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**How do government policies and programmes impact on third sector organisations offering work opportunities for disadvantaged workers? Lessons from research into organisations in Ireland and the UK**

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## **Introduction**

This paper examines the effects in the UK and Ireland of national government employment policies on those third sector organisations seeking to provide work opportunities for disadvantaged groups. Many of these organisations are also delivering socially important products or services such as childcare or environmental schemes. The commonalities and divergencies in the two national policy perspectives in Ireland and the UK are examined. Empirical work is derived from a European research project (PERSE) funded through the EU framework V stream (see [www.emes.net](http://www.emes.net)). This research has already been discussed in other papers<sup>1</sup>. The findings indicate some of the similar and different difficulties voluntary and social enterprise organisations face in delivering social and employment benefits within the current policy and programme climate.

### **1. The policy context: UK and Ireland**

The policy climate in the UK, and to a lesser extent in Ireland, has been towards employment intervention of 'passive measures' (Hill 2003:131) following Esping-Anderson's notion of the 'Anglo-Saxon' model. This involves deregulating both wages and the labour market, and reducing welfare state provision. Hill argues that

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<sup>1</sup> See Fenton, M.C., O'Hara, P., and O' Shaughnessy, M. (2004); Spear, R. and Aiken, M. (2004); Aiken, M. and Spear, R. (2003); Bode, I and Aiken, M. (2004).

the European Union has influenced the UK into examining more active models of intervention such as job creation and job subsidy (Hill 2003:136). The current low unemployment rate in the UK disguises the way worklessness has disproportionate effect on certain localities and groups such as people with disabilities, women with young children, certain ethnic minority groups, those with low qualifications (ONS 2002).

In the UK active programmes from the 1970s were well used by community and voluntary organisations with some initiatives offering over 20,000 jobs (Spear 2001:244). Today, there are a variety of New Deal programmes aimed at specific target groups (Spear 2002:5) while grant givers in the UK, such as the Community Fund (2000/1:14), recorded people on low incomes as their largest beneficiary group from the main programmes (with grants worth £108.7m) and grants for work with unemployed people amounted to £53.4m. Nevertheless, Spear argues, UK labour market policy still emphasises placement and job search over actual integration into work (Spear 2001:260).

Irish labour market policies have developed either passive or active measures. The former involve providing financial assistance while the active measures include Community Employment, Job Initiative and the national Social Economy Programme (which provides subsidised employment to the long-term unemployed and other socially excluded). Work is offered in social enterprises that deliver community-based services. This type of support has helped create and sustain Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) in the local and community development sphere. The research found that benefits of this active approach included access to training, work experience, a social setting that facilitates interaction which can aid personal development. Some WISEs offered a flexible work place conducive to enhancing self-confidence and interpersonal skills.

Research also indicated that Irish WISEs seek to create employment and/or improve the employability of the long-term unemployed and other groups at risk of disadvantage. However, they experience difficulties in recruiting staff on the open labour market in conditions of labour market buoyancy. Those initiatives dependent on availing of grant aided employment subsidies are coming under increasing pressure (a): to become viable in a short period of time; and (b): restricted in the type of personnel they can recruit using state subsidies (i.e. employees must be eligible for specific measures). Employees eligible and available tight labour market are often among the most disadvantaged within a community and have specific social, educational and economic needs. This places an additional pressure on the WISE to sustain a trading activity while providing the requisite support structure required by such employees.

## **2. Comparative features**

Ireland and the UK present interesting cases for a comparative study around policy approaches to work integration social enterprises. In both states the legal frameworks and traditions around voluntary sector development are similar. There are also now comparable levels of unemployment and, in addition, flexible labour market approaches are favoured in both Ireland and the UK. A difference can be noted in the strong relationship between Irish ALPs and the social economy sector. Within a European setting there are a great many similarities between the two states yet despite these similarities there have been separate policy approaches which may have had an

influence on the differing evolutionary paths of social enterprises in Ireland and the UK.

