ICEL Public Procurement Law Annual Conference 2026

'Public Procurement Law in Northern Ireland: A Unique Jurisdiction?'

UK Reform, EU Legacy and Cross-Border Realities

One-Day Conference

Audience: Solicitors, barristers, in-house counsel, procurement officers, local authorities, arm's-length bodies, health and education sector bodies, utilities, third-sector providers, suppliers to the public sector, NGOs and advisers.

Format: In-person conference with expert panels, practical case studies, and Q&A.

Suggested CPD: 6 hours, subject to accreditation requirements.

Date/Venue: Tuesday, 17 November 2026; Bar Library, Royal Courts of Justice, Belfast

Core theme: Although public procurement in Northern Ireland is now primarily governed by UK domestic legislation and policy, EU procurement law remains relevant in a number of important ways — particularly for legacy procurements, interpretation of EU-derived rules, cross-border activity, EU-funded projects, public law principles, subsidy control and the broader legal environment created by the Windsor Framework. One year into the new regime of the Procurement Act 2023, the Irish Centre for European Law takes stock of the law and practice of Public Procurement in Northern Ireland and considers to what extent European Union public procurement law remains relevant.

Facilitating future North-South collaboration: The project team will also facilitate networking opportunities throughout the event, including structured discussion sessions and a closing reception. These activities are intended to support the development of long-term professional relationships and future collaborative initiatives between stakeholders from both jurisdictions. Participants will be invited to consider the establishment of a Cross Border Procurement Network following the Conference. Feedback from this network will be obtained on a bi-annual basis to ensure that each year's conference remains relevant and identifies the practical and legal challenges facing stakeholders and attendees of the conference on a yearly basis.

Conference Objectives

By the end of the day, delegates should be able to:

- Understand the current public procurement framework in Northern Ireland, including the impact of the **Procurement Act 2023** and transitional issues.
- Identify key legal risks across the procurement lifecycle, from market engagement to contract award and modification.
- Apply best practice in drafting, evaluation, transparency, conflicts management and record-keeping.

- Understand remedies, challenges and litigation strategy in procurement disputes.
- Explore Northern Ireland-specific policy priorities, including social value, SME participation, sustainability and governance.
- Identify where EU procurement law continues to matter after Brexit.
- Distinguish between:
    - legacy procurements under the old EU-derived regulations;
    - procurements governed by the new UK regime;
    - procurements affected by EU funding, cross-border structures or international obligations.
- Assess the continuing relevance of **CJEU case law** and EU-derived principles such as transparency, equal treatment and proportionality.
- Understand how the **Windsor Framework/Northern Ireland Protocol** may indirectly affect procurement through goods regulation, subsidy control, state aid concepts and cross-border market access.
- Manage procurement disputes in a jurisdiction where UK reform and EU legacy issues may overlap.
- Have a clearer understanding of the challenges facing procurement professionals operating cross-border procurements.
- Identify colleagues in Northern Ireland and Ireland who would contribute to the development of long-term professional relationships and future collaborative initiatives

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Programme

09:00 – 09:30

Registration, Tea and Coffee

Arrival and networking.

09:30 – 09:40

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chair: Brian Doherty (ICEL, Northern Ireland Committee)

Speaker:

- **Christopher McCrudden (ICEL)**

09:40 – 10:10 Session 1:

A Quick Tour of the Procurement Framework in Northern Ireland

Overview and purpose:
A scene-setting session explaining the legal and policy framework governing public procurement in Northern Ireland. To provide a clear map of the procurement framework in Northern Ireland and explain where EU law continues to have practical significance.

Chair: Brian Doherty (ICEL, Northern Ireland Committee)

Speakers:

- **Sharon Smyth FCIPS LLM, Deputy Secretary Department of Education (formerly Chief Executive of Construction and Procurement Delivery (CPD) for the Department of Finance)**
- **Bronagh Ferguson (Legal Advisor, Departmental Solicitor's Office)**

10:10 – 10.40 Session 2:

When is EU Public Procurement Law Still Particularly Relevant in Northern Ireland? A Deeper Dive

Overview and Purpose:
A dedicated session addressing the central conference question directly.

