

# Members' Newsletter

March 2025



**iSME**  
Irish **SME** Association



Dear member,

Lenin once said “There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.” Ireland and Europe have undoubtedly gone through such a period of weeks since the New Year.

As the Taoiseach goes to Washington next week to hand over the bowl of shamrock (which is incinerated immediately afterwards by the US Department of Agriculture- if it has any employees by next weekend), we have yet to see if we are about to enter a tariff war with Ireland’s largest single trade partner the US. Our exports to America are more than twice the size of those to the UK, our next biggest trading partner.

Our recent trade survey among the membership showed that while only 29% of our members export, 74% of our membership imports. And if these imports are to be subject to tariffs, we are in for a very bumpy time indeed.

We can only hope that saner voices prevail, but at the moment, those voices are in short supply on the far side of the Atlantic.

This makes it all the more important that Government alters course quickly on its indigenous enterprise policy. Ireland Inc is far too dependent on a small number of US multinationals here, not just for corporation tax, but for PAYE, PRSI, USC and VAT.

At least the EU does appear to be reacting with some level of awareness, and is proposing a significant curtailment of the burdens of the [CSRD](#) and the [CSDDD](#) via the [Omnibus Regulation](#).

We need Government to be on top of its game here. It took the eye off the ball with the CSDDD, and we were reliant on the kindness of others in taking on Brussels. We do not have the luxury of doing this again- there isn’t the time.

Ireland must ensure that any regulatory package agreed in Brussels works for SMEs, not just for quoted multinationals. If we do otherwise, we can say goodbye to our domestic enterprise base.

With an election to the National Council due in May, we were delighted to see the number of members who have agreed to seek nomination to the 2025-2027 Council. It should be a lively election!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil O'Sullivan', followed by a long horizontal line and a circular flourish.

- **Health with Holland**
- **Ordu Limited**
- **Pressure Welding Manufacturing Limited**
- **Connect Hearing**
- **Murphy Bennett Insulations Ltd**
- **Norton Business and Sustainability Consulting**
- **Kylemore Karting**
- **Chem-Dry Ireland Limited**
- **A & M Insulations**
- **Arena Digital Marketing**
- **Red Castle Technology**
- **Kerry Mechanical Engineering Ltd.**
- **Raptor Engineering Solutions Limited**
- **Graph Engineering**
- **Rhino Industrial**
- **Innovative Total Solutions Limited**
- **MacCarthy Baker & Co.**

## Join ISME's National Council and Shape the Future of Irish SMEs

Are you passionate about championing the interests of small and medium businesses in Ireland? ISME is looking for dynamic and experienced individuals to join our National Council and play a vital role in shaping the future of Irish enterprise.

- As a member of ISME's National Council, you will have the opportunity to:  
Influence key policies and initiatives that support and advocate for SMEs across Ireland.
- Contribute your insights and expertise to drive ISME's strategic objectives, ensuring a stronger voice for business owners.
- Collaborate with a network of like-minded professionals committed to fostering growth, innovation, and resilience within the SME sector.



If you are passionate about supporting SMEs and making a real impact, we'd love to hear from you. To learn more about this opportunity and how you can get involved, email Neil McDonnell, ISME CEO on [neil@isme.ie](mailto:neil@isme.ie).

## ISME Flash Survey suggests that Irish SMEs have 'limited exposure' to trade war,

Given the growing uncertainty around EU-US trade relations, ISME last month carried out a survey amongst our members to gauge their exposure to a potential trade war.

The results show that while most respondents rely on imports, their exposure to potential US-EU tariffs is limited.

However, the findings reinforce the systemic importance of the UK for Irish small businesses post-Brexit.

ISME CEO Neil McDonnell stressed the need for government action to minimise the impact on essential imports and strengthen UK trade ties in an article published in the Irish Examiner on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> February.

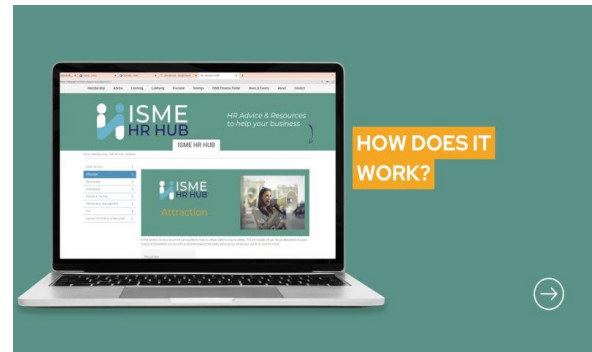
Read article [here](#).