### **3. Research summary**

This paper builds on previous work on the PERSE research project which examined work integration roles of social enterprises in 11 European states (Fenton, M.C., O'Hara, P., and O' Shaughnessy, M. (2004); Spear, R. and Aiken, M. (2004)); Aiken, M. and Spear, R. (2003); Bode, I and Aiken, M. (2004); other working papers are available at [www.emes.net](http://www.emes.net)). A summary of the main themes arising from the research is offered here. The PERSE research in Ireland suggested the pressures were on some WISEs to become financially sustainable very quickly. State funding regimes have meant the eligible people are those with deep social, educational and economic needs. Balancing a trading or service activity while providing the requisite support structure for recruits has been hard. In the UK, the research found funding pressures to deliver 'job-ready' people quickly forced some organisations towards taking on less disadvantaged people so as to maintain funding (we describe these as 'creaming' tendencies). Severely disadvantaged people need recognition of progress made even if a job is not achieved. In addition in the UK the wider social or environmental benefits of these organisations seem rarely taken into account in local government procurement policies or in wider policy around social enterprises delivering work integration.

In both countries evidence was found of disadvantaged groups being more receptive to engaging and trusting not-for-profit organisations. Inflexible rules of integration schemes sometimes mitigated against the interests of the disadvantage workers. There was often a greater trust between the not-for-profit organisation and the purchasing consumer although sometimes they were suspicious of an inferior product or service because of the disadvantaged workforce. Retaining voluntary involvement and resisting over-professionalisation was problematic especially with the increasing levels of bureaucracy needed to access statutory financial support. The intricacies of European funding rules discouraged long term financial sustainability with surpluses from trading not permitted.

#### **3.1 UK research**

In the UK 15 social enterprises were examined. One interesting finding was the wide range of types of organisations involved in work integration:

- Autonomous organisations largely concerned with work integration

- Holding structures with work integration as one arm

- Virtual organisations managing several projects

- Organisations dominated by service provision but with work integration as part of the supply chain.

Six types of social enterprise were identified in the UK as having a substantial area of activity concerned with work integration and the 15 cases were drawn from these types.

1. Worker co-operatives (including social co-ops) such as Daily Bread wholefood business and Magpie Recycling.
2. Community businesses such as FRC Group, ECT Group and Hackney Community Transport.
3. Social firms, such as Springboard and Recycle IT!
4. Intermediate labour market organisations such as Bolton WISE and Create and Necta
5. Quasi-state social enterprises such as Remploy.
6. Voluntary organisations with employment initiatives such as Factory and Greenfingers- Shaw Trust and Enprove-Groundwork.

We developed the following three part typology from the UK research based on **dominant source of resources** in an attempt to understand the dynamics of these organisations. This typology is important as the drive for resources is key factor in the dynamics underlying any organisation's activities. The three types are:

**Market driven (8)** 4 cases or organisations with dominant public sector contracts (Childcare Works, FRC, ECT, Greenfingers-Shaw Trust) and 4 cases with dominant private sales (Recycle IT!, Daily Bread, Magpie Recycling, Remploy).

**Mixed economies (2)** (public/ private/third sales, subsidies) – Necta and Factory.

**Publicly subsidised (4)** two very highly subsidised (Bolton Wise and Groundwork-Enprove), both Intermediate Labour Market organisations; and two with more mixed sources of income: Springboard and Create.

