

AUTUMN 2022

Volume 1  
Issue 18

# THE **b**ISME

THE BUSINESS OF IRISH SMEs

## A CEO with a difference

Adam Harris, Founder and CEO of AsIAm discusses setting up & running a social enterprise & the benefits of hiring neurodivergent employees...

### The **b** Issue

Tips on moving your bank account

### The **b** Insight

Funding SME Growth through IPOs

### HR Focus

Welfare Meetings as an effective tool in managing absenteeism

### Finance Focus

Best time to look for funding is when you don't need it

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Irish SME Association

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# Budgets, Bills & Banks...

Hello readers,

Given the multiple crises at the moment, the Government has brought forward budget day, which will be on 27th September this year. We set out our stall in our [Pre-Budget Submission](#). There has been a great deal of Government kite-flying since then, but it does seem, following the publication of the [Tax Strategy Group](#) papers that there will be some movement on income tax at least, but it is less clear if there will be any adjustments on company, capital or entrepreneurial taxes.

Before the Dáil rose for recess, we were delighted to welcome the publication of the [Personal Injuries Resolution Board Bill 2022](#). It is not perfect, and we will be writing to the Tánaiste with our views on it, but there is progress in discouraging the amount of personal injuries litigation that goes through the courts.

You were probably as shocked as we were when the Bar Council and the Law Society released a [report by EY](#) in July suggesting that legal costs were not high in Ireland and were falling. This nonsense is contradicted by every reputable agency such as the World Bank and the EU Commission, and we [wrote to the Justice Minister](#) to express our lack of credibility in the legal profession.

Unfortunately, the collapse of the private rental sector is maintaining upward pressure on rental prices according to the latest [Daft Rental Report](#). The cost of rent cannot be addressed by simply pushing up wages, or forcing the



*Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive, ISME*

adoption of a “living wage.” We need a greater supply, otherwise employers will continue to be forced to arrange supply of accommodation themselves.

We [alerted the media](#) to this, and I’m delighted to say it got some fair and sensible coverage. The rental crisis is a clear example of the “lurch to the left” that has occurred in Irish politics over the last decade, and has forced landlords out of the market (unless they’re multinational institutional landlords!).

Inflation continues to run at a rate we have not seen for four decades. Many small businesses will not be able to afford energy costs this winter, and it is likely the Government will have to intervene, similar to interventions in [Austria](#), [Spain](#), [Italy](#) and [France](#).

After two years confined to our houses, the ISME team will take to the road again with our roadshows. You will see the dates and details for these roadshows on our [Events Page](#). The team and I look forward to meeting business people around the country.

It’s going to be an interesting autumn ahead!

Neil McDonnell  
ISME CEO



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## USEFUL EVENTS FOR SMES

### TechConnect Live 2022

Tuesday, 13th September  
9.00am–4.00pm,  
RDS Hall 4, Dublin  
[Book here](#)

### Business Beyond Borders 2022

Wednesday,  
14th September,  
9.00am–6.00pm,  
RDS, Dublin  
[Book here](#)

### InterTradeIreland Go-2-Tender Workshop

Tuesday & Wednesday,  
20th & 21st September,  
9.30am - 1.00pm,  
[Book here](#)

### Biz Expo

Thursday, 29th September,  
9.00am–4.00pm,  
Sports Ireland National  
Indoor Arena, Dublin  
[Book here](#)

### The Business Show

Thursday 6th October  
Aviva Stadium, Dublin  
[Book here](#)

### Network Ireland National Conference & Businesswoman of the Year Awards 2022

Friday, 7th October,  
9am–6.30pm,  
Galway, Salthill Hotel  
[Book here](#)

### Jobs Expo

Saturday 15th October,  
10.00am–4.00pm  
Croke Park, Dublin  
[Book here](#)



## Pending Commercial Rates Revaluation

The Rates Revaluations that were due to take place in 2019 were postponed due to Covid-19. We understand that the Proposed Certificates are now being issued in September 2022.

The Valuation Office are extremely strict on deadlines and there is no leeway. There is a statutory process involved in the revaluation and it is essential that ratepayers prepare and take action well in advance. Time is of the essence and we recommend that all property inspections take place as soon as possible.

Further information and key dates [here](#).

## Creating an Energy Action Plan

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) is offering free training to help businesses create an energy action plan. Training is taking place regularly over the coming months. To learn more and register view the [SEAI Eventbrite Page](#).

## New SEAI Energy Academy Course: Leading Sustainable Change for Decarbonisation

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland's (SEAI) Energy Academy has released a new free e-learning course "Leading Sustainable Change for Decarbonisation" aimed at providing you with the essential concepts needed to lead sustainable change within your business.

- Learn how your business can approach, measure, and report on sustainability
- Find out how Ireland came to the target of net-zero emissions and what decarbonisation means for your business
- Explore what the circular economy is and the benefits of circularity for your business

Join the SEAI Energy Academy now on

[www.seai.ie/energyacademy](http://www.seai.ie/energyacademy)

## Personal Injuries Resolution Bill

The Minister of State for Trade Promotion, Digital and Company Regulation, Robert Troy published the Personal Injuries Resolution Board Bill 2022 in August. The Publication of the Bill is a milestone in the Action Plan for Insurance Reform and in delivering a Programme for Government commitment to enhance and reform the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB).

The Bill will amend the Personal Injuries Assessment Board Act 2003-2019 to provide that the:

- PIRB will offer mediation as a means of resolving a claim
- PIRB will retain claims of a wholly psychological nature
- PIRB will have additional time to assess claims where an injury is yet to settle rather than releasing to litigation
- PIRB will seek proof of identity on application and disclose information to An Garda Síochána to reduce fraud
- PIRB will deepen its analysis and public information roles

The Minister is also proposing to amend section 51A of the Act to encourage early resolution of claims and minimise costs. The Bill provides that where the claimant proceeds to litigation an assessment that has been accepted by a respondent will have the status of an offer of tender payment, as of the date the respondent accepted the assessment. Where the court award is not greater than the PIAB assessment, the claimant will not recover their costs and will generally be liable for the respondent's costs as well. Read full details [here](#).



Sinead Byrne, Michelle Ellis, James Stevenson

## WHATS ON YOUR MIND... WORKING AT ISME

*“Having joined ISME earlier this summer as one half of the HR Team, it was been an enjoyable induction period so far. It has been genuinely refreshing to join an organisation that values it’s employees along with everyone collaborating to ensure that ISME members receive a valuable helpful service. Looking forward to supporting and hopefully meeting our members over the coming months.”*

Sinead Byrne, ISME HR Advisor

*“With excitement and anticipation, I began a new role as HR Advisor with ISME in June. I feel incredibly honored to be a part of the ISME Team and look forward to working closely with all the ISME members.*

*Building relationships with our members and offering the highest quality HR support is my number one goal this year. I am dedicated to providing best in class HR advice and information to members to ensure they are legally compliant and have the correct HR information to support their business needs.”*

Michelle Ellis, ISME HR Advisor

*“I joined ISME in July and really believe in the value of being in an association. My previous role was in the membership team of the Master Builders Association NSW in Australia, and could see there the benefit of being in an independent business association. I look forward to talking with Irish business owners and showing how being a member of ISME can support and enhance your business.”*

James Stevenson, ISME Business Development Executive



## Green skills to future proof your business

SOLAS is developing a range of green skills programmes, under the **Skills to Advance** initiative, in collaboration with the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and strategic partners Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Environmental Protection Agency, Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, Irish Water and Regional Skills Fora.

These **Skills to Advance** programmes include QQI accredited micro-qualifications at Level 5 in the areas of Environmental Sustainability in the Workplace, Lean Practice for Sustainable Business, Resource Efficiency in the Workplace, the Circular Economy, Sustainable Procurement and Greening the Supply Chain. They are of short duration, stackable and will be delivered in a blended learning format incorporating tutor led support and access to online digital resources to enhance the learning experience.

This initiative assists employers to develop new skills in their teams, improve their cost savings, competitiveness, and profitability through highly subsidized training. For employees, **Skills to Advance** provides upskilling opportunities to develop new skills in emerging areas and future proof jobs.

For further information contact your local ETB or visit [www.skillstoadvance.ie](http://www.skillstoadvance.ie).



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- Green your business for cost savings, competitiveness and profitability
- Access highly subsidised flexible training

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## A CEO with a difference...

Adam Harris, Founder & CEO, AslAm

### **Please talk us through your career and what has led you to this point?**

When I was a young child, I was diagnosed as being Autistic. At the time, there was not as much awareness and most Autistic people went to special school – so that is where my journey started. Thankfully, the system began to change and, when I was 8, I moved to mainstream school with support. I went on to go to secondary school independently and I became more self-aware.

