



Minutes of National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group Sixth Meeting

22 April 2021
Online (via Webex)

Attendees:

Andrew Forde (AF), Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) Chairperson
Michael Clifford (MC), Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE)
Tammy Darcy (TD), the Shona Project
Chris Gordon (CG), Irish Social Enterprise Network (ISEN)
Mary MacSweeney (MMS), Dublin City Council (DCC)
Bríd O'Brien (BOB), Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Prof. Deiric O'Broin (DOB), Dublin City University (DCU)
Rónán Ó Dálaigh (ROD), Social Enterprise Development Co. (SEDCo)
Larry O'Neill (LON), Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
Eoghan Ryan (ER), Rethink Ireland (RI)
Brendan Whelan (BW), Social Finance Foundation (SFF)

Also in Attendance:

Richard Gavin (RG), DRCD
Gareth Makim (GM), DRCD
John Ryan (JR), DRCD
Sam Dowzard (SD), DRCD
Íde Holden (IH), DRCD
Deirdre Garvey (DG), the Wheel
Emma Murtagh, (EM), the Wheel
Donal O'Sullivan (DOS), Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE)

Apologies:

Ivan Cooper (IC), The Wheel
Richard Deane (RD), Pobal
Gillian Devers (GD), Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)
Therese Molyneux (TM), Department of Justice (DoJ)

1. Agenda

The Agenda for the sixth meeting of the National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group (NSEPIG) was approved as proposed.

2. Minutes of the Fifth meeting of the NSEPIG

The minutes of the fourth and fifth meeting of the NSEPIG were approved, with one technical amendment requested.

3. Chairperson's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed participants to the meeting and provided the following updates:

- The launch of *Our Rural Future–Rural Development policy 2021-2025* was highlighted, and it was noted that it includes a focus on the development of social enterprises including rural based social enterprises.
- There is a need to draw out the link between the circular economy and social enterprise as well as the importance of socially responsible procurement (including social clauses in tenders) which has been committed to across government.
- The first annual Work Programme under the new Rural Policy is expected to issue in the coming weeks which will set out clear targets for delivery/progression of measures on a quarterly basis.
- The first Social Enterprise newsletter, SE-News, has been issued. The group was asked to circulate it among their networks, and encouraged to provide feedback and suggestions for future editions.
- DRCD made a presentation at a meeting of the LEO Centre of Excellence which received a positive response. A commitment was made to circulate a Memorandum to LEOs, explaining what social enterprises are and what supports are available to them.
- On the EU Action Plan for Social Economy, the importance was stressed that Irish stakeholder views be reflected at EU level given that what happens at international level can help to shape or support the development of social enterprise at a local level.
- Chair noted that a process to replace the Head of Division, William Parnell is underway and should be complete during the summer.

Comments were invited.

- MC thanked the Chair for his presentation to the LEO Centre of Excellence and noted that the feedback was positive and reflected a positive understanding of social enterprise. He again noted, that it there may be a competitive process for some LEO supports.
- MMS mentioned the European Social Economy Regions call and an application from the Liberties area of Dublin focusing on the circular economy and social. A presentation is to be circulated to all members following the meeting.

4. Brief Update on Implementation of the Policy

Richard Gavin presented an update on Policy Implementation covering the following points:

- The first Awareness Raising 'Boot Camp' has taken place and by all accounts was a success. The involvement of the social enterprise sector in raising awareness was emphasised and the success of awareness efforts depended on social enterprises playing a proactive role.
- The first edition of the SE Newsletter was launched and will be further developed. The importance of including the voices of social enterprises was highlighted. DRCD welcome any suggestions of social enterprise case studies to be included in future editions.

- It was noted that funding to support awareness raising initiatives by social enterprises was being considered by DRCD.
- The success of the Social Enterprise module with Foróige and its potential to raise awareness among young people was mentioned.
- Applications will close on 28th April for the 'Partnership with a Social Enterprise' category under the Chambers Ireland's Sustainable Impact Business Awards.
- On Dormant Accounts funding, DRCD is collaborating on a programme with Rethink Ireland to develop a programme for early stage social enterprises, who haven't yet been able to access mainstream supports. DRCD is also developing a small capital grants scheme that it is hoped will be rolled out to social enterprises in partnership with the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) network.
- Progress is being made on the Legal Form Study with the next planned phase being a legal validation of recently completed research. Once complete, the research will be launched.
- It was noted that an application for a social enterprise research fellowship, to be funded by DRCD, has been recommended by the Irish Research Council.
- A draft National Social Enterprise Policy Annual Report has been circulated to the group and feedback is invited prior to its publication.
- DRCD took part in the Department of Justice's (DOJ) first 'Working to Change' Implementation Group meeting.
- Work is ongoing between DRCD, DOJ and Pobal on procurement training for social enterprise, with further webinars being planned in 2021.
- A meeting of the Higher Education Institutions Network took place on 3 March 2021.
- The final date for the submissions to the consultation on the EU Action Plan on Social Economy is 23rd April 2021. Implementation Group members were strongly encouraged to contribute their views.