In considering the resource mix it is also important to be aware of four additional dimensions which have a bearing on the policy frameworks around disadvantaged workers. Firstly there is the question of the degree of disadvantage encountered by the workers targeted by these different organisations. For some organisations the workers may be at some distance from immediate employment in conventional workplaces (eg at Springboard) and this often implies a need for a greater investment of resources in supporting and training the workers which may necessitate the public investment of funds. Secondly the numbers of disadvantaged workers as a proportion of the whole workforce is also important. At Bolton WISE the large numbers of disadvantaged workers, taken for short term periods may also shape the profile of funding required. Thirdly, there are some organisations (the co-operatives such as Magpie and Daily Bread are good examples) where the aim is to offer permanent jobs. Undertaking this within a trading environment means the numbers of disadvantaged may need to be limited to a certain level. At both organisations staff are not formally categorised as disadvantaged - nevertheless at Daily Bread there is a recognition of the proportion of less able bodied people that can be taken on in order to maintain profitability. Fourthly, funding pressures from public sector monies towards 'creaming' (taking on those who are more job-ready) also affects the resource mix and balance of market trading possible (such as at Necta). These four dimensions are indicative of organisations undertaking different nature of activities which require different resource mixes and therefore interaction with different arms of public policy.

### **3.2 The research in Ireland**

In Ireland a sample of 15 WISE were dispersed across the republic and were operating in different fields of activity. Fourteen of these were located in different

peripheral rural locations and/or serving a peripheral rural populace. These provided a wide variety of local services including community radio, elder and childcare, rural transport, rural household refurbishment, community theatre, and social housing provision. Each had a traded income generated through the sale of goods and services in the market place; all were and/or had benefited from public subsidies (in a variety of forms) and each had a civic stake holding (in the form of voluntary directors and ordinary volunteers). Five of these had also received financial support from Clann Credo (a social finance company) and the Western Development Commission (a statutory body promoting economic and social development in counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon, Mayo, Galway and Clare). One of the cases selected was based in the urban centre of Galway city but was chosen because it was an Independent Parenting WISE In Ireland and represented the one of its type available at time of study.

The WISES included in this study can be broadly divided into two categories namely Local Development and Social Economy WISEs.

### **Local Development WISE**

Local Development WISEs began to emerge in the mid to late 1990s. These are community and area based organisations. These emerged within a national policy framework which encouraged social partnership and an area based approach to local development and against a backdrop of high unemployment levels. Local Development WISEs evolved to tackle local problems of social exclusion and essentially incorporate two sets of goals: the provision of community based services and the creation of training and labour market re-integration opportunities for the long term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups such as lone parents, travellers and persons with a disability. These WISEs adopt the goal of labour market re-integration for two main reasons. The first is a commitment to tackling local unemployment, and the second relates to their need to avail of much needed statutory resources, commonly accessed in the form of direct employment measures. The delivery of a local response to a local problem is a priority, labour market re-integration is secondary.

### **Social Economy WISEs**

This type of WISE has a direct link to the national Social Economy Programme (SE). This programme was launched in 1999 and is administered by FAS, the National Training and Employment Authority. The WISEs that operate through SE must reflect a greater degree of professionalism and business acumen than those that operate with the assistance of measures such as CE. These WISEs must demonstrate their contribution to the regeneration of the local area, the extent of the involvement of employees in the management of the enterprise and the personal and life skills benefits to the workers in the WISE.

The worker is a priority in this type of WISE. The work is temporary, ranging from one to three years. Volunteers play a strategic management role rather than contributing to the daily delivery of goods and services. These types of WISEs are also developing more formalised business relationships with statutory health boards and local county councils. They offer services such as waste management, rural transport, elder and childcare, and the refurbishment of houses and public service contracts are forming a significant source of traded income for these WISEs. Because

they are perceived as commercial organisations, they are less likely to attract private and public donations compared with the local and community development WISEs.

In summary, WISEs chosen in the Irish study are situated in peripheral rural locations. They deliver a range of essential community services including transport, rural house refurbishment, elder and childcare. Such services have helped sustain declining rural populations, delaying the onset of a demand for residential care of the elderly and, in the process, creating training and employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed. However these WISEs are vulnerable to the uncertainty of the market place, changes in public policies and funding mechanisms, and the availability of volunteers.

