

## ISME LAUNCH PRE BUDGET SUBMISSION



We have published our pre-budget submission to the new Government, which you can read [HERE](#). In the submission, ISME calls on Government to loosen the purse-strings now for the same reason we have called for fiscal prudence for the last three years. Governments must act in the long-term good of the citizens and must spend counter-cyclically. Now, it is time to spend. As always, your feedback on what we should include in the future is welcome.

## Updated FAQs

ISME have created a detailed COVID-19 FAQ section on [isme.ie](http://isme.ie). Here you will find answers to the most frequently asked questions to our HR Advisor and Membership team. Topics covered include: health and safety obligations, annual leave and discretionary travel, absence from work and payment obligations, cost saving measures, entitlements and supports, statutory redundancy, long term absence and protected leave, employee relations during COVID-19, returning to work – safety protocols.

Read the FAQs in full [here](#).

## Getting Back to Business with ISME

We launched this initiative in June that provides Members with a platform to promote their business, network and get key information during the COVID-19 crisis. We have been delighted with the response to **Back to Business** and you can view member ads and offers, webinars, advice and blogs focusing on key tools and advice needed to get back to business; plus virtual networking events - **Pitch my Business**, the next event is taking place on Wednesday 16th September at 10.30am. You are welcome to submit your free advert for the campaign to [marketing@isme.ie](mailto:marketing@isme.ie) - spec available [here](#). View the portal [here](#).

**ISME** Irish SME Association

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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Online Etiquette for Email & On-screen Chat

Wednesday, 26 August  
12.00pm - 1.30pm  
[Online](#)

### ISME Backing Business – Embracing Change Business Growth Program

Commencing September, through to December 2020

Currently seeking Expressions of Interest [Here](#)

### Foundation in Entrepreneurial Sales- Online Course (Certified) - Launching Now!

[Available now online](#)

### EWSS Explained - Live Q&A with Karen Byrne, Assistant Principle Officer, Revenue Commissioner

Monday, 7 September  
10.00am

Send questions and reserve your space by emailing [marketing@isme.ie](mailto:marketing@isme.ie)

### Back to business: Pitch my business

Free virtual networking event, open to all, network and promote your company.

Wednesday, 16 September  
10.30am  
Find out more [here](#)

## ISME'S GUIDE TO THE ROLE OF A COVID-19 LEAD WORKER REPRESENTATIVE

The National Return to Work Safely Protocol document sets out the principal and practical steps required in order that employers and employees can keep themselves and their workplaces safe following a return to work. A key piece of this protocol is the requirement for each workplace to appoint at least one Lead Worker Representative.

ISME's guide is designed to aid employers to ensure that they are complying with the protocols relating to selecting, training and supporting their Lead Worker Representative.

Read the guide [here](#)

## BREXIT Support from ISME

We have created a page for BREXIT resources to help you navigate these unknown times. Included on the page is *A Brexit Guide* written by ISME Roadshow speaker, Paul McMahon 'BrexitLegal.ie' is a comprehensive free website about Brexit for Irish business.

Read more [here](#).

## Business confidence improves from low Q1

ISME's Trends survey shows an overall improvement in business confidence from Q1, albeit from a very low level. Also improved is business sentiment regarding future sales and future employment.

Regarding insurance costs, most businesses are still experiencing premium increases.

While the top concerns for SMEs in this quarter are Economic Uncertainty at 83%, Brexit at 43% and Insurance Costs at 26%. Reduced Orders have jumped to 47% as a Q2 concern, clearly driven by COVID-19.

Read in full [here](#).

## ISME's Business Trends Survey Q2 2020

Have you seen an increase / decrease in your insurance premiums?



## Results of our third COVID-19 Survey are LIVE

Our COVID-19 Survey shows that 69% of our respondents are availing of the TWSS, and 30% of our self-employed respondents are availing of the PUP. 58% of respondents have not yet asked for assistance from their banks, which ISME CEO, Neil McDonnell calls "surprising at this point in the pandemic."

