Meeting of Higher Education Institutions Network on Social Enterprise

MINUTES OF MEETING

Venue: Webex meeting
Date: 03/03/2021
Time: 14:30 – 16:00

IN ATTENDANCE

Higher Education Institutes

- Caroline McMullan   Dublin City University
- Deiric O'Broin   DCU
- Ivan McPhillips   GMIT
- Simon Stephens   Letterkenny IT
- Marie Taylor   Limerick IT
- Ziene Mottiar   TU Dublin
- Briga Hynes   University of Limerick
- Felicity Kelliher   Waterford IT

Department of Rural and Community Development

- Andrew Forde   Principal Officer
- Richard Gavin   Assistant Principal Officer
- Sam Dowzard   Administrative Officer
- Íde Holden   Clerical Officer

APOLOGIES

- Lindsay Malone   IT Carlow
- Mary O'Shaughnessy   University College Cork
- Olive McCarthy   University College Cork
- Suzi Jarvis   University College Dublin
- Emma McEvoy   NUI Maynooth

Opening

Andrew Forde commenced the meeting, highlighting the importance of the forum as a way to connect researchers and policy makers. The agenda was taken as read.

Approval of Second meeting's minutes

Minutes of the second meeting were approved without comment.

Census and Concept Paper overview

Andrew Forde introduced the Census concept paper, noting the unit's awareness of potential implications for the term 'census' and that the Department is open to other terminology.

The goals of the census exercise were outlined, with the exercise looking to establish a reliable, evidence-based, national picture of the social enterprise population. He highlighted how the lack of an evidence base can make policy decisions more difficult and emphasised that this type of data collection exercise can benefit the sector as a whole.

The social enterprise definition found in the National Social Enterprise Policy was acknowledged as being the foundation upon which this work would be undertaken. The known issues relating to social enterprise data collection regarding transparency and abridged accounts were also noted.

Census Concept Paper Presentation

Sam Dowzard gave a brief presentation regarding the Census concept paper, briefly delineating the paper's various elements and its relationship to the National social Enterprise Policy, specifically measure 23 as part of the Policy's *Policy Alignment* objective.

He emphasised that the purpose of the paper was to stimulate discussion and feedback as well as to delineate the intendent outputs and objectives of the census exercise.

As part of the current scoping exercise being undertaken by the Department with social enterprise stakeholders, an open invitation for continued discussion on the topic was extended to all HEI network members.

Member input on Census concept paper

Points raised:

- Network members questioned **whether it is currently the best time to undertake the Census** exercise due to COVID-19**,** as going ahead now may generate a distorted picture of social enterprise due to effects of the pandemic

- The **tightness of the timeline** outlined in the concept paper was acknowledged as a potential issue. Andrew Forde mentioned there was flexibility around these deadlines but that an ambitious deadline afforded a degree of focus.

- The methodological challenges associated with **the broadness of the definition of social enterprise** was highlighted and the importance of **being inclusive** at this stage of the process was acknowledged by network members and the Department.

- A suggested approach for the census was to undertake a **categorisation exercise** in the first instance. The importance of **self-categorisation** by social enterprises was discussed as was the issue of getting organisations to self-identify as social enterprises.

- The value of a **phased approach** was noted by network members as well as the importance of outlining to the social enterprise sector **the benefit of engaging in the data collection** exercise and explaining why it is being undertaken.

- Deiric O'Broin outlined that the **challenge of definition** will also relates to the question of **which organisations are eligible for supports**.

- Orientating the data collection with an **outputs perspective** was advocated for – considering what the desired use of the data would be and working backwards so as plan what data is needed and how to collect this information.

- The risk of the inclusion of social enterprises who are **"whitewashing"** as social enterprises also was mentioned.

- The **importance of consistency in language** and in aligning with **EU policy** around social enterprise was highlighted. The network advocated communicating with EU and OECD stakeholder in this regard.

- Felicity Kelliher described a **tool used in network research of "layered embeddedness"** for collating info. She outlined that this could be used as a way of identifying/recognising who are the "core" social enterprise contributors and who engage with the community on the "periphery". Andrew Forde noted that it could be helpful approach in capturing the diversity of the sector and requested that the tool be sent to DRCD.

- The network was informed that a **Data Collection Sub Group** is to be set up, with details to be agreed with the National Social Enterprise Policy Implementation Group. Input from the SE HEI network was welcomed.

Social Economy Research Network of Ireland (SERNI) Update

Deiric O'Broin outlined that:

- The Research Network was still continuing to meet and build the network.
- A new website is being built up as a resource.
- A network of 12-13 PhD students working on social enterprise and at different stages of studies has been established.

Andrew Forde highlighted that there is an open door invitation to SERNI and the HEI network in regards to proposal relating to social enterprise/research conference supports.

DRCD Social Enterprise Activity Update

- A research report regarding the **challenges faced by social enterprises relating to Legal Form and whether a dedicated legal form is necessary** is being finalised. Information

regarding a launch event would be circulated to the group, with May given as a preliminary timeline

- Richard Gavin highlighted that he is following up with the IRC for more information on applications received for the **Social Enterprise Impact Fellowship**. The suggestion was again raised by network members that unused funds could be used to support PHD research if the fellowship award was again unsuccessful

- On an EU level, Andrew Forde drew attention to **the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan,** which the Department is intending to feed into, as well as the Department's signing of the **Toledo Declaration** in December 2020

- The upcoming launch of the **social enterprise module as part of the Foróige NFTE program** was outlined and feedback would be forthcoming on this project.

AOB

The date for the next meeting was suggested to be **early June**. The use of a Doodle poll was suggested by Sam Dowzard in order to coordinate the best timing for meetings going forward and working to ensure that as many network members as possible are able to attend.