Unlike some European countries that have both a tradition of, and legislative provision for public sector contracting, Ireland's WISEs are only beginning to develop a purchasing relationship with the state. This is particularly evident in the fields of elder and childcare, waste management and housing repair services for the elderly.

The Irish WISEs provide evidence of their important role in bringing key local voluntary and statutory actors together, contributing to the creation of a critical mass to tackle local problems and devising flexible approaches to delivering training while simultaneously meeting local needs<sup>2</sup>.

#### **4. Contrasting policy frameworks affecting the work integration field**

How far have the policy and programme frameworks affected third sector organisations offering employment opportunities to disadvantaged workers?

Irish policies on the labour market and local development have given rise to social enterprises. In summary, these policies emphasise the role of community in the provision of local services including job creation for the long-term unemployed. The UK context can be seen as more pluralistic with a greater emphasis on business models of development to enable disadvantaged people to be helped into work by social enterprises alongside other providers. The local and social context of social enterprises engaged in work integration seems less privileged in the UK context.

The national policy climate seems to have been very strong in influencing the emergence and development of different types of social enterprise engaged in work integration. The framework in Ireland has been one of state partnership with the community and voluntary sector with a much of the financial support being made available through Active Labour Market programmes. In the UK the dominant framework has been more state + local partnership + market (including elements of hierarchy, networks and market). This has led to more limited range of social enterprise in Ireland than in the UK. The differing policy climates have also influenced, we suggest, the internal dynamics of social enterprises. In the UK the predominant focus has been towards a targeted delivery of specific outputs in terms of job ready people. In Ireland that there has been a greater emphasis on supporting community based initiatives and subsequent attempts to build social capital and enhance local capacity for self-help. Although the more recent national Social

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<sup>2</sup> This discussion appears in O' Hara, P., & O' Shaughnessy, M. (2004) Work Integration Social Enterprises in Ireland, EMES Working Paper WP no.04/03

Economy programme reflects a reorientation in this regard, placing a much stronger emphasis on the market place as a means of sustaining social enterprises.

#### **4.1 Ireland**

##### **Irish WISEs – The Policy Context**

The emergence of Irish social enterprises, in particular WISEs, can be linked to national active labour market policy and a statutory commitment towards developing solid partnership between the state, the community and voluntary sector as a means of tackling social exclusion at a local community level.

##### **Social Enterprises & Irish Labour Market Policy**

Active Labour Market programmes are one of the main forms of state support to Irish social enterprises since the 1980s. Community Employment (CE) is by far the most significant direct labour market intervention measure and it provides training, development and work experience to the long-term unemployed (and other key groups at risk of social and economic exclusion) in community and voluntary projects and in public bodies.

Since the mid 1990s the potential of the social economy as a means of tackling long-term unemployment and rejuvenating disadvantaged communities became more prominent in public policy discourse. This was reflected in a number of policy and research documents in Ireland (NESF, 1995; National Anti Poverty Strategy, 1997; PLANET, 1997). These gave rise to the launch of a national Social Economy Programme in 1999. Similar to CE this programme was administered by FAS, the National Training & Employment Authority and it supported social enterprises, providing they were professionally managed, functioning in the market place and provided employment opportunities for long term unemployed and others at risk at social exclusion.

##### **Social Enterprises & Local Development**

During the 1990s the concept of partnership and area-based development became central to the Irish approach to tackling social exclusion (O'Hara 2001:155). This was accompanied by a series of policy initiatives that facilitated the emergence of new social economy initiatives in urban and rural locations. O'Hara (2001) suggests that the adoption of participatory strategies and their incorporation in national planning led to the formation of coalitions of interest which have been the primary promoters of the social economy from the mid 1990s<sup>3</sup>.

