**Minutes of National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group**

**Eighth Meeting**

**21 October 2021**

**Online (via Webex)**

Attendees:

**Dr Andrew Forde (AF),** Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD), Chairperson

**Ivan Cooper (IC),** The Wheel

**Tammy Darcy (TD),** the Shona Project

**Richard Deane (RD),** Pobal

**Gillian Devers (GD),** Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)

**Mary MacSweeney (MMS),** Dublin City Council (DCC)

**Rónán Ó Dálaigh (RO’D),** Social Enterprise Development Co. (SEDCo)

**Bríd O’Brien (BO’B),** Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOU)

**Eoghan Ryan (ER),** Rethink Ireland (RI)

**Brendan Whelan (BW),** Social Finance Foundation (SFF)

**Prof Deiric Ó Broin (DO’B),** Dublin City University (DCU)

Also in Attendance:

**Clodagh O'Reilly (COR),** Irish Social Enterprise Network

**Donal O’Sullivan (DOS),** Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE)

**Richard Gavin (RG),** Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)

**John Ryan (JR),** Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)

**Declan O'Brien (DOB)** Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)

**Íde Holden (IH),** Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD)

**Pauline Gannon (PG)** Social Impact Ireland

**Lucas Olmedo (LO)** University College Cork

Apologies:

**Chris Gordon,** Irish Social Enterprise Network (ISEN)

**Larry O’Neill,** Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)

**Michael Clifford,** Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE)

**Therese Molyneux,** Department of Justice (DoJ)

1. **Agenda & Minutes**

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

1. **Chairperson’s Opening Remarks**

The Chair welcomed participants to the meeting, and made the following points:

* A Rural Social Enterprise Event that took place in Kilmovee Co. Mayo, on 30 September. This event was a commitment under Our Rural Future, and important to a balanced regional development. Welcomed the fact that the event was run in partnership with the Western Development Commission (WDC).
* AF was pleased with the launch of the Social Enterprise Legal Forms Research Report, noting the conclusion that the threshold of need for a definitive social enterprise legal form had not been met at this time, but said the issue was not closed and there would be opportunities to clarify and reassess the situation in the future. AF also noted the potential that the new Cooperatives Legislatoin presents to become a legal form of choice for many social enterprises.
* The Strategic Public Procurement Advisory Group are preparing guidelines for green and social procurement. Collaboration between DRCD and the Department of Justice, and Pobal will continue in the area of social procurement training for social enterprise.
* DRCD has contributed (including through participation in GECES) to an EU Action Plan for Social Economy that is to be published in December. He noted that the EU considers social enterprise to be one of the 14 business eco-systems.
* AF congratulated DCC on their Social Enterprise Awards, welcoming them as an excellent platform to showcase good practice and share information.
* AF noted that 2022 will be the final year of the National Social Enterprise Policy 2019-2022 and emphasised that work on the future policy landscape begins now, with a year of evaluation and reflection on how things have gone and where we’re heading. DRCD will be consulting widely to ensure a co-produced policy which might give rise to some challenging decisions. The National Social Enterprise Conference will begin the conversation and we look forward to developing it together with all stakeholders.

1. **Brief Update on Implementation of the Policy**

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

* DAF ARISE Scheme application process closed 20/10/2021, received well over 100 applications.
* DRCD sponsored a new award ‘Partnership with a Social Enterprise’ at the Chambers Ireland Sustainable Business Impact Awards – the winner was William Fry’s Pro Bono program. There was good publicity including a Business Post article on Social Enterprise.
* DAF Covid Regeneration Scheme with ILDN is ongoing.
* DAF Start-up scheme for social enterprise, in association with Rethink Ireland, is with Minister for approval.
* Social Enterprise Capital Grants Scheme, in association with the LCDC network, closing dates have passed and the Minister will announce the results in the next 4 to 6 weeks.
* Social Enterprise Legal Forms Research Report had a successful launch with Rethink Ireland recently.
* Irish Research Council Fellowship on impact of Social Enterprise - As the process in 2020 and 2021 did not produce a satisfactory outcome, DRCD is looking into other options, and would welcome input from the NSEPIG. This will also be raised with the HEI network at its next meeting.
* National Census/ Data Gathering: Tender will soon be published on etenders.ie. We hope to sign contracts with successful bidder in early 2022 and have a first interim report by August 2022.
* Draft Annual Report 2020 is due to be published in the near future.
* DRCD is negotiating a partnership with OECD to conduct a review of the National Social Enterprise policy.
* DRCD hosted a virtual British Irish Council showcase event in September, showcasing social enterprises from around the country, Kilcannon Garden Centre, An Meitheal Rothar, FoodCloud and GIY (Grow it Yourself).
* The Third National Social Enterprise conference will take place on Thursday 18 Nov. It will be a Hybrid event hosted from Dunhill Ecopark.

1. **Presentation: The role of Policy in unlocking the potential of Irish Rural Social Enterprises**

Lucas Olmedo from University College Cork provided a presentation to the group on his research report on the role of policy in unlocking the potential of Irish Rural Social Enterprises:

A copy of the presentation was circulated to NSEPIG members following the meeting.