It was clear to me that so few people really understood Autism and that was where a lot of the barriers I had experienced came from. I began to blog about my experiences growing up on the spectrum and it became clear that so many other people across Ireland had experienced similar obstacles. Society was focusing on changing the Autistic person but actually it was society that needed to make small changes to meet Autistic people halfway.

I dropped out of Social Science in UCD and formally founded AslAm, Ireland's National Autism Charity, in 2014, when I was 19. Today, we are a team of 27 based in Blackrock, Co Dublin but undertaking work across Ireland. Our vision is a society in which every Autistic person is accepted as they are – equal, valued and respected.

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

I love the diversity of the work that we do. One day we might be in Leinster House lobbying for better supports and services for the Autism community, the next we could be supporting a business through our Autism-Friendly Accreditation Award and the next running an event to support Autistic talent to access the workplace.

AslAm isn't a typical charity – we take a business approach to achieving our aims by offering our services commercially to businesses, the revenue supporting our charitable activities. This doesn't just boost sustainability but also means we create solutions which work, add value and create a win-win for the Autism community and for business. It is a real privilege to do my job and I see it as my small way of giving back to the community for the opportunities I have had which are still denied to many Autistic people across Ireland.

### **Tell us about AslAm and the work you do?**

To achieve our vision, we believe it is necessary to both directly support and empower Autistic people and family members and also to support society, particularly business, in becoming more Autism-Friendly. In terms of the support we provide, this year we will deal with 5000 queries through our Information Line, support 1000 people directly and advocate extensively for the community.

Our Training and Accreditation activity is in many respects what makes us unique, we work with businesses, employers, public services and communities to support them in becoming more accessible for Autistic people. We deliver bespoke training to support organisations to enhance their accessibility from both a customer-facing and employment practises perspective. We have developed an Autism-Friendly Accreditation process which allows businesses to identify and put in small measures which they can put in place to remove barriers for Autistic people who want to use their services, gaining formal recognition and promotion on completion.





Adam Harris at the launch of autism-friendly shopping across Penneys' Irish stores

### What are AsIAM's plans over the next few years?

We recently finalised a new Strategic Plan 2022-2025 which is very much focused on scaling our activity, providing more support and removing barriers to access across Ireland. A new area of focus for us in employment. 85% of Autistic people in Ireland are unemployed or underemployed, this is despite a wide array of skills and qualifications and an often unique way of thinking and approaching problems. This has a devastating impact on the quality of life for Autistic adults but it also represents a tragic loss of talent of business and society.

Things like the traditional job interview which are based on answering abstract questions, building rapport with strangers and dealing with the unknown, can miss brilliant people within our community. We have established a new Adult Support and Employment Department within the organisation and will be working with businesses across Ireland through our new Community of Practice initiative, to upskill employers to hire and retain Autistic talent, and connecting employers with candidates. In the coming months, we will be launching a pilot programme specifically focused at reaching Autistic people, outside Dublin, and creating opportunities in the SME sector. Watch this space!

### What are your thoughts on how businesses can be more inclusive in their recruitment?

Autistic people have scattered skillsets so it is important to create job descriptions which seek out deep skills or abilities in specific areas as opposed to very broad, general skillsets. The way I think of it is that neurotypical or non-Autistic people are your generalists whereas Autistic people may be your specialists. Removing the unknown from the job interview, allowing a person to demonstrate not communicate their ability, and accepting a different communication approach to eye contact or how a person approaches questions is important.

Of course, it doesn't stop at recruitment, in-work mentors, allowing a person to make sensory accommodations such as having a movement break or being able to select where they sit in the office, are vitally important. I think Covid-19 has changed many assumptions in the world of work, from where we work to what we wear, and we should use this as an opportunity to create workplaces which maximise opportunity and the ability to access talent.

### What can businesses do to be more autism-friendly for customers and employees?

Day-to-day activities such as going to the shop or enjoying a meal out can be overwhelming for Autistic people. Noise, crowds and not knowing what to expect are just some examples of what can create stress, a sense of overwhelm can often see a person simply having to opt out.

Simple measures like running a quiet time, offering priority queueing or having pictures available in advance of a person's visits can make a big impact. The changes required are often small and inexpensive but really work and send out a powerful message of inclusion.

At least 1 in 65 people in Ireland are Autistic and when immediate family members are considered, we are talking about a community in excess of 300,000 people. This is before we consider that autism-friendly measures can also support many different groups such as people with dementia, hearing loss or literacy challenges to name but a few. By working with us, businesses can reach more people and do the right thing.

We have had great success rolling-out our Autism-Friendly Accreditation with business across Ireland. We have worked with big brands such as SuperValu, Primark and Vodafone but also with local businesses. In 2018, we supported Clonakilty to become Ireland's first Autism-Friendly Town and this saw 150 businesses and organisations come on board. This year we are working with 20 towns across Ireland. The important message is it is achievable and creates results for everyone.

“At least 1 in 65 people in Ireland are Autistic..with immediate family members..we are talking about a community in excess of 300,000 people.

## The last few years have been incredibly challenging – how did it effect your work and how did AsIAM respond?

Covid-19 caused havoc for our community. The loss of structure and routine, coupled with the closure of vital support services, meant that many individuals and families within our community went into crisis. Queries to the organisation rose some 300% at a time when fundraising and our traditional trading activities had to be radically transformed in order to comply with public health guidelines. We were lucky to have received amazing support from the public and from our business and philanthropic partners.

Whilst it has been a challenging time, it has also been one of huge growth – we have greatly expanded our supports to rise to the challenge and reached more people through putting many of our programmes online. In 2021, we reached 20,000 people through our training programmes.

## From your experience, what are the major challenges in setting up a social enterprise in Ireland?

I think it is fair to say that the whole area of social enterprise is underdeveloped, under-resourced and under-supported in Ireland. That said, I am amazed by the organisations that exist to support social entrepreneurs and social enterprises and the goodwill towards ideas whose time has come.

I was a 19-year-old with a big idea and there is no way we could have gotten off the ground without incredible support from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland who selected AsIAM for an Elevate Award in 2014 and for its Scale Programme in 2018. What I would say to anyone considering it is give it a go – it is a solution that is needed, someone has to, and you will be amazed by the people who will step forward to support you.



*The AsIAM team launched the Autism Information Line in 2022*



## Do you have a business mentor? What advice would you impart to an SME business in today's competitive and challenging environment?

When I started working in this area, more or less straight from school, I think it is safe to say I knew next to nothing. I understood Autism and what needed to change but I had to learn about governance, finance, fundraising, HR, marketing and everything in between. I was incredibly lucky to have a broad range of people to guide me.

Our first Board of Directors was in many respects a panel of mentors, led by Fintan Tierney (Tierney Chartered Surveyors) who put in place the structure the organisation needed but also acted as a critical friend and sounding board. I still rely on Fintan and many of this group today.

In terms of my advice for SME businesses, I think the most important ingredient for success is having great people. We would not have gotten through the pandemic without the skill and commitment of our team and I think talent retention will be critical in the challenging times ahead.

**“** *I think the most important ingredient for success is having great people...*

## Passion, planning and people are the three 'Ps' that many of our members attribute their success to. Would you agree with this mantra, what else would you add?

I think the three Ps are all important ingredients. I would add innovation – in AsIAM our strength has been identifying opportunities and quickly adapting and steering the organisation to seize them.

For more information on AsIAM Training and Accreditation Services or their Employment Programmes visit [AsIAM.ie](http://AsIAM.ie) or make an enquiry today at [info@asiam.ie](mailto:info@asiam.ie).



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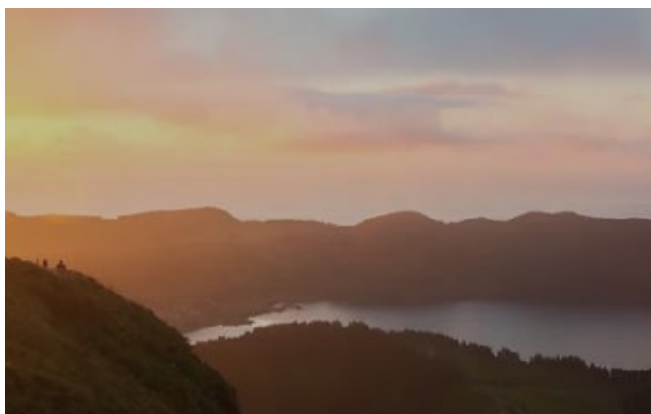
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## Corc Impact

Founded in 2022, Corc Impact is a boutique management consultancy focusing on helping businesses make a sustainable positive impact on the world. Founder and Managing Director, Niamh Flaherty Pimentel is on a mission to help companies find the sweet spot in their business strategy where they can both “do well” **and** “do good”.