#### **4.2 UK**

Unlike in Ireland, the UK has generally lacked a policy framework specifically for the social economy, indeed the sector as a sector has almost no recognition and representation, although its constituent parts especially voluntary organisations and co-operatives are well represented. Frameworks that have arisen to address social exclusion have arisen from labour market and regeneration policies, both at national and local levels. At the national level this has led to funding programmes such as New Deal, informed by a philosophy of pluralist providers competing in the market, with no priority given to the social economy, indeed the initial formulation of New

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<sup>3</sup> See Fenton, M., O'Hara, P., and O' Shaughnessy, M. (2004) and O' Hara, P. (2001) for a fuller discussion of the policy context out of which Irish Social Enterprises have emerged.

Deal was more for the use by private business. Social economy organisations have competed in such markets, and drawn on multiple sources of funding, including regeneration, and have succeeded in developing some recognition. At the local level there is an emphasis on partnership structures for governance, and these are open to social economy organisations. The outcome has been a proliferation of types of social economy structures operating against social exclusion (6 types noted above). The advent of a major new policy initiative for social enterprise must be seen in this context of strengthening a “brand” and its place in the market, rather than privileging a specific form of organisation. This new emphasis has perhaps given greater emphasis towards achieving sustainability, although this is more at the level of rhetoric than policy.

The greater variations in both pay and terms and conditions of employment in the UK, has led to concerns that at the bottom end of the skill spectrum, there is the risk of a relatively low skilled ‘underclass’ moving in and out of marginal, poorly paying jobs, with little employment protection, poor pensions, and limited employment benefits. As unemployment has fallen, there has also been a need to focus more on these socially excluded segments of society and their communities. In general the niche that social enterprise initiatives for work integration occupy is that of addressing the problems the most disadvantaged groups in society have in integrating into the labour market.

The relation with public bodies appears to be related to the market activities of the organisations. Both Necta and Groundwork had a close relation with the local authority in Nottingham of which they spoke highly. Necta found this important in accessing contracts, in gaining social inclusion funds and for support and information. Remploy was actively working with the local authority in Southampton with the strategic objective of making better local links and seeking partnerships for accessing European and other funds. There was a similar but more developed and extensive pattern with Childcare Works, a highly networked organisation in public sector groupings at neighbourhood, city, regional, Scottish and UK, and European level. Their particularly complex patchwork of funding seemed to necessitate a large investment in investigating and keeping up-to-date and forming partnership groups for bids.

Elsewhere relations with local authorities seemed much less positive. The Factory saw local networks – creating them, working in them and gaining from them as vital for survival in the current hostile public sector market in their borough. The contact to the ruling group in the authority was described as ‘confrontational’ The Factory’s response has been to establish strength with other third sector organisations ‘to make sure the third sector gets what it wants to get and if it doesn’t to ask why not.’ The ruling council group’s attitude is seen as wanting acquiescence or they will shut projects down: a ‘terrible’ situation.

Nevertheless there has been a growth in policies and regulative initiatives aimed at mapping, supporting and growing social enterprises. This can be seen in a variety of arenas of government departments: in the activities of the Social Enterprise Unit at the Dti, the development of the new legal form of the Community Interest Company, proposals for changes to Charity Law and the Charity Commission’s role - to name but three. Social enterprises are seen as potential actors in an increasingly contracted out welfare state.



## **5. Contrasting theoretical explanations**

We now seek to understand some of the differences encountered between the two states with broadly similar legal and third sector traditions by examining some theoretical policy frameworks.

### **5.1 Social capital**

In both countries social capital may be seen as a general outcome of the activities of the WISE (as well as an input); alternatively they may be seen in a more focused way as a key part of strategy that enhances the capability of the social enterprise to meet its goals. In this latter respect a social capital strategy may be instrumental to improve the functioning of the social enterprise: either by building networks of influence with funding stakeholders or with community groups – being “well integrated” improves relations with target groups. Social enterprise organisations also have values that favour links with the community, thus this aspect of social capital is likely to be embedded in its structure and practices. While both countries cases exhibit bridging social capital with public bodies for functional reasons (esp. where this is the dominant source of income), in Ireland community relations are strongly supported by the policy framework – esp. regarding volunteer/community to the board.