Regarding business mortality, there is a continued improvement in sentiment among SME respondents, with a cumulative 2.7% of them seeing their business failing within one month. This is down from a cumulative 11% at the end of April. Read in full [here](#).

## Business Advisory Service

ISME Skillnet is offering a free Business Advisory Service to help business owners relaunch their business in a confident and organised manner. The service consists of 6 hours of mentoring with a professionally qualified business coach, carefully selected by ISME.

If interested, please contact Adam at [adam@isme.ie](mailto:adam@isme.ie)



## Learning and Development Update

It has been a busy time for the ISME L&D Team. We will be continuing several free webinars to help SMEs get back to business.

### Backing Business – Embracing Change Business Growth Programme.

We will be running a programme running from mid-September through to the end of 2020, which is focused on developing you and getting the right mindset for innovation:

For a minimal fee, you will work with two acclaimed ISME trainers ([Simon Haigh](#) and [Jason Cooper](#)) and business advisors who will, over 12 x 1.5 hour online sessions, guide you to invest in your personal and professional journey so you are best placed to succeed. Each participant will receive full course material, workbooks, e-books, and the opportunity of ongoing coaching.



### Griffith College in Partnership with ISME: Free Certified SME Business Management.

We are now offering a Certified SME Business Management accreditation with our friends at Griffith College. Certified at Level 7 on the QQI framework, this programme will arm any business owner or budding entrepreneur with the confidence to run a business smoothly and profitably.

We are currently able to offer this free of charge and can register [here](#): (Be sure to mention ISME!)

### Exciting New Personal Development Learning Platform – Zhrum

Zhrum.com is a new self-directed online coaching platform that enables employees to explore and unlock their full potential. With a fully holistic approach, you can focus on the topics that matter the most to you at this time, whether in your personal or professional life. Zhrum's low-cost model means businesses can support their employees in unlocking their full potential in order to overcome any obstacle with access to their own virtual coach. If you would like to try the service, [Zhrum](#) provides initial access for free.

### Important Crisis App Development underway with Trinity College Dublin:

Please fill out this very short survey

ISME is supporting the BisCast web app, an initiative developed by Trinity postgraduate students to unite the small business community and provide support during times of crisis. We would appreciate your participation, as collaboration is key to the app's effectiveness, which will use the data to create roadmaps for successful crisis navigation and adaptations. Please fill out this short [survey](#) so that together, we can support Dublin's small business community.

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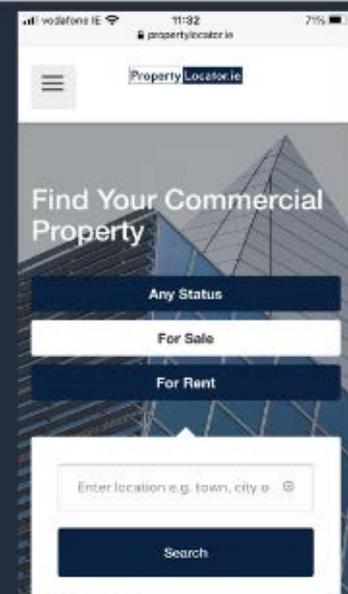
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# Striving for Positive Mental Health

Annie Sampson.  
Director and Principle Trainer -  
Super.Vision Training

At any time, good mental and physical health is very important, but now more than ever, and in particular for people in business, it cannot be ignored. Psychotherapist and trainer, Annie Sampson looks at the small changes we can make that can produce greater wellbeing and positive mental health.

When we're not doing too well, we often experience some or all of the following:

- Fatigue, lack of motivation
- Broken sleep, insomnia, waking feeling tired
- Worries and anxieties that go round and round without resolution
- Body tension, headaches, back, neck tension
- Appetite, absent or overeating
- Difficulty concentrating, lack of focus
- Irritability, snapping at people, feeling overwhelmed, feelings of not being able to cope

So, what can we do to achieve positive mental health? Try looking at the areas below and keep a scorecard of how well you're doing from 1 - 10, with 10 being very good.