Comments from members were invited.

An enquiry was made about further education training with Solas and RG confirmed that DRCD would look into this.

ER noted that EaSI programme award 'Social Finance in Ireland and Investment Readiness' will be launched by Rethink Ireland, ISEN and DCU in May, looking at existing social finance in Ireland and engagement with EU partners. ER added that a nationwide awareness campaign on social enterprise supported by the SE Development Fund will be commencing over the next couple of weeks.

Members were updated about ISEN involvement in a European network for sustainability, promoting best practice with Work Integrated Social Enterprises (WISEs), and that they would be taking on a researcher part time.

RG attended the Working to Change Implementation Group meeting, where the issue of insurance for persons with a criminal conviction was discussed.

The problems of insurance in general for social enterprises were discussed. AF noted that this issue was one of general importance and well-known to the Department and being prioritised by Minister Humphreys.

It was suggested that an update on Working-to-Change might become a standing item on the agenda.

There was some discussion again on the issue of access to LEO support by social enterprises. Divergence of opinion regarding the scale and consistency of LEO practice was apparent within the group. It was agreed that evidence regarding the levels of support offered by LEOs to social enterprises would assist in addressing any anomalies. CG and ROD were invited to research the level of support offered by LEOs to social enterprise nationally, and to prepare a short paper for the Implementation Group.

5. Update on progress of the Social Enterprise Data Collection (Census)

SD gave an update on the Census/Social Enterprise Data Collection scoping exercise, including meetings with different stakeholders including the EU Commission and the OECD. He noted the evolution in the Department's thinking on the matter, underscoring the importance of it being a reliable and accepted process, and the need for the methodology to take a longitudinal approach.

Challenges around data collection which distinguish Ireland from other jurisdictions were noted such as the widespread usage of abridged accounts which limits transparency, as well as the fact that there is no legal form or specific tax status generally applicable to all social enterprises in Ireland. Therefore, the Irish approach must be tailored in order to be effective.

AF noted that the scoping thus far had proven to be extremely fruitful but explained that the Department had reached a "fork in the road" regarding the process between 'methodology first tender later' approach and an alternative 'tender first, methodology design included as part of the tender process' approach. AF again invited the views and advice of the Implementation Group on this matter, as well as any other aspect of the process, emphasising the importance of the process being as methodologically robust as possible.

As part of the feedback from the group, a longer term role for the Central Statistics Office in the project was suggested.

LON suggested consultation with LDCs who have a key role and insight at ground level, and who need to have buy-in. AF agreed to follow up with the ILDN on this.

There was broad welcome for the Departments approach to engagement and dialogue on this issue and there was agreement within the group about the need to consult with those supporting the sector before starting the data collection process to avoid any misplaced perception of imposition by the Department.

The Group was again invited to provide any further feedback.

6. Access Europe Presentation by Emma Murtagh, the Wheel.

Emma Murtagh gave a presentation on their Access Europe programme.

The Wheel is delivering the Access Europe capacity building programme for Irish civil society organisations including social enterprises to better access EU funds from 2021-23. They act as a central hub for EU advice.

Slides of the presentation will be distributed to the NSEPIG

7. AOB

The date for the seventh meeting of the NSEPIG was agreed for 22 July 2021.

The group was made aware that Sam Dowzard will be leaving DRCD and that this was his last meeting with the NSEPIG. The Chair thanked SD for his contribution and congratulated him on his appointment to the Department of Foreign Affairs.

There being no other business, this meeting of the NSEPIG was brought to a close.

Actions as a result of the sixth meeting of the Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group:

Action No.	Action Description	Responsible	Target date
Action 1	Research to be undertaken on the levels of support provided by the LEOs to social Enterprise.	CG and ROD	ASAP / To be considered at next meeting.
Action 2	All presentations from this meeting to be circulated to members.	IH	22/04/2021
Action 3	The date for the next meeting is the 22 nd July 2021. Calendar invites and links to be circulated to all members.	JR	22/04/2021
Action 4	AF to follow up directly with ILDN.	AF	01/05/2021