
Galway City Community Network

The Public Participation Network in Galway City

Submission on the

National Social Policy for Ireland

Preface

Established in 2014, Galway City Community Network is the Public Participation Network in Galway City. It represents over 150 groups and organisations in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City. The twin objectives that GCCN pursues are to

- Advance the values of sustainability, equality, culture, community, empowerment and inclusivity and embed these in the policies, programmes and practice of local government, state organisations, national government and civil society;
- Develop and implement progressive models of and approaches to representation, participation and engagement for civil society in informing and shaping policy development and implementation.

Submission

Galway City Community Networks welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the National Social Policy the PPN User Guide Review. The subsistence of the submission is based on the outcomes of a workshop held with GCCN members, including a number that are or run social enterprises. The contribution that these social enterprises make in Galway was noted. Amongst their distinguishing features are:

- They operate in or with the most marginalised communities in Galway;
- They provide essential services to communities in the city that would not otherwise be delivered;
- They provide employment opportunities to people from the communities that are often most distant from the labour market;
- They have trading income, however that income is often insufficient to meet the costs of the service and the Community Services Programme is essential to their sustainability;
- Any surpluses generated are reinvested in the social enterprise *or* to advance the cause for which they were established *or* contribute to the collective benefit of the community they serve;
- They provide other less quantifiable benefits such as wellbeing and challenge stigma and stereotypes.

General Comments

GCCN members believe that social enterprise is a critical area of work for the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Ireland and has significant potential in these areas.

GCCN members welcome the development of a National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland and believe that it is timely and appropriate.

However, there was consensus that, in its current iteration, the Policy is unclear and serves to confuse rather than to bring clarity to the area of social enterprise. The term 'Policy' is used when the document reads more like a strategy.

Understanding Social Enterprise

Definition

The definition that is currently used, and the narrative that flows as a result, is confusing and does not accurately capture social enterprise. The definition and the narrative are leading to obfuscation between:

- social enterprise and private enterprise that might have some social benefit;
- social enterprise and community development.

Social enterprises are not established just to provide a social impact. They are established to address issues or gaps in service delivery. Social enterprise act collectively to achieve a collective social impact and are underpinned by a motivational set of values such as participation, empowerment and collectivity.

GCCN recommends that these values be made explicit and the following definition used with a change in the narrative throughout to reflect this:

Social enterprises are enterprises established by community organisations to address social, economic or environmental issues that trade in commercial activities or provide services, and where any surpluses generated are reinvested to achieve these objectives

What are referred to as deficient demand social enterprises are critical to the nature of social enterprise and the collective social benefits they can contribute. GCCN suggests that a specific definition is included:

Deficient demand social enterprises are social enterprises that seek to meet the demand for goods and services within a community that are critical to need but not matched by resources to pay for these due to economic and social disadvantage and/or low density of population.

Summary of the research

A summary of the research that informed the Policy would be very beneficial.

Social Enterprise in Ireland

This section serves to confuse private enterprises established by those that may have an interest in social benefit *and* social enterprise. They are not the same. Social enterprises are collective endeavours, generally established by communities to address gaps in services. A private enterprise that has a notion of social benefit should not be considered as social enterprise. Increasingly, there are individuals and private enterprises that are usurping the term for their own interests and this Policy needs to be very clear on this.

Social enterprises are not established to contribute to government policy as described. Where they do make a contribution, it is a by-product and not the underpinning objective. This should be clarified.

The inclusion of Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation is problematic. While they may create a focus on societal need and identifying potential responses, it must be specifically noted that Social Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation are not social enterprises. Social enterprises may take the learning from each and develop an enterprise response to the need which is based on the collective community approach rather than an individual one.

The description of the spectrum of social enterprises is confusing and GCCN suggests using the Forfás description:

In Ireland, there are four main types of social enterprise, and often social enterprises may overlap in these goals:

- those with commercial opportunities that are established to create a social return;

- those creating employment opportunities for marginalised groups;
- economic and community development organisations; and
- those that deliver services.

Policy Objective One – Creating Awareness of Social Enterprise

It is critical that there are measures to create awareness of social enterprises and their potential. However, this awareness raising must be based on a revised understanding of social enterprise.

GCCN suggests that a register for social enterprises that meet the revised criteria could be established. Those registered could be supported to achieve standards and quality marks.

Policy Objective Two – Growing and Strengthening Social Enterprise

Existing and potential social enterprises need supports. These supports must be tailored to the needs of the social enterprise and it should not be assumed that the current model of business supports will be sufficient without amendments. Currently, the Policy overstates the commitment and support of local authorities, Local Community Development Committee and Local Economic and Community Plan to social enterprise. However, there is significant potential for the development of supports and LCDCs should be encouraged to include real measures in the revised LECs.

The Local Enterprise Office is critical, and the responsibility of the LEO should be extended to include social enterprise. The supports provided need to be tailored to the needs of social enterprise.

The critical nature of the Community Services Programme should be referenced here. Additional streams of financial and resource supports should be created. The needs of marginalised communities and employees need to be taken into account.

Ireland is subject to EU Procurement Directives that provide provisions for social clauses.

Public procurement should be open to social enterprise and there should be a social clause in all relevant public procurement that applies preferential status on social enterprises.

Policy Objective Three – Achieving Better Policy Alignment

There are a range of government departments, agencies and other stakeholders, including national community sector organisations and social enterprises themselves that have an interest in the implementation of the policy and ultimately in the creation of a better environment in which social enterprises can flourish. GCCN proposes the establishment of an implementation and monitoring unit that would include all these stakeholders.

Any implementation structures and processes need to take cognisance of the need to ensure representation of the marginalised communities that benefit from social enterprises.