## Sleep

Is it deep, disturbed, difficult? Aim for good sleep hygiene: a bedroom on the cool side. A structure is recommended, going to bed and getting up at the same time and keeping off the screen, mobile, computer, even TV. Try not to look at any of these right before bed. A hot milky drink can help.



## Exercise

Getting up from the computer every 20-30 minutes and stretching, set the alarm. We're not designed to sit still all day and are more likely to develop muscle tensions, which can be painful. Walk - it doesn't have to be far or for very long, being out in the elements is good therapy.

## Diet

Is it varied? Fresh rather than processed foods. Cooking gets you away from the screen and can let your brain switch off from work and its worries. Do you get time to sit down and enjoy a meal?

## Communication.

Are you being heard by those who need to hear you? Look at the way your communicating, you can change this, but you can't make someone listen. Decide what you want to communicate, choose the words that convey this, speak slowly, breathe! When you don't feel listened to, it can cause irritation and anxiety. And are you listening to those you are talking with? Focus on what's being said to you and let the words and sentiment sink in. Communication is an art and it needs attention and work.

## Structure the day.

We are creatures of habit which means we like to know what's happening with no big surprises. At least we can control the time we get up and go to bed, eat, and work. Check, are you being a slave to your work rather than aiming for the 8-hour cycle of sleep, work, leisure?

## Compassion.

This is a big one. Can you be compassionate with yourself? Praise for what you did well, learning from what didn't go so well, rather than berating yourself. If you're the type who continually pushes yourself, has high expectations, then you might not have enough self-compassion, which can lead to stress and anxiety

A certain amount of anxiety is necessary for us to work, learn, and complete day to day tasks. Too much and we don't do well. We are aiming for balance, to feel our anxiety levels drop when we have completed the task in hand. When the levels don't drop, that's trouble!

These times have produced a lot of anxiety in some of us, we can support ourselves by looking at the above and tweaking. Next step, 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. Very good advice. If your scores are high and you're feeling good, then you don't have to change anything, just accept and enjoy. Small changes are all that's needed, they act like a ripple, producing bigger changes and gains.

Annie delivers wellness training and will be presenting a Well Being and Mental Health course with ISME Skillnet in the Autumn, details will be available [here](#) and find out more about her work [here](#).



**Adam Weatherley**  
 Learning & Development Manager, ISME

On Thursday March 12th, I was at Dublin Airport heading to Geneva. At 11pm on the Friday, my hotel told me I must leave the premises by 10am the next morning and the whole town was going into lockdown. At midnight Sat 15th, I was walking through Dublin arrivals having travelled back home via 3 airports. 14 days of isolation ensued. A very difficult period for the family - no contact and separate mealtimes.

Never had there been a time where Irish SMEs needed help, guidance and support. At an emergency ISME team meeting, it was discussed what our role would be to address the pandemic, what new responsibilities to adopt and how we were to communicate in our new remote existence.

Our HR Advisor, Cait Lynch, had only started with us on March 16th. Cait found herself at the coalface of member enquiries, her telephone very much the daily hotline for scores of bewildered business owners and managers, wondering what to do with their business, what to do with their staff and what supports were available to them. With the team, she made enormous contributions to our [advice page](#) - which is still the most visited page, getting 1000s of hits each week -

Cait provides some interesting insights into her experiences since joining ISME:

*"I joined ISME on 16th March, and the office was working 100% remotely by 19th March. There are still some team members in ISME who I have yet to meet face to face! As the HR advisor role is so busy, I didn't really get time to appreciate what a strange start to a job it was, but even remotely, the team and our members made me feel very welcome and made it easy to adjust. It has been a challenging few month but so far, I have found it extremely rewarding and COVID-19 has given me the opportunity to get to know many of our members through calls and queries. I am one of the lucky few whose job really doesn't change due to remote working but looking to the future I can't wait to meet the rest of the team as we begin to get back to normality".*

