

'QHUBS' QUALITY STANDARD SETS OUT NEW FRAMEWORK

A new national Quality Standards Framework for Ireland's enterprise hub, co-working and remote working sector is now in place. The first of its kind in the world, the new framework now provides a professional standard for the 350+ enterprise hubs, plus co-working and remote working locations nationwide that play a pivotal role in supporting start-ups, SMEs, multinationals and remote workers across the public and private sectors.

one of the key actions to be delivered as part of the CEAI Regional Transformation Programme. This programme is supported under the Regional Enterprise Development Fund.

Minister Damien English said: "The significant number of remote working hubs and enterprise centres across the country are valuable assets in promoting national, regional and local economic development. The Framework will further strengthen Ireland's position as a world-class destination for remote working, support for entrepreneurship, collaboration, rural regeneration and enterprise development.

"It complements our National Remote Working Strategy, 'Making Remote Work', which sets out to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace to maximise economic, social, and environmental benefits for businesses and the workforce.

"It will also reinforce our efforts to deliver sustainable regional development and a jobs-led economic recovery. The project will benefit the development of the enterprise centre and hub space infrastructure in Ireland."

STANDARDS FOR EACH LOCATION

Mark Christal, Manager of Regions & Entrepreneurship at Enterprise Ireland, said that the new Framework is "an important development that will prove of great benefit to this growing element of Ireland's regional economy".

He added that it will both establish standards for each location and provide them with a framework on how development can be achieved and transparently reported.

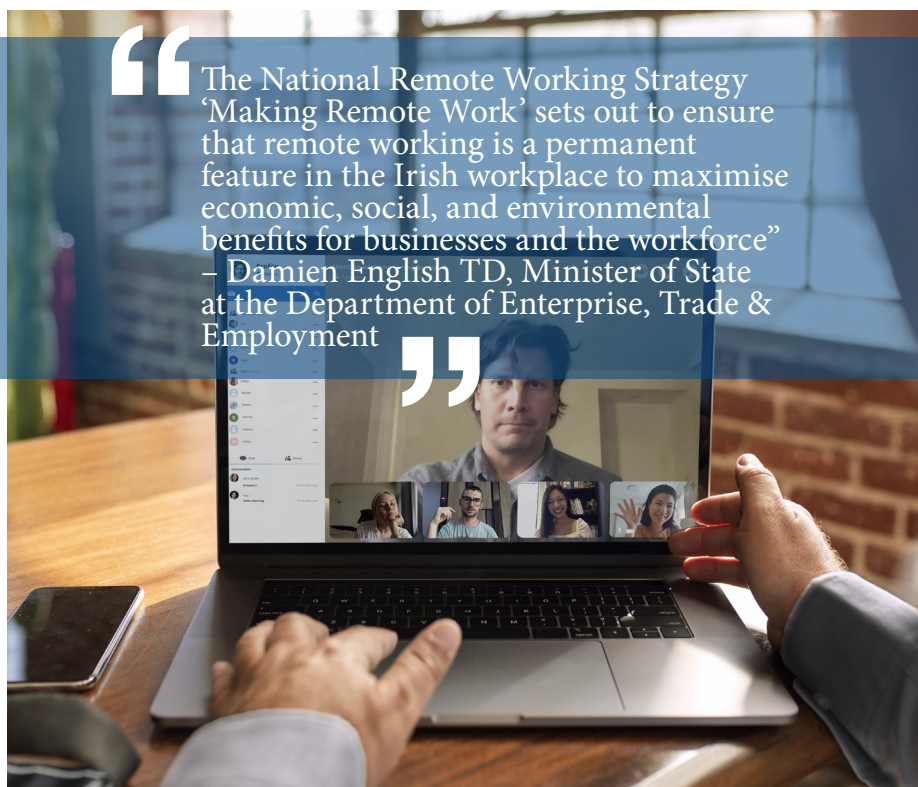
"Enterprise hubs, co-working facilities and remote working will play an increasingly important role in

The development of the Quality Standards Framework, which was overseen by a National Steering Committee chaired by Damien English TD, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment, was funded by Enterprise Ireland, and managed and co-ordinated by the Community Enterprise Association Ireland.

Entitled 'QHubs', the overarching aim of the new quality standard is to raise the quality, environmental and innovation performance of the sector, due to the ISO standards in which the framework is grounded, to ensure the national hub network continues to support the realisation of a sustainable and balanced regional development model for Ireland.