Niamh finds that many businesses do not know where to start or think they’re in an industry or sector that cannot make a real impact. Many others believe that operating more sustainably involves a trade off with growth or reduced profits. However, Niamh believes that if sustainability is part of the mindset of an organisation, the potential for meaningful impact is endless. According to PWC Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey 2021, 75% of employees said they wanted to work for an organisation that makes a positive contribution to society. Yet, sustainability remains a 2nd tier priority for a lot of businesses.



Niamh explains the meaning behind the name, Corc Impact.

*“Corc is the Irish word for the bark of the cork oak tree, one of nature’s most amazing raw materials. I’ve been fascinated with cork for some time as no human-made product has been able to replicate its unique combination of properties. Portugal has the most hectares of cork forest worldwide with areas such as, Montado, living ambassadors of sustainability and a driving force of sustainable development. Corc connects the two places I call home, Ireland and Portugal, representing endless possibilities and high potential for sustainable impact.”*

Corc Impact is looking to work with businesses who want to make sustainability their priority, focusing on being a force for good.



Niamh Flaherty Pimentel,  
Corc Impact

Some clients are at the start of their journey, but Niamh stresses it does not matter what stage you are at. The key is that you want to drive purpose-driven change, at scale. Execution is the key to ensuring you deliver long term value for all, yet, Niamh says

*“So many businesses really struggle here. Organisational focus is critical, we’re all faced with tough choices, however those that constantly make difficult choices / trade-offs and set clear priorities are much more likely to succeed”.*

Niamh adds

*“Attracting and retaining talent is a constant challenge for businesses today. Those that make sustainability a priority, clearly outlining how employees contribute to purpose-driven strategies, will enjoy significant advantages over their competitors”.*

Niamh is a highly experienced strategic leader with over 15 years’ business experience across multiple sectors and roles. Working across professional services and industry Niamh has experienced, first-hand, the challenges most businesses face. Niamh has led large-scale strategy transformations, working on the frontline, across many countries and cultures.

Working with Niamh you’ll get more than business expertise, Niamh is highly energetic, and her enthusiasm is infectious. She’ll push you outside of your comfort zone and challenge your thinking.

To find out more visit [www.corcimpact.com](http://www.corcimpact.com) or contact Niamh directly at [Niamh@corcimpact.com](mailto:Niamh@corcimpact.com).



# Why the best time to look for funding is when you don't need it

Ian Hawkins, Head of Content, Swoop

Cash flow indicates the health of your business. If you want to see your business succeed, there's one factor more important than any other, that's cashflow.

*"Unfortunately, businesses often only seek help with funding until the last minute to start looking",*

says Andrea Reynolds, founder and CEO at Swoop.

*"Smart businesses know where the sources of funding are before they need them. I know that being able to sit on your hands and wait for a better deal is a luxury not everybody has. If you are in this position, take advantage."*

There has never been more sources of funding available to Ireland's small and medium-sized businesses. With a market teeming with niche and specialist lenders offering innovative products, business owners can be forgiven for finding the market confusing.

Many businesses approach their bank in the first instance, but a standard bank loan may not be the right type of funding. Depending on your funding requirements and sector that you operate in, a different type of funding option may be more suitable. For example, eCommerce, retail and hospitality businesses particularly find products that leverage monthly card sales to be a preferred option. These products are paid back as a fixed percentage of credit card receipts, so the more business you do, the faster the balance is paid off. There are many other products on the market now which may be much more appropriate solutions for a business with a specific need.

Navigating through the funding landscape, however, can be time-consuming, even for the experts. This is where the [ISME Finance Finder](#), powered by Swoop, can help. This online tool uses matching technology based on the information a business provides to understand a company's finances and find the right deal for your needs. The application process is automated, putting an end to filling in long forms and speeding up the decision. The [ISME Finance Finder](#) also removes some of the risk of being turned down for a loan, which can harm your credit score, making it more difficult and expensive to borrow money.

Signing up is free and within minutes, you could be learning more about the funding available to your business across the pillar banks and the majority of alternative lenders.



By beginning your funding journey now and investigating your options, you can check how much borrowing will cost and what approval you will receive.

Andrea suggests some simple questions that business owners should ask:

*"If you needed, say, €50,000 in a hurry, where would you get it? How would raising this affect your business? What tasks would pulling it together take you away from?"*

By thinking through this scenario, Andrea believes that business owners can plan for the future by identifying available lines of credit, appropriate products that meet their needs and test assumptions around affordability:

If borrowing costs more than you thought it would, check your credit score. Taking a few simple steps to improve this could bring down the cost of borrowing in the long term. Make sure you have your last three months' bank statements to hand and cost out exactly how much funding you need.

Making securing funding fast and painless while quickly identifying the best deals on the market, the [ISME Finance Finder](#) puts power into the hands of the business and Andrea firmly believes should be on every business owner's desktop.

Cashflow is the number one issue for businesses. Using the ISME Finance Finder can help businesses unlock deals that used to take specialist finance experts a long time to research. With this platform, it's all there in one place, easy to use and it's the fastest way to get money into your account.

Put yourself in the best position to obtain a great deal on finance for your business and follow these steps:

1. Have your last set of filed accounts to hand
2. Get the last three months' bank statements for your business
3. Sign up now for the [ISME Finance Finder](#) on [www.isme.ie/finance-finder](http://www.isme.ie/finance-finder)

Be prepared for possible tough times ahead, visit the [ISME Finance Finder](#) now.

# Covid-19 Loan Scheme

Loans from €25,000 to €1.5 million

Repayment terms of 1-6 years

Reduced interest rates

Loans unsecured  
up to €500,000

Available up to  
31 December 2022

## Loans can be used for:

- Financing working capital and investment
- Refinancing of existing loans provided to support businesses impacted by Covid-19 (max 30%)

Loans can be used for funding necessary investments to recover from the pandemic, such as hiring new staff, adapting the business model or premises, diversifying production, or looking for new suppliers or new markets, and to refinance Covid-19 related expenses.

## Scheme costs

Loan interest rates vary between participating on-lenders, but are discounted from standard rates.

## Who can apply?

Eligible SMEs and Small Mid-Caps, including farmers, fishers and food businesses, impacted by at least 15% of their turnover profitability by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## How do I apply?

- The two-step application process starts by completing the Eligibility Application Form available on the SBCI website, [www.sbc.gov.ie](http://www.sbc.gov.ie) (STEP 1);
- Eligible businesses will receive an SBCI eligibility number/code that must then be provided to one of the participating on-lenders to start the credit process (STEP 2).

*Terms and conditions apply*





# Welfare Meetings

Managing absence is a topic that keeps cropping up time and time again for companies. It is often identified as one of the biggest challenges facing managers. In the below article we will delve into what role a Welfare Meeting plays when managing absenteeism and how you can use Welfare Meetings as an effective tool in your business.

## What is a Welfare Meeting at work?

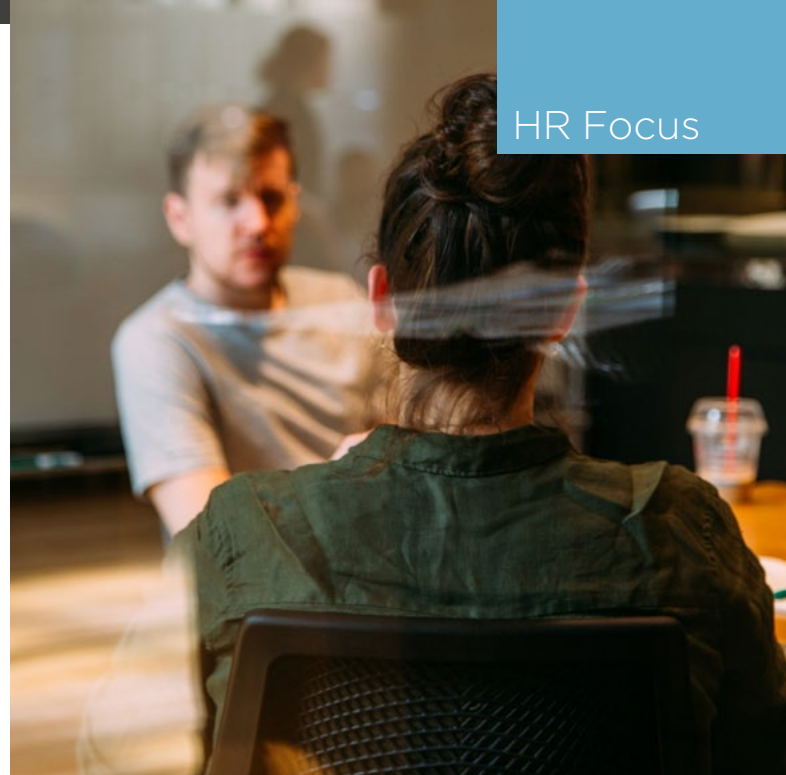
A Welfare Meeting is an initial conversation an employer has with an employee during a period of sickness absence. This meeting should help support an employee's recovery and possibly facilitate a speedier return to the workplace. Remember early intervention is the key to avoiding a protracted absence for the employee and an employer.