Cillian O'Donoghue joined our membership team as we headed into lockdown. He shares his experiences below:

*"From my own perspective, like Cait, I think it was my second day with ISME when we went into lockdown, so it was very much a baptism of fire! For those first few weeks, the majority of calls were almost an outreach service reassuring people who were confused and worried, especially during the full lockdown period, as*

*many were concerned they may never reopen. As the weeks went on though, there has mostly been positive feedback on ISME's support, training, and advisory, and the **Back to Business** initiative. Things are beginning to settle a bit now as well, with more and more questions or feedback related to issues like Brexit and Insurance, rather than just COVID, which was the case until June".*

If the COVID-19 has a silver lining it has forced many of us to modernise our business processes. The OECD report published in late October last year, emphasised our over-reliance on outdated business processes. COVID has ensured that we embrace digitalisation. We were guilty of it here too. The Learning & Development function at ISME was 80% classroom based. We had to get 100% online overnight, and our panel of approved trainers proved very helpful and innovative as the crisis deepened. We were awarded a generous emergency fund from Skillnet Ireland, who also responded rapidly to the crisis. The fund has allowed us to provide free learning events and business advisory clinics to support business owners, their staff, and people suddenly on wage subsidy with potential job insecurity. The purpose of the events was initially to boost morale and confidence, but also to provide people with an opportunity to upskill, something that often we overlook when we are



busy in "normal" times. Our free webinar series has become hugely successful with a focus on new routines, restructuring your work day, time management and setting and achieving your new goals.

Our longstanding partnership with Griffith College was to prove vital at the start of the crisis. By the end of March we had developed a free 10 webinar programme ["Restart Your Business, Rethink Your Strategy"](#) with well-known keynote speakers such as Jim Power and Pdraig O'Ceidigh. At its peak 1300 people were tuning into each webinar. The webinars were recorded and now form the virtual classroom backbone of our Certificate in SME Management, a QQI Level 7 accreditation which is currently offered free of charge through ISME and Griffith College - you can view the programme [here](#).

Ronan Rigney, our 16-year ISME membership veteran, and a man who has seen recessions and crisis, shares what he has heard from businesses in recent months:

*“Since the lockdown and the pandemic spreading across the world and Ireland, businesses have knuckled down and started to adapt, many developing an online presence where one didn’t exist, or enhancing their existing online presence. Remote working has also expanded around the country. Businesses have taken on board the Government guidelines and Health and Safety protocols for COVID-19 in their businesses in relation to social distancing and hygiene measures.*

*Whilst there is still a lot of concern about the future, many business owners are hoping with the Government employment subsidies and supports, and the practical steps they have taken in the workplace, they can trade through the challenges and difficulties”.*

The rapidly changing mindsets, and with innovation becoming a necessity, the ISME team designed the **Back to Business** initiative. It was created to promote and support SMEs through free advertising, advice, blogs, events and webinars including a series of virtual networking events *“Pitch My Business”*, offering a business owner 3 minutes to deliver their elevator pitch to other businesses.

ISME also created a [Coronavirus](#) section on the website providing up to date information and advice across all areas impacted by COVID-19. This helps businesses navigate through the number of Government supports available to them, and to provide information to enable

them to make difficult and courageous decisions. For example, the TWSS has had several iterations over a matter of a few weeks making it hard for business owners to understand what they were entitled to. Being able to help them understand this vital Government support has proved to be very popular

Through our Q&A webinars which have featured Neil McDonnell, ISME’s CEO and our HR Advisor, Cait Lynch plus expert panellists, we were able to address queries and issues raised by members. We recognise the need to run these events on a continual basis and they will continue for the remainder of 2020, and by the looks of things, well into 2021.

