



## Response to the Department of Rural and Community Development's Public Consultation on the Draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022

### Introduction

- **Early Childhood Ireland is the national membership organisation for the early years sector in Ireland. We represent more than 3,800 early years providers who support children and their families through preschool, afterschool, and full day-care provision nationwide. Our work includes quality enhancement, publications, advocacy, training, support & information for a sector that employs over 25,000 people.**
- **We are responding to the to the Department of Rural and Community Development's Public Consultation the Draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022. In devising our response, we have considered the following:**
  - **The Draft Policy including guidelines<sup>1</sup> about responding to the Consultation;**
  - **The Department's questions as set out in the Draft Policy;**
  - **The 2017/18 Early Years Sector Profile Report<sup>2</sup>;**
  - **The government's First 5 strategy<sup>3</sup>;**
  - **Our members' needs and views.**

### Background

- **As the national representative and support body for the early years sector, Early Childhood Ireland works closely with providers, peer organisations, parents, policy makers, partners, funders and researchers. We advocate on behalf of our members and the children and families they work with on matters that are important to them: and we progress thinking and research to help inform and shape the quality of practice and policy. Most specifically, Early Childhood Ireland works closely with providers to whom we provide training, support in improving practice through mentoring and advocate on providers' behalf on matters of policy relevance, including sustainability.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://drcd.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/social-enterprise-policy-draft-for-public-consultation.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2018/11/Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-2017-2018.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018\\_4966\\_DCYA\\_EarlyYears\\_Booklet\\_A4\\_v22\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/earlyyears/19112018_4966_DCYA_EarlyYears_Booklet_A4_v22_WEB.pdf)

- **The importance of early childhood care and education settings is immense. Childcare providers not only support and educate young children, but also offer multiple childrearing supports to families, including children with additional needs and their parents. Early childhood care and education services can also contribute in significant ways to community development and provide much needed additional support to people in disadvantaged areas. However, Ireland is experiencing a considerable childcare crisis, faced by a series of significant challenges, many of which are undermining the economic viability and sustainability of early childhood care and education settings. At the same time, childcare costs to parents are among the highest in Europe and pose a real threat to employment viability for parents.**
- **The early years sector in Ireland operates in a dynamic environment that is influenced by ongoing policy changes and developments. In the academic year 2017/18, 4,543 services were contracted to provide at least one of three state-funded early years programmes, namely Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and/or Training and Employment Childcare (TEC). The sector employs 29,555 staff and 202,633 children were enrolled across early years services nationally in 2017/18. 74% of early years services are operated by private organisations and 26% of services are operated by a community service.**

**First 5** is a whole-of-Government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families. It sets out new measures to improve quality, accessibility and affordability of childcare through a Workforce Development Plan, a new funding model and the forthcoming National Childcare Scheme which will launch in October 2019. The National Childcare Scheme will streamline the various early years funded programmes into a single system.

### Policy Objective 1: Building Awareness of Social Enterprise

In implementing this Policy, the Government will work with social enterprise stakeholders to help raise awareness of social enterprise, social entrepreneurship and social innovation in Ireland. The type of policy initiatives which the Government could take through the Department of Rural and Community Development to help raise awareness could, for example, include:

1. Working closely with social enterprise stakeholders to develop an Awareness Strategy to raise the profile of social enterprise in Ireland.
2. Identifying, with social enterprise stakeholders, best practice examples of social enterprises to improve public understanding of such enterprises and to highlight their contribution to society and the economy.
3. Holding an annual Social Enterprise Forum for all stakeholders to participate in shaping policy, building understanding of social enterprise, disseminating information, and sharing best practice.

#### Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of raising greater awareness of social enterprise?

- **We welcome these measures. We would propose that efforts are made to ensure the inclusion and visibility of sole operators.**
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to raise awareness of social enterprise, and if so, what are those actions?
  - **It would be useful to ensure that age, gender and ethnic background are explicitly addressed/made visible by all actions.**

Building on a number of current initiatives around social entrepreneurship and social enterprises, in finalising this Policy the type of policy measures which the Government could take to increase social enterprise initiation could, for example, include:

4. Supporting social innovation and social enterprise start-ups through targeted programmes and initiatives.
5. Exploring the scope for further inclusion of social enterprise and social entrepreneurship modules in the education and training system.
6. Working with education and research bodies to further support the development of social innovation.

Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of increasing social enterprise initiation?
  - **Early Childhood Ireland recommends that the Department ensures that bodies providing early years degrees and other qualifications are included in the proposed measures.**
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?
  - **We would like to see the early implementation of models proposed in the *First 5* strategy, for what are described as Early Learning & Care (ELC) collaboratives:**

*‘Pilot the development of models of local ELC collaboratives to better address governance and sustainability in ELC, in partnership with community and private providers. This will facilitate the collaboration of services, reducing the burden on individual settings and improve sustainability. The pilot will investigate and review existing models of organising providers. It will establish a continuum of collaboration for different types of providers (including agreeing on a number of options for collaboration that can be piloted or replicated). It will pilot identified models over a full year of operation and make recommendations on the future roll-out of models. The pilot will establish local ELC collaboratives, i.e. geographical cluster networks of providers through which cooperation structures can emerge. Special incentives for including childminders will be considered.’*

In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve business and leadership supports for social enterprises could, for example, include:

7. Compiling and making available information on the various business supports available to social enterprises, along with details of the providers of those supports.