## ISME HR Hub – your HR support

To support Members to deal with the ever-changing world of HR and employment law, we have created a portal to give you access to guides, templates, contracts, policies and more to support you in managing HR in your business. We have curated the information based on the HR Life Cycle: Attraction, Recruitment, Onboarding, Policies & Training, Performance Management and Exit.

You can also find information from government agencies and other third parties in our General Information & Resources page, links to the top downloads and view our selection of blogs including Statutory Sick Pay FAQs and EU Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions.

To find out how it works and looks, click on the video about the portal [here](#). To use the ISME HR Hub log into the Members Area, click on the top left button.



## Save More This New Year with ISME Affinity Partners

Take a look at the most recent addition to the ISME ADVANTAGE Affinity programme :

For the next two months (until end of May) ISME members can subscribe to **The Business Post** just €75 for the year, after that, the standard price of €99 per year applies. This is your chance to stay ahead with expert analysis, market insights and in-depth reporting to help businesses grow.

**The Business Post**

View all our Affinity programmes [here](#). ISME Members can access all offers when they log into the Members Area.



### FUNDING OPTIONS FOR YOUR BUSINESS IN 2025

An ISME Webinar With **Derek Butler**  
CEO of **GRID Finance**

Hosted by **Neil McDonnell**, ISME CEO

Thursday, 27 March 2025  
10AM-11AM



## ISME 2025 Webinar Series is back. Register Now

Join our Business Advisory Webinar with Derek Butler, CEO of GRID Finance on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2025. The webinar will help you gain insight on the Funding Options For Your Business in 2025. This hour-long webinar will be hosted by ISME CEO Neil McDonnell.

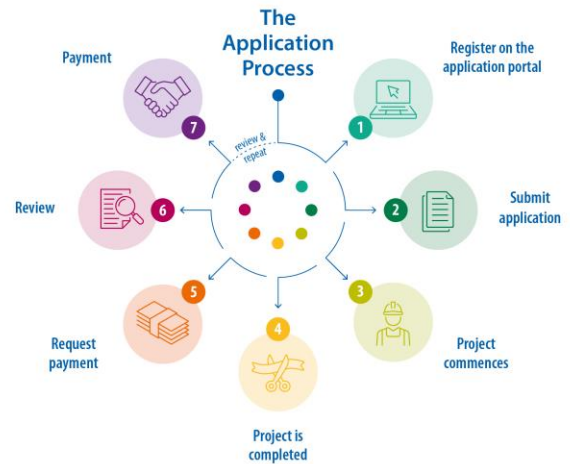
Register your interested [here](#)

## The Business Energy Upgrade Scheme is live

Minister [Eamon Ryan](#) [Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications](#) launched a new €50 million Business Energy Upgrades Scheme to support small and medium sized businesses to carry out energy efficiency upgrades.

SMEs can now get immediate grant approval for a wide range of building energy efficiency and renewable measures including solar PV and thermal, heat pumps, fabric, and air handling upgrades. There is support available for design assistance and for optimising existing BMS systems.

Please find the link to the supports here:  
<https://www.seai.ie/grants/business-grants/rapid-approval>



## ISME Finance Finder: Free 30-minute Consultation Available

The ISME Finance Finder, powered by Swoop, is offering a **free 30-minute one-to-one consultation clinic**. The consultations are provided on a no obligation and confidential basis.

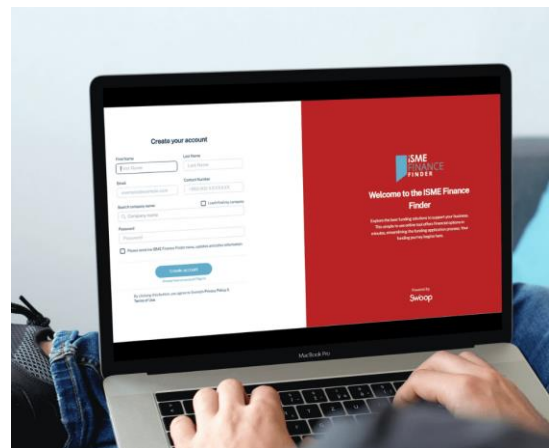
The Swoop team provide expertise and professionalism based on their deep knowledge of the lending market both in Ireland and in the UK. During the consultation they can address such key questions as:

- Who are the key players?
- What does it mean for your business?
- What small business loans or funding is available for SMEs?