Lobbying became, and still is, very important to the SME sector. Coronavirus highlighted the importance of SMEs to the overall Irish economy, and what needs to be done to keep businesses viable. We agree that the Government’s supports to date are good, but not enough to carry SMEs through this crisis, liquidity being the biggest issue. ISME have been front and centre on this throughout the pandemic, our CEO frequently on Irish media and talking to key stakeholders. You can read about our lobbying activities [here](#):

This journey is not over yet by any means and like you we will adapt and change to respond to this evolving new world for business.



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# 'Blue Cert' Proposed for Irish SME Sector

ISME, as part of an industry group representing small to medium sized businesses in Ireland is proposing the introduction of a certification process to professionalise the SME sector. The framework for the 'Blue Cert' qualification for SMEs has been developed in a collaboration between ISME, Network Ireland and Griffith College and aims to increase the SME sector's resilience and equip it to drive productivity in the Irish economy.

Based on the Teagasc Specific Purpose Certificate in Farm Administration ('Green Cert') already in operation in the farming sector, ISME submitted its proposal for a 'Blue Cert' for SMEs to Government in 2019. In the proposal, economist, Jim Power states: *"Productivity among Irish SMEs is static or falling, as is profitability. This is occurring at a time when there is an increasing trend towards protectionism globally; when our nearest and largest trading partner is leaving the single market, and when US (and EU Commission) trade and corporation tax policies threaten the long-term viability of our traditional industrial policies based around foreign multinational corporations. If we are to scale our indigenous enterprise base, it is imperative that we address latent deficits in managerial skills within our SMEs."*

Commenting on this proposal, Neil McDonnell, ISME's CEO said:

*"The Irish SME sector significantly lags the multinational sector in terms of productivity. This gap has been widely reported on by OECD, and the National Competitiveness Council. Both the Workplace Relations Commission and the Health and Safety Authority have identified basic deficits in the knowledge of employment law and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 which must be addressed. The best way to quickly upskill management in the indigenous enterprise sector is to encourage a rapid uptake in skills training and life-long learning."*

Louisa Meehan, President of Network Ireland added:

*"We strongly support the idea of a 'Blue Cert'. An industry-supported course that provides training in relevant aspects of running a business would be hugely attractive to our membership of more than 1300 women across the country. It makes sense that a well-rounded foundation would help to nurture a strong and resilient SME sector in Ireland."*

In its proposal to Government, ISME outlines the following objectives for a Blue Cert training programme:

- To create an SME sector that is dynamic and innovative
- To broaden the enterprise and export base to ensure that the economy is resilient, diversified and adaptable

- To support the internationalisation and market diversification of Irish enterprise in order to make the economy more resilient to external market shocks, such as Brexit
- To grow the capacity of local firms to absorb and implement new technologies
- To improve management quality and training in smaller enterprises in order to foster innovation in order to evolve into new products, new markets and new sectors



ISME CEO, Neil McDonnell with Louisa Meehan, President, Network Ireland and Dr Tomás Mac Eochagáin at Griffith College.

Dr Tomás Mac Eochagáin, Director of Academic Programmes at Griffith College said:

*"Building a network of professionally trained experienced managers will greatly facilitate the resilience and growth of Ireland's SME sector, allowing it to compete nationally and internationally. Griffith College has a history of strong established relationships with industry and welcomes this opportunity to work with ISME and Network Ireland to deliver certified training to meet the needs of SME managers."*

In its proposal to Government, ISME identifies the key skills that would need to be developed through a Level 6 QQI course covering: business and commercial law, the tax system, wages, technology absorption and software packages, engineering skills, marketing skills, treasury skills, research and development capability, staff training, market research and intergenerational business transfer. It is proposed that the course would be incentivised in the same manner as the 'Green Cert'. In its proposal, ISME states that *'schemes, grants and tax treatment could be dependent on having the QQI qualification.'*

Adam Weatherley, Learning & Development Manager, ISME commenting on the proposal said:

*"We are delighted to be involved in this much needed initiative. Not only will it address the OECD's report recommendation for an increase in uptake of Management Development Programmes for Irish businesses, it will also help tackle the SME productivity issues. We see market inducements as a great incentive for business owners and their staff to take this certified programme."*

# Cait Lynch, ISME HR Advisor

A series that highlights the lives and interests of ISME members and staff. In this edition, The bISME talks to Cait Lynch, ISME HR Advisor about her love of horses.