Chair: Brian Doherty (ICEL, Northern Ireland Committee)

Speaker:

- **Catherine Donnelly SC: Bar Library, Dublin; Blackstone Chambers, London; Northern Ireland Bar; Professor, Trinity College, Dublin**

10.40 – 11:05

Morning Break

Tea, coffee and networking.

11:05 – 11:45 Session 3:

Designing a Lawful Procurement — UK Rules, EU Principles and Northern Ireland Practice

Overview:
This practical session considers how to structure a procurement from the outset to reduce legal and commercial risk, and where EU-derived principles will continue to influence day-to-day procurement design, even where the procurement is governed by domestic law.

Chair: Vincent Power, Partner, A&L Goodbody, Dublin

Speakers:

- **Kerry Teahan, Partner, Carson McDowell**

- **Dr James Kinch, Principal Solicitor in the Public Procurement Law Section of the Irish Chief State Solicitor's Office, currently working with the Irish Department of Culture, Communications and Sport**

11:45 – 12:25 Session 4:

Northern Ireland Policy Priorities — Social Value, SMEs and Sustainable Procurement

Overview:
This session examines the policy objectives shaping procurement practice across Northern Ireland.

Chair: Chair: Vincent Power, Partner, A&L Goodbody, Dublin

Speakers:

- **Meabh Cormacain, Head of Social Value Unit, Strategic Investment Board**
- **Christopher McCrudden, ICEL, Blackstone Chambers, London; Northern Ireland Bar; Professor Emeritus, QUB**

12:25 – 13.10

Lunch and Networking

Moderated discussion: developing long-term professional relationships and future collaborative initiatives, including consideration of the establishment of a Cross Border Procurement Network.

13.10 - 13.50 Session 5:

Avoiding common sources of procurement disputes

Overview:
This session examines the practical issues that commonly arise in public procurement practice across Northern Ireland.

Chair: Michelle Drury BL, Bar of Ireland, Executive Director, ICEL

Speakers:

- **William Curry, Partner, Arthur Cox;**
- **Brendan McGurk KC, Monckton Chambers and Northern Ireland Bar**

13.50-14.30 Session 6:

When Things Go Wrong: Litigation Risk in Practice in Northern Ireland

Overview:
A focused session for lawyers and senior procurement officers on procurement disputes and court challenges. To examine how procurement disputes are likely to be argued in Northern Ireland, including the extent to which EU law and EU-derived case law may still influence claims.

Chair: Michelle Drury BL, Bar of Ireland, Executive Director, ICEL

Speakers:

- **Emily Neill, Blackstone Chambers and Northern Ireland Bar**
- **Andrew Beck SC, Bar of Ireland**

14:30 – 14:45

Afternoon Break

Tea, coffee and networking.

14.45 – 15.45 Session 7:

Cross-Border Procurement, EU Funding and the All-Island Economy

Purpose:
To examine procurement activity involving Northern Ireland, Ireland and EU-funded programmes.

Chair: Hon Judge Anthony Collins (ICEL, Irish Court of Appeal)

Speakers:

- **Micaela Diver, Partner, A&L Goodbody, Belfast**
- **Vincent Power, A&L Goodbody, Dublin**
- **Nathan Dunleavy SC, The Bar of Ireland**

15.45 – 16:45 Session 8:

Panel Discussion — The Future of Public Procurement

Panel themes:
"What will good procurement look like over the next five years? Five years from now, will procurement practice in Northern Ireland look more like the rest of the UK, the Republic of Ireland, or something distinctively Northern Irish?"

Chair: Hon Judge Anthony Collins (ICEL, Irish Court of Appeal)

Panel Members:

- **Vlada Aikman (Director of Public Policy and Devolved Nations, Competition and Markets Authority)**
- **Paul Quinn ((Chair Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) and Chair Gambling Regulatory Authority of Ireland (GRAI); former Irish Government Chief Procurement Officer)**

16.45 – 16:55

Closing Remarks and Key Takeaways

Chair: Hon Judge Anthony Collins (ICEL, Irish Court of Appeal)

Speaker

- **Christopher McCrudden (ICEL)**

16:55 – 17:30

Drinks Reception and Networking

Informal networking for delegates, speakers and sponsors.