

The quarterly IEA Food and Drink Council meeting will take place in Teagasc Ashtown on **Wednesday August 10th**

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to see agenda. We will be returning to the theme of cost competitiveness and how Ireland is performing. Dr Constantin Gurdgiev gave his views on this at the February meeting and it will be interesting to see if Grant Thornton share his views. We will also get an overview of Enterprise Ireland's Lean Business Offer which is very popular in the current climate with companies seeking a competitive advantage in every thing they do. Finally, we will hear from Investec about how companies can manage risk in the currency markets.

Ciara Jackson of Grant Thornton will give a presentation on Ireland's cost competitiveness vis-à-vis our major trading partners. She believes that if Ireland is to compete globally, we need to understand our cost drivers and how to manage them, and how to use the money that we have (which is diminishing all the time) to maximise our competitiveness. Ciara will benchmark our various costs (labour, utilities, professional fees etc.) against the UK, Germany, France and Holland and give Grant Thornton's view of whether or not we are closing the gap.

*Ciara Jackson is the Manager of Grant Thornton's Food and Beverage team. Prior to joining Grant Thornton, Ciara has fifteen years experience working with dairy & food ingredient (Kerry Group) and financial services multi-nationals (GE Money) who are global leaders in their field.*

Dr Richard Keegan of Enterprise Ireland will give an overview of Enterprise Ireland's Lean Business Offer. This is designed to encourage clients to adopt Lean business principles in their organization to increase competitiveness. The programme is based on 3 levels of intensity of interaction with clients and is now in its second year, with many food companies enrolling on one of the programmes.

*Dr. Richard Keegan BE, Ceng, MComm, Phd FIEI is the Manager of the Competitiveness Department in Enterprise Ireland (encompassing Lean Business and Benchmarking) Dr. Richard Keegan is a specialist in the areas of World Class Business and Benchmarking with Enterprise Ireland. He has written several books on the topic and has lectured at Trinity College Dublin at post graduate and MBA levels, and as a guest lecturer at National University of Ireland – Galway, to both undergraduate and MBA levels.*

Finally, Philip Ahearne of Investec will speak on the subject of risk management in the currency markets. Investec now offer forward contracts to companies that don't impact on the company's existing overdraft facility and Philip will go into more detail on this, amongst other things, in his presentation.

*Philip Ahearne, Head of Corporate Foreign Exchange Sales, Investec Philip has worked in the Financial Services industry since 1983. His career has spanned a variety of rolls in several institutions. Currently Philip Heads up the Corporate Foreign Exchange Sales team, a position he has held for the past 3 years. In this roll Philip and his team deal with Corporate clients from all sectors of business in Ireland in relation to their treasury requirements. Philip is a Licentiate of the Institute of Bankers.*