

Vantastic CLG Submission to National Social Enterprise Policy for the years 2024-2027

I am writing on behalf of Vantastic CLG, an engaged and enthusiastic member of the Social Enterprise Community in Ireland, eager to contribute to the development of Ireland's new National Social Enterprise Policy for the years 2024-2027.

Firstly, we would like to express our appreciation for the commitment shown by the Department for Rural and Community Development in seeking input from the public and various stakeholders. It is a commendable effort to ensure that the policy reflects the diverse perspectives and needs of our community.

As an organisation invested in the growth and sustainability of social enterprises in Ireland, we believe that fostering an inclusive dialogue is crucial for the success of the upcoming policy. Social enterprises play a pivotal role in addressing societal challenges, driving economic development, and promoting environmental sustainability. Therefore, a robust and well-informed policy is imperative to empower and uplift these enterprises.

Vantastic has actively participated in the collaborative initiatives led by both 'The Wheel' and 'The Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland' in involving stakeholders through member consultations on the Public Submission for the Development of Ireland's National Social Enterprise Policy for the years 2024-2027. Our engagement in these consultations has proven to be both enlightening and enriching. The interactions with 'The Wheel' and 'Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland' have been of immense value. The thought-provoking discussions and the exchange of ideas have deepened our understanding of the nuanced realities, challenges, and opportunities within the Social Enterprise community. The transparent and open dialogues facilitated by both organisations have allowed us to draw insights from the diverse experiences shared by fellow members, experts, and professionals.

We are particularly pleased to observe that the submissions made by both organisations accurately capture the diverse perspectives expressed during the member consultations. Both submissions highlight the significance of addressing the multifaceted needs of social enterprises and emphasise critical areas of focus, including inclusive support mechanisms, capacity building, collaboration, measurable impact, awareness and recognition. These submissions underscore our collective commitment to shaping a comprehensive and effective national policy that reflects the dynamic landscape of social enterprises in Ireland.

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In addition to the previously mentioned collaborative submission, we would like to provide feedback on three specific actions that, if implemented, could significantly impact the five thematic objectives outlined in the policy. These include funding for Social Impact Reporting, the introduction of an independent Accreditation Mark for Social Enterprises, and the implementation of additional strategies in public procurement that encourage the active participation of social enterprises.

1. Policy Objective Five (Data Collection & Social Impact Measurement): Regarding this objective, we strongly recommend the allocation of resources, particularly funding, for specific Social Impact Reporting on a pilot basis. Investing in social impact reporting for social enterprises is a strategic move, not only benefiting individual organizations but also contributing to the overall growth, credibility, and positive impact of the social enterprise sector. This initiative aligns with principles of transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, fostering a culture of responsible and sustainable business practices.
2. Policy Objective Two (Growing Social Enterprise - Accreditation Mark): In relation to this objective, we believe that introducing an accreditation mark is pivotal for establishing credibility, ensuring quality, and fostering trust within the Social Enterprise Sector. Such accreditation marks would serve as valuable symbols, signifying a dedication to excellence and compliance with recognised standards. While we support the idea of a voluntary (non-legal) accreditation, we stress the importance of the mark serving as an independent guarantee, affirming that an organisation has met criteria agreed upon in the Social Enterprise sector and is genuinely committed to effecting positive social change.
3. Policy Objective Two (Growing Social Enterprise - Public Procurement): Acknowledging the government's consideration of social impact in public procurement, we propose additional strategies/actions to further promote the use of social enterprises in public procurement:
 - Develop and implement procurement policies explicitly encouraging social enterprise participation, including setting targets for the percentage of contracts awarded to them.
 - Integrate social value criteria into procurement processes to evaluate the broader benefits social enterprise suppliers bring to society, such as job creation, training opportunities, community development, and environmental sustainability.
 - Utilise a balanced scorecard approach, assessing not only price but also social and environmental considerations when awarding contracts.
 - Establish mentorship programs or networks connecting social enterprises with experienced suppliers to enhance their competitiveness.
 - Simplify procurement procedures, especially for social enterprises, to reduce barriers to entry.
 - Consider dividing larger contracts into smaller lots, making them more accessible for social enterprises.
 - Reserve a certain percentage of public contracts or lots exclusively for social enterprises.

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In response to the invitation for suggestions on a name that encapsulates the vision and ambition of the social enterprise policy, we propose two possible titles.

- "Nurturing Social Enterprise Growth - A Vision for Ireland 2024-2027"
- "Fostering Social Enterprise Advancement - Shaping Ireland's Future 2024-2027."

In conclusion, Vantastic CLG is honoured to contribute to the ongoing development of Ireland's National Social Enterprise Policy. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Department for Rural and Community Development for their dedication to inclusivity. We firmly believe that our proposed actions, along with the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, will shape a comprehensive and effective National Social Enterprise Policy. We eagerly anticipate witnessing the positive outcomes that will define the future of the Social Enterprise sector in Ireland.

On Behalf of Vantastic CLG
Cormac Moloney, CEO