Plus

- They can advise and review your business's specific requirements?

You may want to start or expand your business, improve cashflow, refinance debt, acquire a business, purchase property, stock or invest in a new market...then there are funding opportunities available to you.



Now may not be the time to apply for a loan but the Swoop team will look at your business to see if it's loan-ready or give advice on what you need to do before applying for funding and show you the options available.

There are 3 ways to connect and set up your free consultation:

- Click [here](#) to fill out a form
- Email [isme@swoopfunding.com](mailto:isme@swoopfunding.com)
- Phone +353 1 270 7658

Visit the ISME Finance Finder [here](#).

## Health & Safety Authority Update



An tÚdarás Sláinte agus Sábháilteachta  
Health and Safety Authority

- ❑ [Annual Review of Workplace Injuries, Illnesses and Fatalities 2022–2023](#) report presents the Annual Review of Workplace Injuries, Illnesses, and Fatalities for 2022- 2023. In preparing this report, we recognise the importance of providing reliable and up-to-date statistical information as an evidence base for decision-making.
- ❑ [A Short Guide to Health Surveillance in the Workplace](#) aims to assist employers and health professionals working on their behalf in understanding their legal requirements regarding health surveillance in the workplace. It also highlights the key elements to consider when implementing a health surveillance programme.
- ❑ [Employing Apprentices: Safety On the Job](#) information sheet is written for people who employ apprentices. It provides a summary overview of how employers should fulfil their duties as an employer and protect apprentices, who may be more at risk of injury and ill health.
- ❑ [Safety On the Job for Apprentices](#)- This information sheet is written for Apprentices. It provides some essential tips to help Apprentices stay safe and healthy as they start their career.
- ❑ [Small Business Start-ups](#) : This short introductory course is suitable if you are starting a small business or have a new business. You will learn about the role of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the importance of managing safety, health and welfare in the workplace. The elements of a health and safety management system are outlined on the course and the main duties of employers and employees under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Risk assessment and meeting Safety Statement requirements for your business is another key part of this course.
- ❑ [Small Business – Employees](#): This short introductory course is suitable for employees that are working in a small business. The course outlines the main duties of employers and employees under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. It also addresses the impact of positive safety behaviour in the workplace. The course also includes key health and safety information required to keep you safe at work, including information on the roles of a Safety Officer and Safety Representative.
- ❑ [Small Business – Employers](#): This short introductory course is suitable for employers and the self-employed who are running a small business. The course outlines the role of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the general duties of employers under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Information on vulnerable workers, including those in a sensitive risk group is provided. Risk assessment and the Safety Statement, and reporting accidents to the HSA is also covered on the course. The content is suitable across all work sectors

## Green Business Supports

Ireland has a target to reduce carbon emissions (greenhouse gas emissions) by 51% by 2030, and to achieve a climate neutral economy by 2050. (source: Government Report). The sectoral emissions ceilings (SECs) agreed in July 2022 put in place targets for each sector to achieve this. The target for the enterprise sector is to reduce emissions by 35% by 2030. In order to do this, businesses are encouraged to invest in a greener future, through sustainable products, services and business models.

Whether your business is big or small, it is important to reduce emissions and promote sustainability in how you work. Click [here](#) to find a number of training, mentoring and financial supports for companies trying to reduce their carbon footprint



## Social Media Fest 2025

Social Media Fest 2025 is scheduled for Wednesday, April 9th, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the Maldron Hotel near Dublin Airport. A "Masterclass for Success" is also planned for the evening of Tuesday, April 8th, from 6:00 PM to 8:30 PM.

The event will feature a lineup of expert speakers, including Fiona Harrold, Anita Wong, Louise McDonnell, Samantha Kelly, and Esther Ocampo. Topics to be covered include:

- How to create a lead magnet that converts followers to customers
- How to create a successful podcast for a global audience
- Strategy
- Turning followers into clients
- Video repurposing to create impactful content
- Optimising your content (SEO))

Tickets are currently available for purchase [here](#).