* Lucas noted the increasing recognition and institutionalisation of Social Enterprises in rural areas including their potential for integrated place-based development.
* Noted need of equity measures for social enterprises delivering quasi-public services and operating in disadvantaged territories. HE Support for rural social enterprise beyond training is needed, for example through partial subsidisation of highly skilled workers and meaningful access to mainstream business supports.
* Links should be strengthened between policy making, research and practice.
* It should be recognised that rural social enterprises are not a panacea, but are complementary actors to other stakeholders for rural development, and that they have unique features to enable them to add significant value if they are provided with appropriate support.

Following the presentation, a short Q+A session took place:

* AF noted that from the outset of the Policy, Social Enterprise has been longstanding in Ireland in various forms, however research in the area is in its infancy – pleased that DRCD was in a position to support this research and looks forward to the delivery of this report.
* LO confirmed the report will be published. He is advocating for place based research and policy, and is conscious that the research speaks for rural based social enterprise, but could also speak for disadvantaged urban areas.
* COR asked about the difference between EU rural Social Enterprise to the experience on the ground in Ireland? LO stated that almost 70% of research reviewed comes from Scotland, and that many of the Scottish findings could be applied to Ireland. Other EU jurisdictions, e.g. Italy, tend to focus on social co-operatives.
* AF thanked Lucas, and brought the item to a close, stating that there is a job of work to be done to communicate with communities around the country and stressed there are many opportunities for social enterprises in rural areas including in the area of micro energy generation to empower communities to establish community based energy projects, particularly in rural areas.

1. **Presentation: Social Impact Ireland’s social enterprise mark pilot program**

Pauline Gannon delivered a presentation to the group on the Social Impact Ireland’s Social Enterprise Mark pilot program.

A copy of the presentation was circulated to NSEPIG members following the meeting.

Social Impact Ireland will work with Social Enterprise Mark CIC (SEMCIC) to pilot its social enterprise accreditation in Ireland.

* PG noted is an international accreditation, which acts as an independent, externally assessed guarantee that a business is operating as a social enterprise, with the central aim of using income/profits to maximise social benefit, taking precedent over generating dividends for owners/shareholders. A pilot programme is bringing a small number of Irish social enterprises through the process of accreditation with SEMCIC, ahead of a possible wider rollout.
* There are varying levels of accreditation, from an ‘Aspiring Social Enterprise’ mark, through an ‘Approved Social Enterprise Mark’ to a ‘Social Enterprise Gold Mark’.
* Among the social enterprises taking part are, The Rediscovery Centre, Cork Craft and Design, Foodshare Kerry, Slanu Stroke Rehab, and Siul Eile

Following the presentation, a short Q+A session took place:

* + In response to a question about the predominant legal forms of social enterprises taking part in the Pilot programme, PG noted CLG was the most represented.
  + A concern was raised by BO’B on how the mark was structured and how social enterprises that evolve in disadvantaged communities might struggle to earn 50% of their income from trading. PG agreed that some situations that arise in Ireland are different, but suggested some grants could be considered as trading income if they are related to the delivery of services.
  + IC cautioned that the term ‘traded income’ would have to be well defined and noted many Section 39 organisations receive up to 98% funding from the HSE, and they would be surprised to be classified as social enterprises. He suggested a distinction needs to be made between earned and traded income.
  + DO’B noted concern about the definition of social enterprise being used and whether it was appropriate. It was suggested that an alternative to the model proposed could be to look at marks awarded in other European countries, e.g. Spain. PG agreed that concerns raised are not new, as this is an ongoing work
  + AF suggested that as a pilot scheme being run by Social Impact Ireland, it will be important to see what works in this instance, what can be improved upon, and to reflect on the whole experience at the end of the pilot.

1. **Updates from Members**

* COR: The Irish Social Enterprise Network (ISEN) are working with Rethink Ireland on the Legal Forms research and are developing a model constitution for CLGs, saying there are a huge number of start-ups and it will be very useful for them to have an adaptable model when starting out.
* MMS: Dublin City Council awards took place online, however winners were able to meet for photos with Lord Mayor etc. Dublin was one of nine centres to show how social enterprise can support the recovery post Covid and case studies are being developed.
* DOB: The Social and Research Network of Ireland (SERNI) will be holding its annual conference (TBC?). An event by SERNI was held in Waterford in August. Papers presented are being brought together for the Journal of Management, which will be accessible to the public.
* RD: Pobal announced Siobhán Cafferty has transferred from DOJ to Pobal and will continue to manage the Working to Change Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy. A new Kickstart Funding round is opening in November, funding from this supports the employment of people with criminal records. The Community Services programme (CSP) is currently being redesigned and Pobal is supporting this, the new programme to come into place in 2023. A new Climate Action Educational Awareness fund will be announced in the coming weeks, this will be available to social enterprises. Finally, in relation to the OECD LEED representation function carried out by Pobal, the OECD is currently developing a set of Principles for Social Economy.

Government Departments were encouraged to provide relevant updates at future NSEPIG meetings.

1. **A.O.B.**

The date for the ninth meeting of the NSEPIG was agreed for 10 February 2022. Intention to be held in person, subject to prevailing public health advice at the time.

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

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

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| **Action No.** | **Action Description** | **Responsible** | **Target date** |
| Action 1 | All presentations and links from this meeting to be circulated to members. | IH | 22/10/2021 |
| Action 2 | The date for the next meeting is the 10 February 2022. Save the date calendar invites and links to be circulated to all members. | JR | 23/12/2021 |