



Please find response to the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland submitted on behalf of Social Enterprise NI

Social Enterprise NI welcomes this report and the focus on the social economy in Ireland. Our views are provided based on our role of being responsible for operating the Social Economy Work Programme in NI on behalf of The Department of the Economy. The social enterprise sector has grown over recent years as evidenced by a soon to be released report on the sector, which we will forward to The Department of Rural and Community Affairs for your information.

General

The report sets out the current condition of the social enterprise sector in Ireland. We would make the following comments in bullet point form

- The term “Not for Profit” is not one which does not sit well with the social enterprise sector. Social enterprises are businesses, like any other SME are required to make profit in order to fulfil their social mission. Social enterprises set themselves apart from other businesses by committing to regenerate all their profit into their social mission rather than distributing as dividends to shareholders. As such they must generate income in order to exist. The term Not for Profit deflects this purpose away and group social enterprises with other community and voluntary groups.
- Any strategy must accept that social enterprises are a business and require the same support as other businesses in their respective phase ie start up or scalable organisations.

There is a significant level of commonality in this report to the sector in NI, namely;

- a lack of understanding of the sector from those outside and operating across public, private and educational sectors.
- How to quantify the sector – what is the size? What is a social enterprise? Why do some organisations not consider themselves to be a social enterprise?
- The social economy transverses all government departments making it difficult to gain traction. It should be proposed as part of this report to appoint a Minister for the wider Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise Sector, a single point of reference.
- Similar issues and challenges as those listed on page 12, “Establishing Policy Objectives” in terms of awareness of the benefits which a stronger and bigger social enterprise sector could bring to the Irish economy, need for capacity building and support for social enterprises, importance of the access to finance, benefits of collaboration and the need for better measurement and collection of data.
- Overall awareness of the sector needs addressed by a co-ordinated approach supported by government by setting up a central body to manage day to day activity
- Call out for Dormant Accounts to be distributed to social enterprises as funding along with the wider community and voluntary sector

- Improved public understanding of the sector and benefits of entering the social enterprise supply chain
- Social Entrepreneurs are by nature innovative and generally this stems from young people. More work needs done with education bodies to include social enterprise in the curriculum
- Whilst there are several regional bodies who support the social enterprise sector, government departments, Local Development Companies, councils and other support organisations, there should be a central government funded body to drive strategy, awareness and benefits of including social enterprises on supply chains
- Similar business supports required as other start up and established businesses-don't need specific social economy programmes
- Support need for capacity building, scalability, leadership, governance, impact measurement, financial planning
- Awareness of mainstream lenders in order to dispel any myth about social enterprises and that they are businesses

SUMMARY

Social Enterprise NI considers that the Department should establish a central body based upon other parts of the UK, and across the world, and a similar structure to that of Social Enterprise NI. This central body is a means of the Department delivering a Work Programme and monitors the work it carries out in building awareness and growth of the sector. Benefits of this include

- Creating a membership which enables it to deliver training and upskilling of the sector
- Builds a picture of the size and scope of the sector
- Creates an organisation which has standing in the economy and is accountable to government department
- Using this body to increase awareness and benefits of dealing with a social enterprise and links into private and public sectors
- Deliver annual conference to promote current trends and topics such as social value
- Be point of reference for government departments
- Setting up an All-Party Group of politicians to develop and nurture the sector
- Create interest in the sector and establish an Annual Awards ceremony to raise awareness
- Devise and deliver programmes with educational bodies – important in terms of growing the sustainability of the sector
- Link with International bodies to discuss best practice
- Consider a similar model to that in Northern Ireland where Social Enterprise NI is an established part of the NI economy.

It is always also important that the concept of social value and impact is considered as a means of driving this sector. Legislation for the social enterprise sector is a game changer and one which we are actively pursuing in NI, as it remains the only part of the UK without any social value in procurement. This should be considered at the highest level for the sector in Ireland.

I trust this is in order.

Social Enterprise NI would be delighted to engage further with the Department and offers it services in assisting the driving of the sector in Ireland

Colin Jess
 Director
 Social Enterprise NI