The event has partnered with "It's Good to Talk," a Wexford-based organization offering affordable professional counseling and support services to the community.

For more information, including ticket purchases and sponsorship opportunities, please visit the official website: <https://socialmediafest.ie/>

## Key market events that influenced foreign exchange markets in February

- The Bank of England halved its growth forecast for this year as it cut interest rates for the third time in 6 months (base rate cut to 4.5%).
- UK retail sales volumes jumped 1.7% for January compared with consensus forecasts of a 0.3% increase (highest since August 2024).
- US President Trump says he will introduce 25% tariffs on autos, pharmaceuticals and chips.
- The victory by the Conservative party at the German election (with a voter turn-out of 83%), boosted the euro post election.
- The US dollar weakened towards the end of the month driven by weaker-than-expected US economic data, fuelling concerns about the strength of the US economy (purchasing managers' index, existing home sales, University of Michigan's consumer sentiment).
- Markets continue to be sensitive to any tariff related announcements by the US and other Governments

## What data and factors could impact on the major currencies in March?

- Thursday March 6th – European Central Bank interest rate decision
- Friday March 7th – US Non-Farm Payrolls employment data
- Wednesday March 19th – European inflation rate year on year final
- Wednesday March 19th – US Fed interest rate decision
- Thursday March 20th – Bank of England interest rate decision

Friday March 28th – European economic sentiment and consumer confidence

As an ISME member, you have exclusive access to Fexco's dedicated account manager John Barry, who will help you with all your foreign exchange requirements.

- **Reduce your cross-border payments costs**
- **Protect your business from currency volatility**

Discover the benefits to your business without an obligation to trade!

>>[Tell Me More](#)>>



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Irish **SME** Association

## Concerned about rising business costs?

Access up to 50% in  
discounts on business  
products & services  
with the **ISME ADVANTAGE**  
**Affinity programme**

**ISME members can save  
now on**  
**[www.isme.ie/advantage](http://www.isme.ie/advantage)**



## Absence Management

Absence management is arguably one of the greatest challenges for any employer due to its sensitive nature, however, it is an essential area of people management that requires a consistent process to be applied.

In 2024, Absence was the main topic the ISME HR Team advised our members on. 13% of all the HR queries received last year fell under this category.

The main types of absences managers and business owners have been dealing with are as follows:

- **Short Term Absence** - absence from work for short periods of time which is typically anything from one day up to a month in duration.
- **Long Term Absence** - usually absence of at least four weeks
- **Sporadic Absence** - where an employee will have a number of days absence, usually a day or two at a time, built up over a long period of time.
- **Unauthorised Absence** - otherwise known as AWOL, when an employee leaves or does not show up for work without consent and without contacting their employer.

In order to ensure that the employee is supported, it is important to ensure that the 'Return to Work' process is managed appropriately. Successful absence management is reliant on strong procedures being implemented in the workplace. Below is an outline of some vital steps your company should consider to help you successfully manage sickness absence in your organisation.

- A clear and comprehensive absence management policy which is communicated and shared with your team is crucial. The recommendation would be that management ensure employees are aware of the company expectations when it comes to reporting absences. Ensure the policy outlines notification and certification requirements, details of sick pay scheme

(SSP or a more favourable Company Sick Pay Scheme) and an indication of how the company will approach attendance issues.

- [Effective absence management](#) can be achieved if you ensure early intervention by line managers. This includes regular communication with the employee during the absence and on their return to work and ensuring the company is keeping records of the employees absence. ISME recommends that companies conduct [Return to Work Interviews](#) after every period of sick leave in order to accurately maintain absence records and to act as a deterrent for non-attendance for nongenuine reasons.
- A key step to success is to ensure that all managers are trained in the organisation's absence policies and procedures and understand the role they are expected to play.
- Maintain regular contact with absent employee to ensure you stay up to date with their prognosis and potential return to work dates. Remember that the longer someone is off sick, the harder it can be for them to return.
- In certain situations the company may need to consider sourcing medical advice from an Occupational Health Practitioner. Actioning this step will be dependent on the details of each case to see if it is appropriate. Consulting a medical practitioner can be extremely beneficial to understand the situation and get professional advice on next steps and how to move forward.
- When an employee is out on Long Term Absence ISME would suggest you engage with the employee through regular Welfare Meetings. This purpose of these meetings is to assist the company gain a better understanding of the employee's current health situation, to establish how long they're likely to be absent from work, how likely they're going to be able to perform their job role on their return, and what steps can be taken to support them.