Having robust procedures in place in the context of sick leave is vital to discharging your statutory duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of your employees. Providing suitable support for an employee suffering from illness or injury is also vital to the success of your business. Any failure to put in place measures to help an employee in their return to work, or in performing their job role, is likely to lead to increased levels of absenteeism and the potential increase in staff turnover. Welfare Meetings are an important positive step towards successfully managing absenteeism and increasing employee engagement.

## How should a Welfare Meeting at work be arranged?

When the decision is made to proceed to a Welfare Meeting, the employer should:

- Notify the employee in writing to advise them of the meeting and ensure sufficient notice is given in advance of the meeting
- Be aware that holding the meeting in the workplace may feel uncomfortable for the employee. It is recommended that the employer give the option to the employee to attend the Welfare Meeting at work, at home or at a neutral venue
- Brief the employee in advance of the reason for the meeting
- Reassure the employee that this meeting is not designed to force them back to the workplace, nor to [discipline them for being out sick](#), but rather solely intended to support them. It can be very effective to remind the employee that they are missed at work
- As a Welfare Meeting is relatively informal, you're not legally obligated to allow an employee to be accompanied by a support person, but it's advised to accommodate any such reasonable requests
- It is also advisable that the company bring along a note taker to have a written record of the meeting so the employee's file can be updated after the meeting.



## Leading a Welfare Meeting

Knowing how to effectively lead a Welfare Meeting at work, and what questions to ask, will go a long way to ensuring that the meeting is successful and supportive. All Welfare Meeting questions must be approached sensitively. It's also important to not be too formal in your approach when asking questions. Employees may also feel uncomfortable discussing personal details about their condition. It's therefore important to reassure them of the purpose of the meeting and to be empathic and understanding at all times. The whole idea is to get an employee to open up, and not to feel interrogated or pressured. And remember - the employee is under no obligation to disclose sensitive personal information.

## How should a Welfare Meeting at work be followed up?

At the end of the meeting, it's important to detail a follow-up plan. This may be the need to schedule a follow-up meeting for an employee who is not likely to return to work in the near future. Alternatively, for those who may be fit for work, you may think about what steps or adjustments can be taken to support their return.

In the event that the employee identifies at the meeting that there is a difficulty with returning to full duty, the company must give due consideration to any requests for support to enable the employee to return to their role. It is crucial that companies consider all of the options available to them and all possible adjustments that could be made to facilitate a successful return to work. If the company does not take the time to investigate the reasonable accommodation, they may be found in breach of the Employment Equality Act.

Each company needs to adjust the management of absence to ensure it adheres to the guidelines set down in their own company's absence policy.

Visit our HR advice [here](#) and ISME members can contact our HR services to avail of advice by emailing [hr@isme.ie](mailto:hr@isme.ie) or calling 01- 6622755.

# Tips on moving your bank account

Marian McCarville, Head of Business Banking & Taxation, Banking & Payments Federation Ireland (BPFI)

Marian McCarville, BPFI

The withdrawal of Ulster Bank and KBC Bank from the Irish market is going to impact thousands of businesses, many of which are Micro-SME accounts. The departing banks are communicating with these businesses, via letters, calls, statement and online banking messaging, advising of the action required and the timelines for closing these accounts, which is 6 months from the time of receiving the account closure notification.

These deadlines do need to be taken seriously. All business account providers in the market are keen to compete for this business and to help customers to change provider in as seamless a manner as possible. However, given the volume of accounts that need to be moved, it is advisable for businesses to take action as soon as possible, as the account migration process can be more complex than for individuals. Here's some useful tips:

## 1. Prioritise Opening a New Business Current Account

The first thing businesses must do is to **open a new business Current Account with a new provider**, so that:

- a) there is a new account available to you to operate before your existing account closes, and
- b) the new account is open and operational to receive the transfer of your existing balance, payments, direct debits and standing orders.

Some businesses will have the option of using the 'Switching Code' which applies to Current Accounts held by personal customers and certain businesses, but not all. Either way, a new account must first be opened, so prioritise making an appointment to get this started.

## 2. Apply Early for Credit Facilities Needed

Credit facilities do not automatically transfer to a new provider and are not covered by the Switching Code, so it is important to engage early with a new provider to discuss what credit facilities are required, and details of any balance transfers that need to be made.

This will involve making a credit application for the credit facilities needed, such as Overdrafts/Loans/Credit Cards/Foreign Exchange limits.

You can apply for these at the same time as opening the new current account. The new provider will advise you of the documentation requirements, the process, and the timelines.

It will take longer to process applications for credit facilities, so it is important to allow enough time for new credit facilities to be put in place.

## 3. Documentation Requirements

While account providers will have their own specific requirements for opening new accounts, there are some general requirements that are unlikely to differ much between providers. When opening a business bank account, you will typically be asked to provide the following:

- **Proof of identity and addresses** for directors, account signatories, beneficial owners
- **Business Ownership and legal documentation**, e.g., Certificate of Incorporation, Registration of Business Name, Partnership Agreement, Memo & Articles of Association
- **Business records** such as recent bank statements, recent certified/audited accounts (if applying for credit facilities).

Early engagement, advance planning and providing the necessary documentation as soon as possible will contribute to a smoother switching process.

## 4. Incoming And Outgoing Payments

**Incoming Payments** - let customers/debtors know of your new bank details so that they have the details necessary to make payments into your new account. If there are any other sources of income into your account, you will need to contact them also.

**Outgoing Payments** - If you have Direct Debits or Standing Orders set up on your old account, you will need to ensure that they are set up on your new account, to ensure that any payments due will be paid e.g., ROS Online. This applies also to recurring payments on a debit or credit card to pay companies such as Sky, Apple etc.

To find out more visit the BPFI 'Guide to Moving your Business Account' at [movingaccount.ie](https://movingaccount.ie)



# Grow your business with us

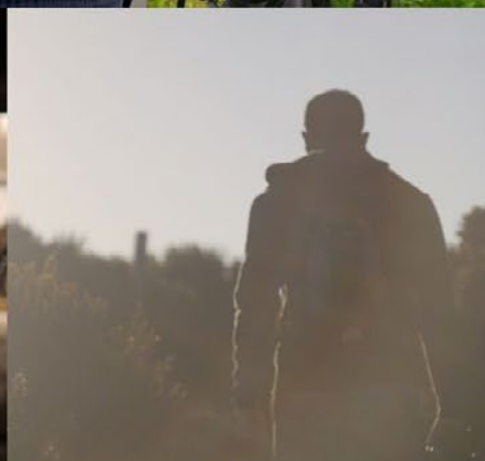
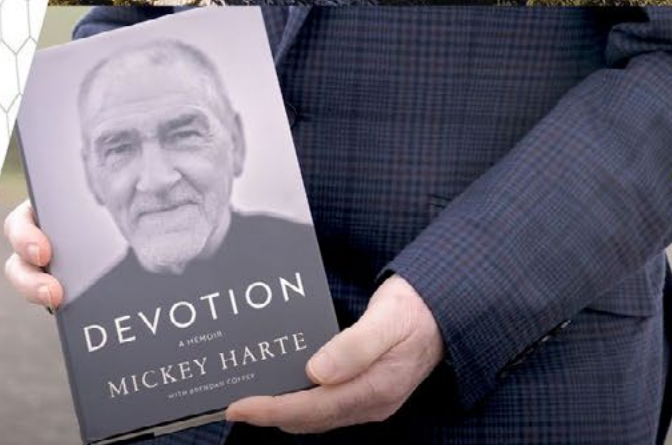
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Contact [gary@gript.ie](mailto:gary@gript.ie) for a free consultation.

Gript is proud to support Irish SMEs; we are currently offering ISME members a 10% discount off most of our packages.





# Digital Transformation Gaps - .ie domains biannual review 2022

Alan Finneran, Business  
Development, weare.ie

The latest .IE Domain Profile Report H1 2022, our assessment of the first half-year period of 2022 (1 January–30 June), points to major gaps in our understanding of the full extent of digital transformation following the pandemic, impacting SME productivity, consumer preferences and behaviours, transformation of professional service delivery, adoption of digital tools and websites by citizens and communities, and also highlights where in society the digital divides remain.