## What interests do you have outside of work?

I love nothing more than spending my free time with horses. I am a member of a local riding club, and my favourite thing to do after finishing up work on a Friday is to head out the gate on a horse to have a gallop and blow off steam! It's a fantastic social outlet as well, and I have made some great friends through horses.

## What got you interested in horses?

I started out like a lot of little girls, obsessed with pony books and toys. As I got a bit older my parents got me some lessons in the hope that I would lose interest, but that never happened! When I left school, I took my British Horse Society exams to qualify to teach horse riding. I taught for a few years before deciding it was not going to be a long-term career prospect for me, but I kept it up as a hobby from there.

## Tell us about the horses you've had over the years.

I spent most of my life riding other people's horses, and only bought my first horse six years ago. Lucy was a 6-year-old thoroughbred cross. Unfortunately, I had a bad fall and had to find a new home for her while I took a break to recover. She is now in the UK competing in dressage and eventing.

I then got Belle, an Irish sports horse. she is 24 this year. Just before the country went into lockdown, she chipped a bone in her foot and is now retired, and loving her new life as a lawn mower!

I'm on the lookout for another, but in the meantime I'm lucky enough to be able to borrow Monty, a lovely Irish sport horse who belongs to my sister-in-law.



Cait riding her horse Belle.

## Do you have an interesting story about your hobby?

As I work in HR, I always love telling the story of the morning I had to ring my manager when I was in A&E after a fall to say I might not make it into work that day. I was only in that job two months. Thankfully my manager had a horse obsessed child so when I mentioned the

extent of the possible injuries, she knew my estimate of missing a day was definitely on the conservative side and planned for a longer absence! We did have a few laughs about that call once I was back in work. The experience also gave me a unique perspective on managing absence in the workplace!

## How important do you think it is to have an interest outside work

Very, it's important to have something else in life aside from work, to have something you can spend your time off enjoying. You come back to work refreshed and ready to go again. If there is a problem I am struggling with, or a stressful situation going on in work, having the horses allows me to switch off from the issue rather than stewing over it and losing sleep. Often coming back to something with a fresh perspective leads to finding a solution.

I started with ISME as HR advisor in March, and I know I really would have struggled with everything that was going on in the HR sector at that time if I hadn't had the horses as an outlet. Many lunch breaks were spent mulling over return to work protocols while sitting on a fence scratching Belle's ears!

## Talk to us about the work you do in ISME.

My role as HR advisor with ISME involves providing best practice up to date HR advice to our members through providing HR support and guidance, ensuring they have access to information on all aspects of HR and current legislation, and providing key content such as guides, templates and keeping up to date on issues related to HR in Ireland. It's a busy role and the HR landscape is ever changing, but it is extremely rewarding as I have daily contact with our members and can help them deal with any HR issues arising in their business.

## How important is work life balance to you?

I think it is vitally important to keep a good work life balance. It's so easy to get completely consumed by work but you have to look after yourself. Burnout is a real issue, and it is becoming increasingly prevalent as the world of work changes. Social interaction, physical exercise, ensuring you keep a healthy work life balance and generally allowing time to look after yourself is so important in preventing burnout.

At the moment, the environment is really difficult for employers trying to navigate running a business during COVID-19. The pressure to keep everything ticking over is huge, but in order to ensure they can keep doing that, employers need to remember to take time out for themselves.