8. Identifying any gaps which may exist in business supports available to social enterprises and working to address those gaps.
9. Providing access to advice and supports to assist social enterprises and social entrepreneurs to develop their business proposals.
10. Providing tailored training for social enterprises to help them to improve their business potential as well as leadership and governance skills.

Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective?
  - **These seem sufficient.**
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?
  - **We would welcome the inclusion of the early years sector in all of the identified measures.**

### Policy Objective 2: Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise

In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve access to finance and funding for social enterprises could, for example, include:

11. Cataloguing and disseminating information on financing/funding schemes available to social enterprises at national and EU levels.
12. Identifying gaps in financing/funding schemes and working to address those gaps.
13. Exploring the potential for new innovative funding schemes for social enterprise.
14. Seeking to improve alignment of funding schemes to support the objectives of social enterprises, whilst avoiding any displacement of existing supports for Community and Voluntary organisations.

Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of improving access to finance and funding for social enterprises?
  - **These seem sufficient.**

In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve access to markets for social enterprises could, for example, include:

15. Supporting capacity-building for social enterprises in relation to procurement processes through workshops and training.
16. Working with stakeholders to identify how to improve opportunities for social enterprises in the business-to-business supply-chain.

Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of improving market opportunities for social enterprises?
  - **These seem sufficient.**

- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?
  - **We would welcome the inclusion of the early years sector in all of the identified measures.**
  
- What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?
  - **We believe that supporting capacity-building for social enterprises in relation to procurement processes through workshops and training should be a priority.**

### Policy Objective 3: Achieving Better Policy Alignment

17. Helping policy makers to better understand how procurement can be used to facilitate the advancement of social policy objectives within appropriate and structured public procurement guidelines.

Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of improving market opportunities for social enterprises?
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?
- What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?

In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve better policy alignment for social enterprises could, for example, include:

18. Developing a better understanding of the interaction between social enterprises and relevant policy areas across Government to ensure closer alignment with social enterprise and enabling social enterprises to increase their contribution to delivering on policy objectives.

19. Ensuring that Ireland engages closely on social enterprise policy developments at international level so that Ireland can influence international Social Enterprise policy development and, where relevant, social enterprises can benefit from international supports.

Questions for consideration:

- Are these suggested policy measures sufficient to achieve the objective of achieving better policy alignment for social enterprises?
  - **These seem sufficient.**
- Are there other actions the Government could consider to achieve this objective, and if so, what are those actions?
  - **Early Childhood Ireland believes that the inclusion of early years and other areas of the *First 5* strategy would lead to better policy alignment for babies, children, their families and communities.**
- Are there specific areas of Government policy which are causing difficulty for social enterprises, or which could be improved?
  - **There is a need to build the capacity of the early years sector to develop sustainable, self-reliant social enterprise models. Greater collaboration between the various statutory agencies involved in early years is an important first step in developing an Awareness Strategy specific to the early years. Involvement of Department of Children & Youth Affairs is therefore essential in any Interdepartmental Working Group. All early years services are supported by City and County Childcare Committees within their local authority. There is an opportunity for greater collaboration between CCCs and Local Enterprise Offices.**
  - **There is a need to develop clearly defined indicators of success when evaluating impact according to the specific type of social enterprise.**
- What should the Government's priority be in working towards achieving this objective?

- **We believe that a deeper examination of the various funding schemes and support options available to social enterprises from the EU will also help to determine the potential for Irish social enterprises to avail of these supports. should be a priority.**

In finalising this Policy, the type of measures which the Government could take to improve better policy alignment for social enterprises could, for example, include:

20. Improving data collection relating to the extent of social enterprise and the areas in which social enterprises operate.

21. Developing mechanisms to measure the social and economic impact of social enterprises across the full spectrum of social enterprise.

Questions for consideration:

- Are there other actions could the Government consider to establish a reliable evidence base for social enterprises?
  - **The CSO could be consulted for advice and guidance on this. A pilot survey<sup>4</sup> has already taken place (September 2018) for the next Census which is due in 2021. Early Childhood Ireland recommended the inclusion of childcare as a data area, and we note that a question on voluntary activity was also trialled. A future Census could, for example, include ‘Social Enterprise’ as an employment sector.**
- What should the Government’s priority be in working towards achieving this objective?
  - **As well as gathering data as suggested above, measuring the impact of social enterprise should be a priority. Early Childhood Ireland recommends that this could be achieved using a similar approach to the recent report on ‘*The social value of CLG Na Fianna*’<sup>5</sup> (April 2018) at a regional or national level.**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://censuspilot.cso.ie/en/about-the-survey/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/2019/05/na-fianna-social-value-report.pdf>