

Response to the Draft National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019 - 2022

by

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Enactus Ireland is part of a global network which empowers third level students to create and initiate social enterprises. In doing so, the students who engage with Enactus develop the skills necessary to become the socially conscious leaders of tomorrow.

Enactus Ireland was part of the policy stakeholder forum that was held at the Irish Universities Association in April 2018, which was chaired by the Social Finance Foundation.

This response represents the views of key stakeholders in the Enactus Ireland network: staff, the board of directors, academic advisers, alumni and students.

Firstly, Enactus Ireland welcomes the Draft National Social Enterprise Policy as it demonstrates the Department of Rural & Community Affairs' commitment to the creation and enhancement of a structured social enterprise eco-system in Ireland.

1. Policy Objective One – Creating Awareness of Social Enterprise

Although the draft policy briefly mentions the third level education system as a means for initiating social enterprises, it should be stressed that our third level education system is an important incubator for social enterprise. Through Enactus alone, social enterprises such as Foodcloud, Access Earth and Giveback.ie have flourished from student ideas to impactful national and multinational organisations. Recognising this and supporting organisations that encourage social enterprise at third level will raise awareness of social enterprise.

The 2016 GUESSS study notes that between 3.5 and 3.7% of Irish students would consider a career in a non-profit organisation. There is a crucial need to profile SE as a possible and attractive career option to students through multiple avenues and collaboration with 2nd and 3rd level institutions, as well as potential apprenticeship opportunities.

Tangentially, research in the area of social enterprise is severely lacking both nationally and internationally. Creating opportunities for Irish academics to research the area of social enterprise will not only raise awareness, but also raise engagement with social enterprises. The obvious link here would be to work with research institutions to develop the knowledge portion.

In addition, higher education institutions have a role to play in developing social capital. Enabling HEIs to support social enterprises to a higher level will contribute to fulfilling this responsibility.

Enactus Ireland welcomes an effort to further include social enterprise and social entrepreneurship modules in the education and training system. It is key, however, to ensure the resources currently available are integrated into these modules.

2. **Policy Objective Two – Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise**

Enactus Ireland would support the creation of a state, or semi-state, organisation solely dedicated to the support, development and enhancement of social enterprises. As mentioned in the draft policy, responsibility for social enterprises has been confusing and varied. In our experience, this had led to social enterprises developed by Enactus feeling lost and lacking direction when they leave the third level eco-system and Enactus network. This results in a high rate of social enterprise failure. Much more support is needed for social enterprises to scale and grow – especially in the areas of mentorship and training.

It is important to highlight the need to look at the social entrepreneur as part of the social enterprise, and their competency to be managers and leaders. It is imperative to provide training and resources in the areas of scaling and strategy development. Leading social enterprise development organisations, such as Enactus and Social Innovation Fund Ireland, currently provide this resource.

Enactus welcomes all approaches to provide funding for social enterprises. In terms of enhancing current government funding streams, raising awareness is key. Social entrepreneurs, especially those who run grassroots and start-up organisations that do not qualify for funding from Social Entrepreneurs Ireland and Social Innovation Fund Ireland, are not aware of the funding supports available to them. Increased awareness at a grassroots level is required. This can be achieved through engaging with organisations which initiate social enterprises.

The Enterprise Ireland Innovation Voucher scheme has witnessed many benefits for stakeholders involved; perhaps a version of this with more specialised caterings for SE could be offered to give more expert support to organisations/communities in need.

3. **Policy Objective Three – Achieving Better Policy Alignment**

Enactus Ireland would support the creation of a National Social Enterprise Steering Group which would inform the department of a better understanding of the interaction between social enterprises and relevant policy areas across Government to ensure closer alignment with social enterprise and enabling them to increase their contribution to delivering on policy objectives.

The National Social Enterprise Steering Group would be made up of key stakeholders in the Social Economy: social enterprises, funding bodies, development organisations and researchers.

This Group would also have the responsibility of working on an international level to ensure Ireland is meeting best practice standards from Europe and beyond.

Additional Notes

- *Definition*
There is a feeling in our network that the definition put forward for application to a social enterprise is too narrow with an over emphasis on the not-for-profit model which, if applied, would limit the potential of social enterprises and exclude many of the success stories such as Foodcloud (mentioned above). With this definition, social enterprises would get consumed into the voluntary and not-for-profit sector completely and thus lose their identity and potential.
- *Negative Impact*
For a social enterprise to create a truly positive social impact, it must be aware of any negative impact it creates (whether it be environmental, social etc.). Those managing a social enterprise should take steps to negate its negative impact to ensure a higher positive impact. Enactus Ireland would welcome training under the new policy in this area as it is completely non-existent now.
- *UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals*
Although the SDGs are mentioned under Better Policy Alignment, to truly achieve the goals by 2030 we need to see them interwoven into this policy. If the people running social enterprises are aware of the SDGs from idea to inception to expansion, we would see a much more structured effort to tackling the goals and Ireland would be closer to meeting the 2030 deadline than we are right now.
- *Better Understanding Across Sectors*
It is key for intermediary organisations, such as Business in the Community Ireland and Campus Engage, who bridge the gap between the Social Economy and other sectors are engaged in this policy and understand the developments being made in this sector. They can then inform their stakeholders to give a nationwide understanding of social enterprise.