



Tallaght Enterprise Centre, Main Road, Tallaght, Dublin 24

**Social Enterprise Policy Consultation,
Department of Rural and Community Development,
Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster Street South,
Dublin 2, D02 EF85**

10th May 2019

Dear Sir or Madam,

As CEO of Partas, a long-standing social enterprise of 35 years based in Tallaght, Dublin, I am pleased to present this submission to the Social Enterprise Public Consultation process. As a member of the Social Enterprise Task Force, I have been working very closely with the Department over the years in arriving at this point and so I welcome the fact that this policy has been developed and I understand the influences that have shaped the policy in its current form. So from our point of view we are broadly welcoming of the policy and the intentions behind it.

Having said all that, there are certain points which I would have made over the years and which I would now re-iterate so that they might be kept in mind and might contribute to the policy as it grows and further develops:

- I propose an overarching approach similar to the principle in medical ethics of: first do no harm. Whatever the outcome of this first policy on social enterprise and whatever benefits it may bring to the sector, it should first not impose constraints, bureaucratic obligations or other burdens that make business more difficult for those engaged and already struggling under scant resources.
- Whilst a policy is by nature broad, it is reasonable for a social enterprise to examine these policy proposals and ask the question: 'what does this do for me?' It is not immediately apparent how this policy will answer that question with optimism other than by supposition that by somehow improving the sector and its image, there would be downstream benefits to practitioners. I understand that this is an important first step, but at some stage it will be necessary to review that question and show tangibly how individual social enterprises benefitted by the implementation of this policy.

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Partas is the trading name of **get tallaght working co-operative clg**. Reg. in Dublin No. 280626 Charity No. 12162 VAT No. IE4871499L



- Social Enterprise is a moving target and as such needs to be constantly reviewed. This current policy has grown from discussion that began with government over ten years ago. In that time the understanding, practice and manifestation of social enterprise has altered dramatically. There are also demographic influencers on social enterprise that were not previously so evident. I don't feel that this document reflects those international and even national changes and as such may consign us to remain in the lower rankings of social enterprise countries. (In 2016 the Thompson Reuters Foundation conducted a global study ranking 44 countries for their social entrepreneurship environment and Ireland ranked 43rd). Can there be some type of observatory service within the policy to track international/EU developments and ensure our early adoption of innovations in the sector?
- Related to the previous point, and another factor that I feel may retard the growth of the sector, is the alignment of social enterprise within the community and voluntary perspective. I have always argued for it to be viewed as an economic/enterprise activity rather than C+V. The sooner it is viewed through the prism of business that does good for society, the more the opportunities will be seen for its growth and influence. Indeed closer alignment to the commercial arena will further benefit the business world as it adapts to further adopt a triple-bottom-line approach and report on its impact socially and environmentally as well as financially.
- The mention of impact in the previous point leads to an observation that as the world moves towards an 'impact' society and the delivery of Sustainable Development Goals, this policy could be even more focussed on 'impact' as a key indicator.
- There should be a specific focus and target on the achievement of Ireland in availing of the large tranches of funding available to social enterprise. To date this has been poor and may reflect ignorance or lack of capacity at government and sector level. This should be addressed to the benefit of all.
- I believe that the policy should be also focussed on harnessing the opportunities for the sector that lie within a properly functioning procurement system that favours social enterprise. This has the potential to be a key enabler of social enterprise going forward and should be given interdepartmental support.
- As in traditional commercial business, leadership is vital to a healthy, progressive, innovative and profitable social enterprise sector. The policy has nothing particularly to say on this issue but there should be key strategic plans to find and develop the right people who have the capacity to bring the sector forward.



- The potential for social enterprise is at all levels of business and therefore the capacity to develop social enterprises within less traditional business sectors needs to be identified. (The Deloitte Global Trends report for 2018 identifies: 87 percent of C-level executives say that Industry 4.0—the industrial revolution brought about by the combination of digital and physical technologies—will lead to more equality and stability, and 74 percent say business will have more influence than governments or other organizations to shape this future.) The focus on C+V will leave us blind to these newer opportunities.

I welcome the fact that in Ireland we are, albeit at a very late stage, about to really get off the starting blocks in relation to social enterprise. I believe that the engagement in relation to this document and the level of commitment shown in recent times, is commendable. I further believe that the manner in which the individuals involved at departmental level have shown how quickly and competently they have risen to the brief is a cause of optimism and I look forward to continuing to contribute in whatever way is helpful to bring the potential of this policy into being.

Yours sincerely,

John Kearns
CEO – Partas