Commenting, David Curtin, Chief Executive of .IE said;

*"This .IE Domain Profile Report clearly illustrates the nation's digital intent, county by county, reflecting a narrowing of the digital divide. However, there is a significant lack of data as to the full extent of digital transformation across the country during the two years of lockdowns. This is because pre-2019 data on digital adoption is chronically out of date."*

Gathering post-Covid data is a critical priority for policymakers and local leaders to ensure that all new programmes and initiatives reflect the post-Covid digital transformation. This starts with understanding what metrics really matter when driving digital adoption, and then enforcing a whole-of-Government approach in developing programmes, initiatives, and solutions to close the digital divide(s).

Siloed data leads to incomplete analysis and, even worse, misdirected investment decisions and supports for communities, sectors, towns and counties. Sharing up-to-date data with motivated stakeholders and commercial service providers will help to avoid this.

## Cybersecurity

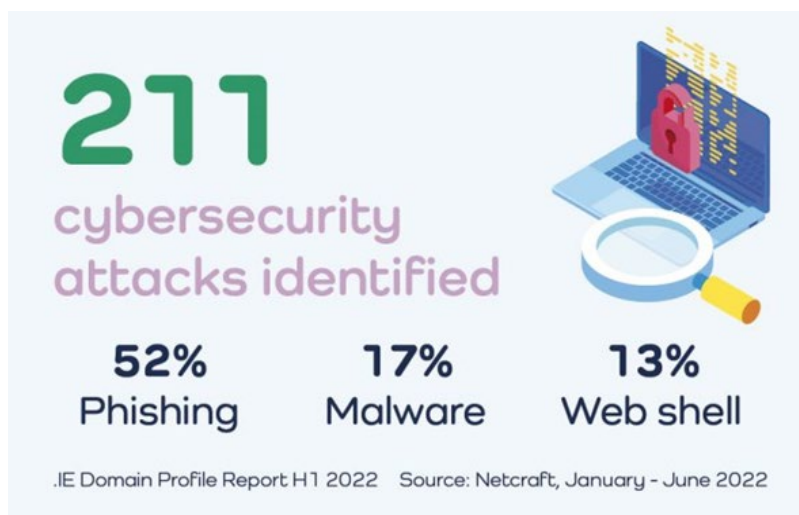
In particular, .IE believes that essential national cyber security initiatives will benefit from this approach, enabling them to effectively direct cyber security awareness training and developing wide-ranging cyber skill sets to protect and defend digital assets and applications, often adopted in haste during the pandemic-enforced lockdowns.

.IE, through the services of Netcraft and with cooperation from the Registrar community, identified 211 cybersecurity attacks in the 6 months to 30th June, and 386 in the 13-month period from 1st June 2021 to 30th June 2022. The most common cybersecurity attacks during H1 2022 were phishing (52%), malware (17%), web shell (13%) and shopping site skimmer (8%).

## Further growth of .ie database

There were 25,539 new .ie domains registered in this period, bringing the total .ie database to 332,642 domains. This is a 2.6% increase for the database on the same period last year, and a 21.8% growth on the same period three years ago (H1 2019), before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

**During the two years of the pandemic, more than 120,000 new .ie domains were registered,** with evidence from the data reported showing that the urban-rural digital divide is closing.



## Market share

The H1 2022 Report also shows that 91% of all .ie domains are registered on the island of Ireland. The .ie domain accounts for 53% of all top-level domains hosted in Ireland, an increase of 1.1% year-on-year. In comparison, .com accounts for 30% of all hosted domains, followed by .uk (7%) and .eu (2%).

## Content-rich websites

Just under half of all .ie domains (48%) have a content-rich website, with almost 1 in 4 (23%) of these e-commerce-enabled, including automated bookings and reservations.

The top three payment processors on .ie websites are Apple Pay (59%), Visa (43%) and American Express (38%).

For further information, visit our [.IE Domain Profile Report](#) page where you can download the full report and factsheet.



## AB Power Systems

AB Power Systems Ltd was founded in 1990 by Brian Holohan and Aileen Dunne. Initially, the business was distribution, installation, and servicing of Standby Power Battery Systems primarily into the telecommunications, power generation and emergency lighting industries. Standby Power Battery Systems are installed to control and protect mission critical equipment from the adverse effects of a power supply failure. Think what would happen if a generating station shut down, the lights in a hospital operating theatre went out or the nightmare of your house wi-fi collapsing. Our equipment prevents these situations from occurring. Our motto is "battery power you can depend on".

Beginning in the early 90's we could see an opportunity to develop a design and manufacturing facility to support our customers with a more bespoke service. Starting off slowly we developed a range of DC Power Systems suitable to the growing telecommunications industry, which was now opening to new providers, particularly in the mobile sector. All the while we were still distributing the Chloride (now Eversys) range of Standby Power Batteries and still do today.

By 1996 we had outgrown our rented facility in Dublin 8 and decided to buy a new industrial unit in Dublin 12, we still operate from there, albeit with several improvements and additions over the years which has almost doubled the original floor space. We have been ISO 9001 registered since 1999.

From 2000 onwards we continued to grow our design and manufacturing facilities adding computerisation in the form of AUTOCAD and an in-house devised programme called Tracker to further develop and streamline our business processes. Today we design and manufacture over 90% of the products we sell. From the start we have always had excellent relationships with our key suppliers, many of them multinationals and this continues to this day. We spend time to understand our customer needs and will always strive for nothing short of 100% satisfaction, even on the occasion that things don't go to plan we will keep working until a solution is found. This attitude has resulted in most of our business coming from either repeat customers or word of mouth.

From the mid 2000's we could see that the developments in the telecommunications industry was causing a shift away from the need for DC Power Systems, there would be still some business but not as before. To counteract this, we turned our attention to other industries with a DC Power requirement.



We had always been very active in the power generation industry (ESB), and with the growing global interest in renewable energy and the introduction of wind farms which were built in the main by private companies, many of them from overseas. We found ourselves ideally placed to offer them a local one stop shop for all their DC Power requirements. We also export to some of our Irish customers with business interests outside of Ireland.

2020 brought Covid-19 and everything changed. We, as essential suppliers continued to operate without interruption but of course with all the necessary health and safety precautions in place. Now that we have come out the other side, we find that our way of doing business needed to adapt to reflect the changing attitude to work/life balance, the difficulty in recruiting staff necessary to grow our business and supply chain issues. We are still extremely busy with orders that show no sign of dropping off in the foreseeable future and we must be able to supply on time and maintain quality.

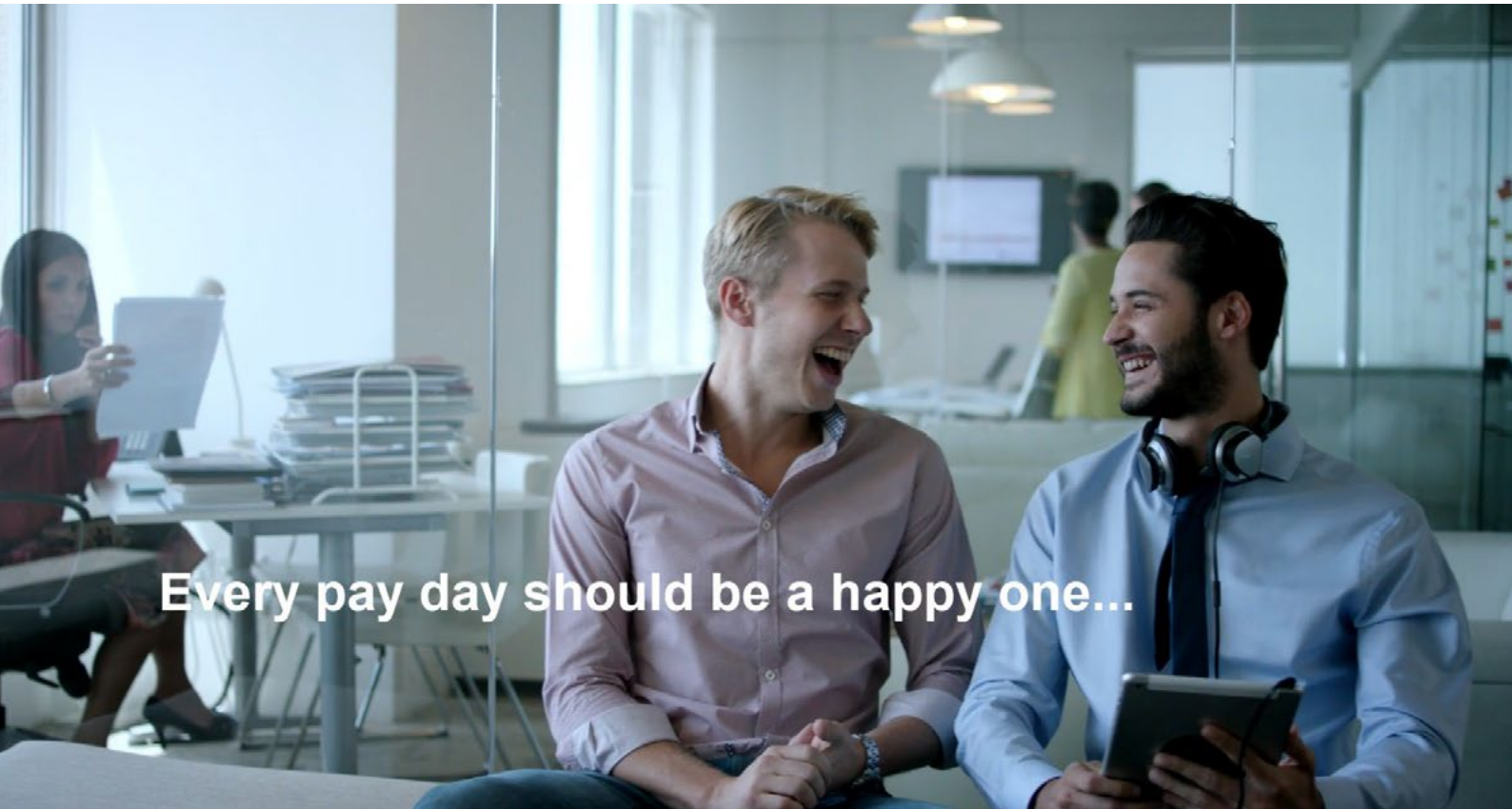
We appointed an Operations Manager in 2021 to further enhance our business and we continually engage with our staff and take on board their suggestions on how we should navigate in these challenging times. One change recently made is a streamlining of our production process and a reorganisation of our workshop area. We have delegated a member of our administration team to liaise with our various suppliers on a constant basis to ensure timely delivery of components vital to our production schedule.

