

31 Mar 2017

Triggering Article 50: what now for HR in Ireland?

What HR in Ireland can do to ensure that organisations are ready to take on the challenges as the UK prepares to leave the EU

British Prime Minister Theresa May has triggered Article 50, formally beginning the two-year negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union, where regulations around trade, visas, migration, security and other significant areas will be renegotiated.

Article 50 is a part of the Lisbon Treaty that allows a country to leave the EU giving both sides two years to reach an agreement. The UK will formally leave the EU on 29 March 2019. The countdown has begun.

The importance of the relationship between Ireland and the UK in terms of the closeness of our labour markets and free movement of people has never been more important. According to a recent CIPD Ireland survey of over 800 HR professionals, two-thirds (66%) reported that maintaining the free movement of labour between Ireland and the UK was either extremely important or very important for their organisation.

Brexit will have a considerable impact on our relationship with the UK and will pose many challenges. So what can HR in Ireland be doing at this critical juncture to ensure that organisations are ready to take on the challenges as the UK prepares to leave the EU?

Consider the following activities:

- Establish a Brexit Group, with HR centre stage to understand and maximise opportunities, and mitigate the people risks.
- Conduct a workforce risk analysis to identify employees/teams that may be impacted by Brexit. Understand the full range of ways that employees may be impacted including work, visas, pensions etc and migration concerns, such as the feasibility of UK citizens remaining here to work.
- Evaluate the retention risks inherent in your talent pool, should organisations competing for the same skills be attracted to set up in Ireland.

- Engage in strategic workforce planning now to ensure continued access to skills and talent to grow the organisation. A strategic approach should consider short-term and long term skill needs, along with capability building for the future. While Ireland may be strong on attracting tech skills to the country, we are at risk of losing sales and relationship management skills (LinkedIn analysis for CIPD Seminar January 2017), skills that are central to growing our export markets.
- Understand how Brexit will impact your talent pipeline in the short, medium and long term. What are your key sources of talent and how will Brexit impact? What additional sources of talent may emerge.
- Understand how changes to the common trade and travel area between the UK and Ireland will impact the organisation. This includes employees and goods travelling between Northern Ireland and the Republic every day and vice versa, as well as those who visit or service the UK market.
- While the organisation identifies ways to mitigate risks and maximise opportunities, invest in a culture of innovation and resilience so that the capability to bring new products and services to market in a volatile environment is strengthened. Provide a supportive environment and development opportunities.
- Watch out for any changes to UK employment legislation that may impact on organisations with employees based in the UK. There is a plan to convert the UK's European legislation into UK law for the date of exit, but soon after this common platform is likely to go on separate paths.
- Communicate regularly with employees about Brexit and allay concerns where possible.
- Continue to create an open inclusive workplace that welcome diversity and is fit for the future.
- Building a sustainable organisation where employees have a voice, are well managed and deliver good work should always be a focus, and Brexit may provide a change opportunity to put that on a more sustainable footing.

We encourage HR in Ireland to have a strong voice on Brexit and be proactive in navigating a way forward by staying connected, understanding the facts and crucially the impact on people.

You may like to hear Peter Cheese's [message to the HR profession on the triggering of Brexit](#).