

About the Small Business Forum

The Small Business Forum was set up in July 2005 by the Minister for Enterprise, Trade & Employment, Micheál Martin T.D. The overarching task of the Forum is to consider the current environment for conducting small business in Ireland, and to advise on the adequacy and appropriateness of public policy responses (Appendix A for the full *Terms of Reference*).

In composition, the Forum is representative of the many and varied stakeholders involved in small business development in Ireland – owner/managers of firms drawn from the breadth of sectors that comprise the small business cohort, small business representative organisations, academics specialising in the field, and State development agencies. (Appendix B for membership of the Forum.)

The Forum met for the first time in September 2005 and decided to inform its work with a number of inputs: a review of current literature, submissions from interested organisations and members of the public, an empirical study, and a series of consultation meetings.

Literature Review: The Forum reviewed a wide range of current major publications from Irish, EU and OECD sources addressing the key areas of finance, entrepreneurship, innovation, productivity, and regulation.

Public submissions: A general call for submissions was issued in the national press, as a result of which seventy-four written submissions were received from small businesses, private sector representative organisations, government agencies, and private individuals. (Appendix C for a list of submissions received.)

Empirical study: In order to ensure that the Forum's eventual findings and recommendations would be grounded in empirical evidence, DKM Economic Consultants were commissioned to carry out a profiling study of small business in Ireland; the purpose of this study was to measure the economic impact of the sector through a range of indicators. The key findings of that study are published in parallel with this report.

Consultation activity: To canvass opinion from as broad a cross-section of small firms as possible, members of the Forum held a series of consultative meetings with upwards of ninety enterprises, in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Carlow.

Informed by the public submissions, the DKM study and the consultation activity, the Forum focused on three distinct work strands:

- ❑ Improving the economic environment for small businesses;
- ❑ Enhancing performance and productivity among small businesses; and
- ❑ Stimulating growth of small businesses.

In each of these work strands, the Forum commissioned research. This work analysed the current state and likely future developments in each area, and were an input to the Forum's final formulation and prioritisation of recommendations.