We support staff with extra training and education, and we will shortly commence the process to gain ISO 14001 certification in Environment Management. Going forward we will continue to expand our business and support our customers and staff.

For more information on AB Power Systems click [here](#).

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# Get Winter Ready and Reduce Your Energy Use with Business Supports from the SEAI

War and conflict are affecting energy prices right across Europe. By reducing our energy use at work, we can limit our reliance on expensive, imported fossil fuels. Working with businesses, SEAI understands the impact of rising energy costs and the need to reduce your energy use and save money.

An average SME could potentially reduce its energy bills by up to 30%, by implementing energy efficiency measures; 10% savings can be achieved with little or no capital cost. Here are some key actions that your business and employees can take now to get winter ready and become more resilient to rising energy costs.

## Heating

The longer your heating is on and the higher your thermostat is set, the higher your bills will be. Remember heating costs increase by 8% for every 1-degree increase.

- Check your timers are set to the correct date and time considering different working hours on the weekends and bank holidays
- Ensure your heating in offices is set to 19 degrees and in areas of higher physical activity set to below 19 degrees
- Identify who is responsible for heating controls and communicate this to your employees, asking that they avoid tampering with the controls

## Draughts

Up to 30% of heating costs can be saved by preventing cold air entering a building. So, controlling this is one of the easiest ways to reduce your heating energy bills.

- Ensure staff are aware of the cost of wasted heat
- Identify sources of draughts and fit appropriate draught proofing. Think about seals around doors and windows, do they need maintenance?
- Ensure that doors are not being propped open for convenience and consider fitting spring-loaded door closures

## Lighting

For many businesses lighting is one of the most energy intensive parts of the business and can be responsible for 40% of a building's electricity use.

- Make use of natural light, relocate objects that are blocking windows, ensure window blinds are open during the day and arrange desks near windows without causing glare

- Identify and label your lighting switches to encourage staff to turn them off when not in use and agree with your employees that the last one out turns the lights off
- Consider installing occupancy sensors which can reduce lighting energy use by 30%
- LED lamps use up to 90% less energy than traditional lamps and can last up to five times longer. Consider replacing existing non-LED lamps with suitable LED ones.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland provides **grants** and **supports** to help your business get winter ready and reduce your energy use.

## How to connect with SEAI

- Encourage your staff to join the [SEAI Energy Academy](#) where they will learn about the basics of energy efficiency, helping you embed a sustainable energy use culture within your organisation
- Register for the next [SEAI Introduction to Energy Management](#) training to learn how to start tracking your energy use and create an energy action plan
- If you spend more than €10k per annum on energy, apply for the [SEAI Support Scheme for Energy Audits](#) and receive a €2,000 voucher towards a high-quality energy audit. This will help you identify your significant energy users and steps you can take to reduce your energy use.

For further information on supports available from SEAI and to sign up to their SME newsletter please visit [here](#).



# Funding SME Growth through IPOs

*Daryl Byrne, CEO, Euronext Dublin*

**Daryl Byrne explains how IPOs deliver for SMEs seeking access to capital for growth, what's involved and how Euronext Dublin can help.**

There are a range of funding options available to SMEs to support their growth, from seed and venture capital to bank finance and private equity. However, accessing funding through public markets is not always on the radar for the SME community. There can often be a perception that joining a public market through an Initial Public Offering (IPO) is something that is only suited to very large companies. However, IPOs can work very well for SMEs too, as evidenced by the successful listings of Corre Energy and HealthBeacon on Euronext Dublin in 2021.

## Why IPO?

Compared to other forms of finance, IPOs offer a number of advantages to SMEs, providing the opportunity to:

- Bring in new investors without giving up control
- Release some value from a company for its founders at the time of IPO
- Attract, reward and retain employees using shares
- Grow the company by way of acquisition using shares to fund this

Once listed, companies can quickly access investors for additional fundraising, as was the case in 2020 during the Covid pandemic when Irish listed companies raised over €4.2 billion of additional funding from investors.

## What is involved?

There are a number of key steps involved in the IPO process. The time varies from company to company and on average can take from 3 to 6 months:

1. Appoint advisers, e.g., broker, legal adviser, accountant, to assist the company in preparing for the IPO
2. Launch an intention to float to signal to investors that the company is seeking to IPO
3. Prepare an admission document which provides information about a company, its financial performance and its business to enable investors to decide on whether to invest in the company
4. Marketing of shares to investors within a price range and building a book of investors

## What happens afterwards?

After listing, ongoing and regular communication with investors is very important. Informing investors of developments about the company, positive and negative, and in good time is essential. Companies that put structured processes in place and communicate well and on a timely basis are typically able to quickly tap into investors when they seek further funds to support and grow their business.



Daryl Byrne, CEO

## How can Euronext Dublin help?

To assist companies prepare for an IPO, Euronext Dublin runs **IPOready**, a training programme for entrepreneurs and senior executives to provide them with the skillsets to access various forms of finance and capital markets. The programme, run in partnership with Enterprise Ireland and the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund, covers six modules held between January and June each year. Our next programme starts in January 2023 and we're seeking applications for this now. Read more about the programme [here](#).

Euronext Dublin also provides a range of supports for companies both in the lead up to an IPO and afterwards, such as webcast services, board document portal services and information about trading in their shares. Euronext is the number 1 listing venue in Europe, committed to ensuring that its markets deliver for SMEs and high-potential companies. To find out more visit Euronext Dublin [here](#).

IPOs continue to be a viable funding option with distinct advantages for many SMEs and are worth careful consideration as companies plan next steps to fund their growth. IPOs have a proven track record and will continue to be a valuable source of funding for many businesses over the years ahead.



## ISME Roadshows back in 2022

We are delighted to be back on the road to continue our Roadshow series starting in September. We plan to host events in Dublin, Meath, Kildare, Cork, Roscommon and Wexford, full details are available [here](#). The first event will take place in Lucan Spa Hotel on 21st September at 8.00am.

The programme will include an address by ISME's CEO, Neil McDonnell, HR Update, discussion and talks by guest speakers about key topics such as HR and Employment Law, SME Finance and more. Each session will finish with Pitch my business – our networking event allowing business representatives to give a 2 minute pitch and network with fellow business people. Refreshments are provided at all events; admission is complimentary and all businesses are welcome to attend.

### Schedule below:

- Wednesday 21st September, 8.00-10am, Lucan Spa Hotel, Dublin
- Thursday 22nd September, 9.00–11.00am, City North Hotel, Co. Meath
- Wednesday 12th October, 5.00pm–7.00pm, Keadeen Hotel, Co. Kildare
- Thursday 13th October, 9.00–11.00am, Clayton Hotel Silver Springs, Cork
- Thursday 27th October, 9.00–11.00am, Brandon House Hotel, Co. Wexford
- Wednesday 9th November, 9.00-11.00am, O'Brien & Wogan Suite, The Limerick Strand Hotel, Limerick
- Wednesday 16th November, 5.00pm–7.00pm, Athlone Springs Hotel, Co. Roscommon
- Thursday 17th November, 9.00–11.00am Maldron Hotel Galway, Co. Galway

To find out more and book your free space visit [here](#)

## ISME makes recommendations for white paper on enterprise policy

ISME has welcomed the decision of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to initiate a public consultation into the development of a White Paper on Enterprise Policy.