## Managing Absence

Companies may need to consider the following two points when managing Absence. ISME would advise that you call our helpline for further guidance on these areas:

### Reasonable accommodation

Under the Employment Equality Acts employers must make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities to return to work. The accommodations should be 'reasonable' and should not impose a 'disproportionate burden' on the company.

### Capability

Managing sickness absences can be complicated. Unfortunately on occasion a business may have to consider termination due to incapability. In these circumstances it is vital that the best practice process is followed and ISME would recommend companies take the time to manage things properly to avoid costly claims or challenges in the future.

The final key point to note would be to ensure the management of absence always adheres to the guidelines set down in the company's absence policy.

### SSP 2025

Since the introduction of Statutory Sick Pay in 2022, employees with 13 weeks continuous service, have been entitled to receive statutory sick pay which increased in increments each year. These days are paid by the employer at 70% of their normal pay, up to a maximum of €110 per day. The employee must be certified by a registered medical practitioner as unable to work.

For 2025, it had been scheduled for SSP would increase to 7 days pay increasing to 10 days in 2026. However, it has now been confirmed that this phased approach has been paused to allow the Government to review ESRI research on the impact of statutory sick leave and that therefore the entitlement currently remains at 5 days.

In light of these developments, we recommend that employers:

- Continue to apply the 5-day entitlement to those eligible
- Inform your employees of this update, particularly if they may not be aware of the change
- Review and update your Sick Pay Policy, Terms and Conditions of Employment and/ or Employee Handbook, should they reference the previous phased arrangement, to ensure alignment with the current legislation.

As always, if you require any support with HR or Employment Law you can contact the ISME HR Team on 01 6622755 Option 2 or via [HR@ISME.ie](mailto:HR@ISME.ie). Members also have access to a full suite of HR templates regarding Absence management on the ISME HR Hub .





**The ISME Skillnet** service is here to help both the business owner and their employees. ISME Members can receive up to 40% discount for ISME Skillnet training, view courses below.

## **ISME Skillnet & UCD Professional Academy**

[View Course](#)

### **MS Excel Advanced**

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> March

[View Course](#)

### **Introduction to Canva**

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March

[View Course](#)

### **Excel: Dashboards And Data Visualisation**

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> March

[View Course](#)

### **Business Writing & Email Etiquette**

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> April

[View Course](#)

### **Customer Service & Complaints Handling**

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April

[View Course](#)

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FIND THE FULL LISTING





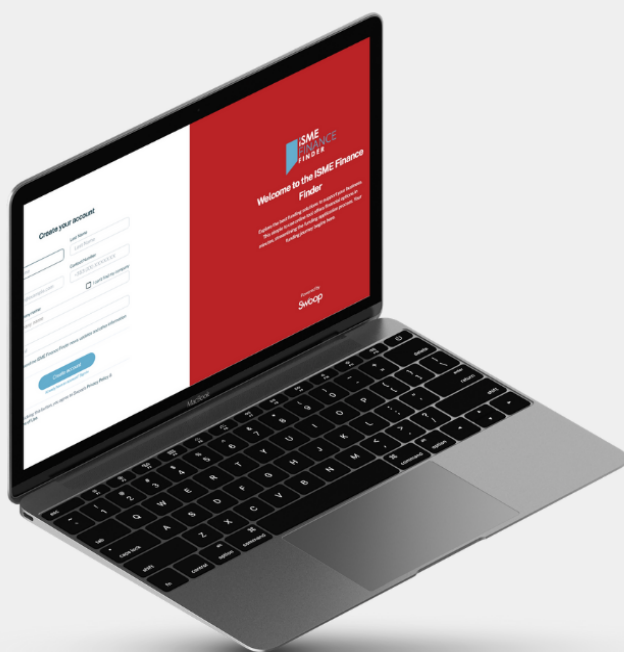
# Do you want to...

start or expand your business?

improve cashflow?

acquire a business?

purchase property?



If so, your finance journey starts here

[isme.ie/finance-finder](https://isme.ie/finance-finder)