This Quality Standards Framework initiative is a key deliverable of the Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI) Strategic Plan 2019-21, and is also

"The National Remote Working Strategy 'Making Remote Work' sets out to ensure that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace to maximise economic, social, and environmental benefits for businesses and the workforce" – Damien English TD, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment



COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE HUBS



Pictured at the unveiling of the new national Quality Standards Framework for Ireland's enterprise hub, co-working and remote working sector were: **Seated (l-r):** Gary O'Meara, Chairperson, Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI) | CEO Meath Enterprise; Damien English TD, Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail at Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, and Siobhán Finn, National Hub Network Manager, CEAI. **Standing (l-r):** Geraldine Larkin, Chief Executive, NSAI; Stephen Carolan, Hubs Programme Manager, Western Development Commission; Des Foley, Director of Services, Meath County Council and member of County & City Managers' Association (CCMA); Colm O'Neill, Assistant Principal, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Sarah Morgan, Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan Manager (on behalf of the Enterprise Plan Manager Network); Sean McNulty, Consultant, Dolmen Innovation & Design; Lynda Boylan, Head of Strategic Partnership, Skillnet Ireland, and Mark Christal, Manager of Regions and Entrepreneurship, Enterprise Ireland.

entrepreneurship across the country and Enterprise Ireland is proud to have funded and contributed to this unique and ground-breaking Framework for the sector." Christal commented.

Gary O'Meara, CEAI Chairperson and CEO of Meath Enterprise, said: "We're delighted that we were in a position to bring together such a dynamic group of key stakeholders to develop this world-class Q-Hubs Standards Framework.

"At a time when the sector is more important to the Irish economy than ever before due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this system will enable the Community Enterprise Association Ireland and our members to be even more ambitious,

more professional, more creative and, importantly, more collaborative.

"It offers the opportunity for like-minded companies to immerse themselves in a nurturing and supportive community of innovators and entrepreneurs and really work together to make a real impact in their local community and the wider economy."

According to AnnMarie Farrelly, Chair of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) Business and Enterprise Committee, "Enterprise centres and hubs have a very important role to play in our new ways of working, creating opportunities for enterprise development, co-working and remote working across

the country. The CCMA is delighted to be one of the stakeholders involved with the CEAI in the development of the Quality Standards Framework, which will complement the national remote working strategy and will greatly assist regional development and entrepreneurship throughout the country. The CCMA looks forward to supporting the roll-out of this initiative and the promotion of further enterprise activity and job creation."

NETWORK OF ENTERPRISE HUBS

The Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI), previously known as the National Association for Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC), is the

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country's leading network of enterprise hubs, co-working locations and flexible working spaces.

Government funded and supported by Enterprise Ireland, the organisation was established over 20 years ago to drive real innovation and entrepreneurship across local communities and regions.

The CEAI's 2022-2025 strategy, due to be unveiled in early 2022, is rooted in an extensive, independently-led consultative process which engaged with member and non-member centres and hubs; local, regional and national government; state agencies and the private sector.

National Steering Committee Members:

- Damien English TD (Chairperson), Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment.
- Gary O'Meara, Chairperson at CEAI and CEO at Meath Enterprise (Project Manager).
- Siobhán Finn, National Hub Network Manager at CEAI (Project Co-ordinator).
- Sean McNulty, Chairperson, Dolmen Design & Innovation (Lead Project Consultant).
- Mark Christal, Manager of Regions & Entrepreneurship, Enterprise Ireland.
- Colm O'Neill, Assistant Principal, Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment.
- Tomás Ó Síocháin, CEO, Western Development Commission (WDC).
- Des Foley, Director of Services at Meath County Council and member of the County & City Managers' Association (CCMA).
- Geraldine Larkin, CEO, National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI).
- Lynda Boylan, Head of Strategic Partnerships, Skillnet Ireland.
- Conor Simpson, Regional Manager, IDA Ireland.
- Sarah Morgan, Programme Manager for the Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan/Planning Policy & Research Officer at Laois, Longford, Offaly & Westmeath Local Authorities.

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STEPS TO ACHIEVE QUALITY STANDARDS STATUS

When a location, centre or hub signs up to the new QHubs Standard, they will go through the following process to achieve their quality standards status:

- Engage in an 'Innovation and Quality Diagnostic' process to define their current status based on their strategic purpose, size, capacity and occupancy as well as services and facilities available. This ranges from Level 1 (a local community hub that provides good quality and affordable workspaces, shared services and networking opportunities) to Level 4 (offering more regional, national and international collaborations, shared learning and peer to peer opportunities, and market access for client companies that want to scale globally).
- With assistance from a dedicated mentor, each participant will identify their desired ambitions and goals, such as how to add value to the facility for client companies via improved services, products, experiences and upgrading business model and processes used. This offers an opportunity for locations to move up through the ranking system from Level 1 to 4, if that is their desired ambition.
- A customised 'Growth Pathway' will be developed to help each participating location work towards their targets, as well as access to the support required to achieve this. This Growth Pathway is verified by an external independent party.
- All hubs will be measured on an annual basis and progress benchmarked, with an external verification party reviewing this progress in line with their Growth Pathway. A range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be set in areas such as Quality, Environmental and Innovative Performance; Community & Network; Customer Experience; Digitisation, and Job Creation.
- In addition to having access to best-in-class resources, managers and team members of each location will be invited to engage in MentorsWork – a 12-week management and innovation programme from Skillnet Ireland and SFA. Involving one-to-one mentoring, webinars, master classes and workshops, the programme is designed to meet the ongoing talent development needs of the managers and staff across the national network.
- An annual Benchmarking Report, broken down by county, region and sector, will be shared with all participants, while an annual award ceremony will take place to recognise growth and performance achievements as well as share best practice learning.

MENTORING