Built on ten themes, the key elements of the ISME response to the consultation are:

- While foreign multinationals play a huge and valued role in the Irish economy, both in terms of corporation tax and a significant employee pay bill, their contribution to Ireland's net national product (NNP) is eclipsed by that of the Indigenous SME sector.
- Emerging trends such as de-globalisation, onshoring of supply, and shortening of supply chains because of climate change are some reasons Ireland will have to rethink its industrial policy.
- Current policies on the taxation and treatment of capital, income, equity and dividends represent significant disincentives to Irish entrepreneurs, businesses and their employees.
- Compared to similar countries, Ireland's track record in scaling and listing domestic enterprises is poor. With a population just 5% larger than ours, Norway's Euronext hosted 67 IPOs in 2021. Ireland had two.
- From a business expansion perspective, we are calling on Government to focus particular attention and energy on the 21,000-strong cohort of businesses employing between 10 and 250 employees.

Read the full article [here](#)

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Creating a winning Customer Experience for Retailers

Thursday, 8th September, 12.00pm – 12.45pm

[Book here](#)

### A continuous coaching model for your retail team

Friday, 9th September, 12.00pm – 12.45pm

[Book here](#)

### ISME Roadshow Dublin

Wednesday, 21st September, 8.00am – 10.00am

[Book here](#)

### ISME Roadshow Meath

Thursday 22th September, 9.00–11.00am,

[Book here](#)

### Effective Telephone Sales Techniques

Tuesday, 27th September, 10.00am – 1.00pm & 2.00pm – 5.00pm

[Book here](#)

### Essential VAT

Tuesday, 27th September, 8.00am – 12.00pm

[Book here](#)

### Intermediate VAT

Wednesday, 28th September, 8.00am – 12.00pm

[Book here](#)

### Advanced VAT

Friday, 30th September, 8.00am – 12.00pm

[Book here](#)



## ISME SURVEYS

### Q2 Trends Survey

How did your business find Q2? We are living in particularly challenging times so we want to hear from you on how your business has been impacted by completing our **Q2 Trends Survey 2022**.

The Trends Survey provides us with the latest up-to-date information on pay, insurance costs and confidence indicators in the SME sector.

You can take the **Q2 Trends Survey** [here](#).

### Q2 Bank Watch Survey

Now available is our **Q2 Bank Watch Survey 2022** where we ask you to share your experiences in accessing and managing your finances in the first quarter of this year.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey [here](#).

The findings of these surveys will be circulated to media and will feed into relevant groups and committees ISME sit on.

Reports will also be uploaded to the ISME website.

All our surveys inform our lobbying on your behalf to Government so it is vital we capture as many experiences as possible.

### We're Listening...

We like to continually review our services and activity and we believe the best way to do this is to listen to the business community. For this we would ask you to give your feedback by taking a few minutes to fill out a survey. You will see in the survey that there are questions that cover your awareness of ISME, rating the services we provide and understanding your business needs and activity.

We really appreciate your participation and will enter all these surveys completed into a draw for a One4All voucher worth €100.

There are two versions – for **ISME Members** you can click [here](#) and for **Non-Members** please go [here](#).

## Two Fully Funded Diplomas for Jobseekers, Graduates and those looking for a new career...

ISME Skillnet is delighted to offer two fully funded programmes from Skillnet Ireland's Skills Connect initiative. Skills Connect offers free, online training which will help you reskill and develop the skills that employers are looking for today. Through this programme, ISME Skillnet will offer two innovative training and upskilling programmes, each offering practical work placements or projects on completion.

These skills conversion courses will help you develop the skills to explore a career in a sector with greater employment potential.

Enhance your job prospects by refreshing your existing skill set and expertise and learn new skills.

Our two programmes:

### Digital Marketing & Strategy Diploma with the Dublin Business School.

A 12-week programme, one evening per week, 7.30 – 9.30pm, commencing 19th September and concluding on 12th December 2022.

### Office Administration and Management Diploma with the UCD Professional Academy.

A 12-week programme, one online module per week, 7.30pm – 9.30pm, commencing 19th September and concluding 12th December 2022.

To register your interest to participate please email

[skillnet@isme.ie](mailto:skillnet@isme.ie)



### An Investment In Your Future

Our Skills Connect programme offers free online training programmes to help workers rapidly reskill and adapt to a changing business landscape.

VISIT [SKILLSCONNECT.IE](https://skillsconnect.ie) TO LEARN MORE



## ISME calls for financial support for SMEs amid ongoing energy crisis

ISME is calling on the Government to provide greater levels of support for SME businesses in Ireland amid the ever-worsening energy cost crisis. While the Government has tried to mitigate the impact of rising energy costs for consumers, the measures announced for business owners will not be sufficient to avert a crisis this winter. Read in full [here](#).



## ISME's Pre-Budget Submission 2023

Budget day will take place earlier than usual this year on Tuesday 27th September and we will be observing whether the recommendations in ISME's Pre-Budget Submission 2023, issued in June are activated.

### The main measures sought by ISME are:

- A comprehensive package of tax reform, including a solidarity USC levy of 3% on all PAYE workers earning over €100,000 per annum.
- The raising of an additional €500 million annually in CGT by lowering it to 25%.
- The elimination of the punitive "PRSI Transition Zone" for lower paid workers, by charging a new 2% rate of PRSI on weekly earnings up to €440 per week and a new 6% PRSI rate on marginal earnings above €440 pw.
- We want to see measures to encourage an increase in the number of firms listing on the Stock Exchange, and we want to make it easier for employees to invest in them.
- The cost of rent and housing is now so high that employers are buying accommodation for their employees. This creates a BIK problem for both employers and employees, and is unacceptable. Private landlords must be attracted back to the rental market via the taxation system to increase the stock of available housing.
- The cost of deep retrofit means that Government must address the cost of financing it, otherwise homeowners will not insulate their houses.

You can read full details [here](#).

## Meet us at BixExpo

We will be exhibiting at Biz Expo on Thursday, 29th September in the Sport Ireland National Indoor Arena, Dublin. Please pop over and say hello to the Membership Team who will be happy to discuss ways we can support you in business. Looking forward to seeing you there.



Thomas Corcoran, James Stevenson & Ronan Rigney

## ISME IN THE NEWS

ISME has been in the media recently speaking about some of the following:

- Rising Energy Costs
- Shopping Trends after Covid
- Living Wage/Minimum Wage
- Opinion Piece with Neil McDonnell on tax reform
- Energy Services Interruption
- Staff Shortages
- Access to SME Funding
- ECB Hike

You can view and listen back to a selection of ISME's media coverage [here](#).

## More Mentoring & Coaching available

Available now is our **Back in Business Mentoring & Coaching programme** – a continuation of the successful 2021's Back to Business programme, which is a complimentary service for ISME Members.

Each engagement will consist of six hours of face-to-face coaching and mentoring. We will provide a suitable business advisor / qualified coach with either domain or sector experience (or both). Our panel of 30 coaches were carefully selected via a robust tendering exercise in 2021. They have been through ordeals that many businesses are going through themselves. Therefore, offering to share their experience allows the development of a trusted partnership, and set a confident path to success. The progression of this relationship will aid a business owner to delve into their true purpose, both personally and professionally. To hear a mentor's or coach's experience, or a business owner sharing fresh perspectives, can shine a new light on to different situations. You can read about the mentors [here](#).

The areas we have covered, but not exclusively:

- Digital and Automation
- Growth and Finance
- People and Leadership
- Business Improvement Strategies
- Business Processes

You can read more about the programme and apply [here](#).

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# How does your customer experience stand out from the crowd?

As an SME Business you may feel that you are doing your best with delivering outstanding customer experiences in your business but is there room for improvement?

In a recent study conducted by McKinsey & Company, many businesses failed to see how improving the customer experience can create value. The research revealed that by improving the customer experience, sales increased between 2-7% and profit 1-2%

I will briefly touch on two ways you can improve your customer experience journey in your business through having a strong customer feedback process and a customer journey map.

## 1. Customer Feedback

Many customer feedback initiatives don't provide what is needed in order for the business to profit. Often when businesses are collating feedback, they receive this at the end touchpoint – the aftersales part of the process. In a recent Harvard Business Review with McKinsey & Company research study conducted on the retrieval of customer feedback, it was found to be disjointed and the sales journey for many of the businesses that gave feedback, did not have this broken down into the various touchpoints of the customer journey.

