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To: DRCD SE Consultation
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Social Enterprise Policy 2023/2024

Dear Sir/Madam

I am completing a Bachelor Arts (Hons) in Business in Social Enterprise, Leadership and Management with Equal Ireland. As part of this course, we were required to review the Social Enterprise sector in Ireland, along with Government reports and do an examination of three particular Social Enterprises. My chosen Social Enterprises were BloomHQ, Bounce Back Recycling and Dignity Partnership. I have learned so much about this sector from my studies. A number of priority areas and recommendations have emerged that I consider will help the sector to grow, providing much needed services and employment opportunities, whilst being beneficial environmental and socially.

Recommendations

1. Establish Social Enterprise Department, legal framework and Register:

- Establish a Social Enterprise Department function in central government or National Social Enterprise Development Agency,
- Appoint Minister for Social Enterprise,
- Appoint Social Enterprise facilitators in the Local Enterprise Offices in each local authority, or in the Partnership Development offices to provide business support, expertise and incubator units for SE startups.
- Establish a Social Enterprise Register. Social Enterprises in Ireland take many forms, there is not one legal entity. Some are registered as charity organisations and some as CLG, Company Limited by Guarantee.

A Social Enterprise Register, like the Charity Register, where Social Enterprises could register, be awarded a quality mark if they met minimum stated company criteria, get a gold governance mark and a social or environmental mark for meeting these criteria. This would encourage Social Enterprises to strive for continuous improvement and to measure their social

or environmental impact. It would give the general public confidence and assurances to work and engage with these companies.

2. Social Enterprise Strategy

The Irish Government made a commitment in its 2021 White Paper to end Direct Provision by 2024 and to develop a new accommodation policy for International Protection applicants. It was a move away from the highly criticised privatised system to a human rights based with supports, with a focus on not-for-profit business model. Due to the outbreak of war in Ukraine and increasing numbers of refugees coming to Ireland, the Government advised last year that these targets will not be met. I think that if it is a policy objective of the government to move towards community-led, not-for-profit enterprises, then there should be a clear strategy, supports and plan in place to achieve this. It is not good enough to simply state this objective in government policy papers and leave the rest to transpire and hope for the best.

3. Easier access to financial supports

Social Enterprises are restricted by lack of financial supports. One person in particular, that I spoke to advised that funding was a huge issue for their SE, finding the match funding or that the funding stream was very restrictive, for specific projects that did not cover what needed to be done. The government propose to address funding under the new SE policy. My recommendation here is that the establishment of a robust structure of flexible, financial supports needs to a priority objective going forward.

4. Increase public awareness

A no of measures should be undertaken at national level to increase the public's awareness and understanding of the Social Enterprise sector.

- Publicity campaign aimed at the general public, but also for policy makers, public representatives and public servants, investors and young people.
- Inclusion of Social Enterprise as part of the curriculum at second level.
- Promotion of the gold or green standard marks for positive social or environmental impacts of the business – (Recommendation No. 1)

5. Public Procurement

In recognition of climate change, public procurement processes have changed, and public bodies are now required to source services, goods and works with a reduced environmental impact, i.e.

Green Public Procurement. Public procurement processes should be further changed to require public bodies to take cognisance of businesses that are competitively priced, but also are having a positive social or environmental impact. E.G. BounceBack recycle mattresses and bulky furniture items, rather than send them to landfill or incineration, so a value could be placed on this at tender evaluation stage, and also on the social impacts of their business model in providing employment opportunities for people who traditionally found it difficult to get work.

Training in competing for public procurement contracts should also be provided by the Social Enterprise Facilitators (from recommendation No. 2).

6. Meeting gaps in services, in particular mental health supports and services

Many social enterprises were set up to provide goods or services in a community where there is a gap for such goods or services. E.g. Dignity Partnership provides support services to people in Direct Provision Centres. Although, I did not get the opportunity to review any Social Enterprise businesses dealing with mental health supports for young people, I am aware, from my own personal family experience and it is in the news again. RTE News (2024) reported that families advised Oireachtas committee that mental health supports and services are largely non-existent. Just over 500 people died by suicide in 2020, and the most common cause of death in young people from 15 to 34 years old was suicide. (Bowers, 2023) SCCUL Sanctuary in Galway, is a social enterprise, providing a variety of therapeutic services to support people’s mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

The provision of similar services throughout the country would make great strides in reducing these alarming and sorrowful statistics.

Ann Carroll

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