## 2. Customer Journey Map

In order to analyse the customer experience, there needs to be a clear customer journey map that is measured at each stage of the process. It should be broken down into segments in the customer journey map so you can focus on different phases depending on the key performance indicators in your business:

- **Phase 1:** The Welcome phase – brand awareness/introduction to brand/building rapport/body language
- **Phase 2:** The Discovery phase – asking open-ended questions (30% sales advisor speaks, 70% customer establishes needs versus wants)/active listening/coaching style questions asked/recognising when to approach visual buying signals
- **Phase 3:** The Buying phase – recommendations made/show and tell of products/features and



Louise Lally, Louise Lally Training Academy

benefits/complimentary products introduced to product being purchased increase average transaction spend/items per customer

- **Phase 4:** The Aftersales phase - customer loyalty programme/feedback/lasting impression/reviews

How to counteract this in your SME business is implementing tools and processes to support a more cohesive approach to this. Let's look at a retail scenario to demonstrate this where the first interaction touchpoint a customer has with a business is when they walk into a store. Now imagine those customers that don't buy but browse and leave the store, how can this be improved? By implementing feedback that measures the success or failure of this can be crucial in converting the next customer into a buyer. One way to do this is by having the team involved in this feedback process at the start i.e., asking them to observe customers that enter the store and their interaction with them. This gives frontline team members a structure to follow and thus enable changes to be made to potential new buyers.

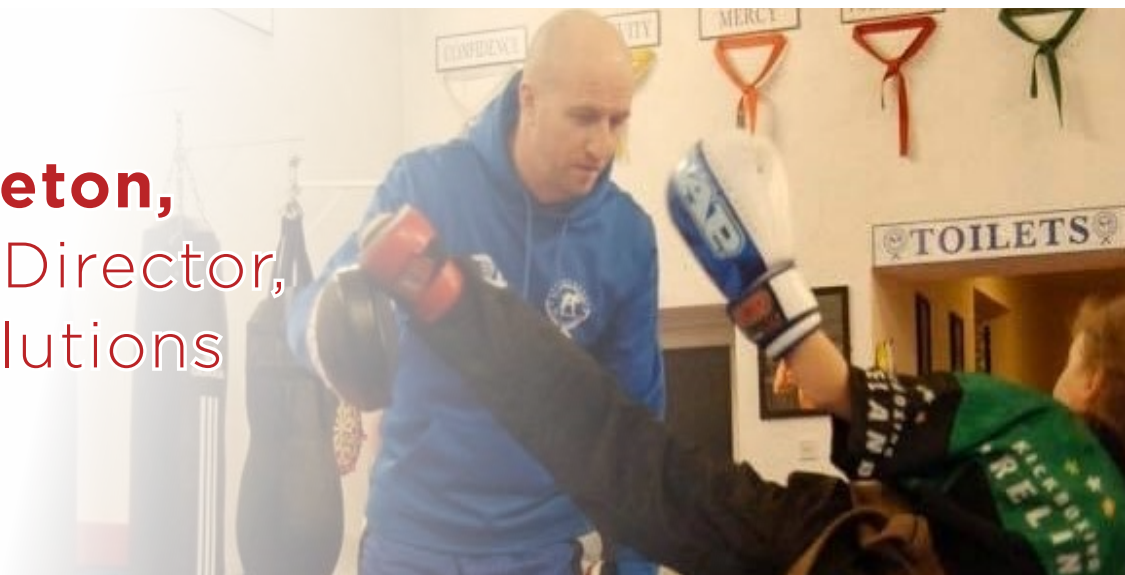
## Why your Customer Experience Journey should stand out from the crowd?

Customers' expectations have shifted, they now need a reason to return to a business. Although there has been a massive increase in online consumers, there is still a place for the bricks and mortar businesses. This will be determined by smaller businesses focusing on the one area larger multinationals struggle to get right, which is customer experience.

In a recent survey conducted by Hubspot during Covid, 75% of consumers changed their buying habits and 40% switched brands. The study revealed that the future growth in businesses will be experience-led and customer-centered.

For more information you can visit [here](#) or follow Louise on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), @louiselallytraining\_ on Instagram and @LallyTraining on Twitter.

## Shane Culleton, Founder & Director, LiCrann Solutions



### What interests/hobbies do you have outside of work?

I am very involved in kickboxing, at local, national and international levels. I have a very successful club which promotes kickboxing as a sport but also as a way of teaching my students to set and achieve goals in their lives. The life skills that can be taught through kickboxing are vast and very important for the fast – moving world that we live in. I am also involved with the Bumblebee 1000 Car Run.

### Why does martial arts interest you?

It interested me initially as a reaction to being bullied at 17 years of age. What started as a reaction to a negative experience, changed my life for the better in so many ways. I became a national champion, an elite fighter but my biggest achievement is the success of my own kickboxing club in the midlands.

The passion for the sport has changed my whole life – this is not down to being able to fight, but more about the focus and dedication given to kickboxing, which I have carried over into all the other areas of my life. Kickboxing gave me the skills I needed to be able to apply myself and to go after what I want in life.

### Tell us about Bumblebee 1000 Car Run?

It is a charity-based supercar event that hosts car drives 2-3 times a year, in aid of various charities. It involves over 100 supercars, driving to a variety of locations usually over 2-3 days. All of the funds raised go to the charities. The events are full of so much hope, fun and really great people, coming together for a chosen cause and I love being involved.

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

What's most interesting for me is that I became a champion at 32 years of age. Why this is so special is the fact that I thought I was too old and that it couldn't be done. But I was wrong. This truly taught me that anything is possible, with a burning desire to succeed and achieve a set goal.

### Are there any hobbies or challenges you would like to try?

I would like to do some Kung Fu in the future, it's always been of interest to me.

### Talk to us about your business?

We established LiCrann CCTV Processing and Redaction in order to provide a safe, secure, cost – effective and fast way of blurring CCTV footage. It was set up due to the huge costs around claims in Ireland which has affected me personally. Once we have redacted or blurred the footage, it is sent back to our clients via our cloud-based portal and they can fill in all of the details that we may need to know. We do all of the work for our clients, ensuring that the footage is fully GDPR compliant and ready to be used in court, should it be required.

### How important do you think it is to have an interest outside work and how do you think it can benefit your work?

Having your own business can be very stressful and challenging. Having a hobby that allows you to rest and recharge is vital. It not only relaxes you but I truly believe that it makes you more efficient and can lead to more innovative ideas. If we are too immersed in our business and we don't recharge, we become less efficient and ultimately, our business will suffer or something will give in our own life.

### How important is work/life balance to you?

Work/life balance is the key to success both in your own personal life and your business life. It's not about working harder but rather smarter. When you work smart you will have a great team that can support you and help you create that balance. It can cost money to employ the right people, but it is worth the price. Balance cannot be achieved if you work all of the time. Something will eventually give and the cost will be far greater. Work/ life balance is essential.

To find out more visit [www.licrannsolutions.com](http://www.licrannsolutions.com)

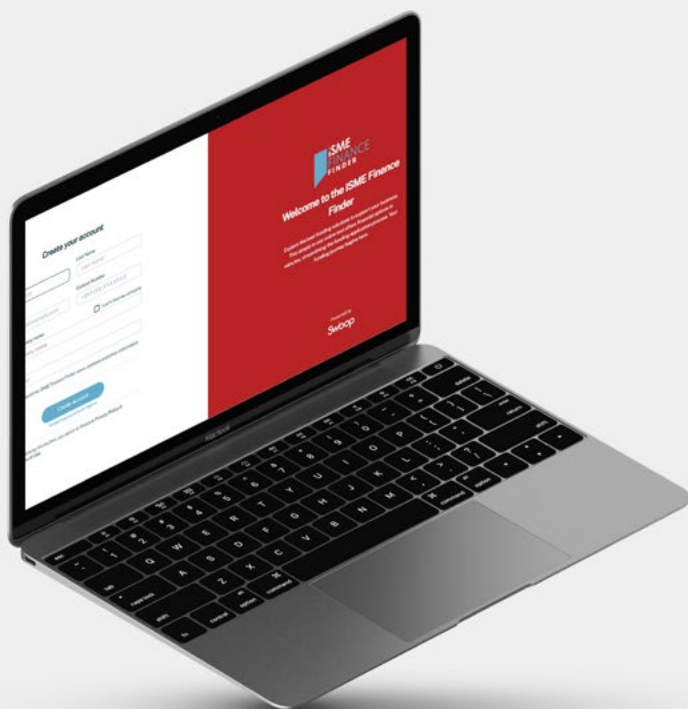




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