Clearly a social capital strategy has been successful in many cases, but there is also evidence of lack of success in low trust contexts.

### **5.2 Frameworks for understanding policy processes**

We have talked about ‘policy’ so far as if it were one homogeneous and easily identifiable entity which may be rationally developed and implemented at a given point. Hill (forthcoming) challenges these assumptions. He points out that policies in some arenas are subject to regular revisiting as circumstances change and cites income maintenance as a typical UK example here. Policies in areas like this not only change frequently at a primary legislative level but they are also susceptible to shifts due to regulatory imperatives enacted outside of primary legislation. These may seek to modify or adapt to feedback as well as to pragmatic requirements.

‘... in the UK...with the use of ‘delegated legislation’, flexibility for amendments based upon later experience will be built into the primary legislation. Feedbacks can often be seen as a clearly structured part of a structured process’ (Hill forthcoming).

In addition, as Hill goes on to point out, institutional theory stresses the way in which ‘earlier decisions structure subsequent ones.’ There is rarely a point zero to start from. This highlights for us the way in which policy is not formulated in a rational vacuum separate from local imperatives, historical pressures or ideological concerns. Hill’s commentary points out three (of several) structuring devices for understanding the operation of the policy process which we find particularly useful here: hierarchies, markets and networks. So governments may chose to intervene (exercising a hierarchical power) or leave matters alone (allowing the market to resolve the issue) or engage with networks (to develop policy in association with others).

In the discussion in this paper we are dealing particularly with the arrangements around the delivery of social policy (work integration) at relatively local levels by particular implementers (social enterprises) in two different policy environments (Ireland and the UK). In the UK we argue these three mechanisms are operating simultaneously in a particular configuration. There is some amount of hierarchical power exercised by government but it is geared to enabling market solutions (via

social enterprises and other providers) using regulatory mechanisms to specify and control given financial inputs and required social outputs. There is a high degree of network operation undertaken to animate the process. This can be evidenced at a local level - we found the involvement of partnership boards and stakeholders from different sectors including officers from a local authority, job centre managers, industry representatives, training colleges and social enterprises engaged in programme development around work integration schemes (eg at Necta). It can also be witnessed at a national level (many of the organisations we researched were fairly routinely involved in national consultations at quite senior levels (eg Childcare Works, ECT, FRC).

Janet Newman's (2001) UK based framework elaborates a governance system that adds to the market/network/hierarchy configuration, a rational goal system (of central targets, measures and incentives), and partnerships (which are seen to be decentralised and consensual and involving mutual or community responsibility and civic/community or family values). Thus, in the UK, a hard-nosed emphasis on measured outcomes in strong market contexts perhaps explains some evidence of creaming. Whilst an emphasis on partnership structures for civil society operate in UK at local strategic level (ie not emphasising direct community linkages within social enterprise). This also allows for considerable local/regional diversity.

In Ireland, the emphasis until recently has been less on the market and more on government (hierarchical) intervention in the face of market and public failure. This has arrived in the form of ALMPS which provide funding to support community-based initiatives that are prepared to provide training and employment opportunities for disadvantaged workers and in the process meet community needs. The use of networks has been evidenced, for example, by the tripartite composition of the voluntary management boards of Irish WISEs as a means of exchanging resources between statutory, private and the community and voluntary sectors and building social capital.

### **5.3 Institutional Approaches**

Both countries exhibit 2 types of isomorphism – within the sector, and towards a business model. However the institutional basis for within sector isomorphism is different: in the UK where one might expect even more diversity, there is strong isomorphism within the sector through association between similar organisations, and the activities of professional and federal bodies; whilst in Ireland state policy seems to be key in forming or at least sponsoring the development of two distinct types.

## **6. Conclusions**

In the case of Irish WISEs we can see the strong relationship between national active labour market policies and the emergence of WISEs, dating back to the 1970s. Programmes such as Community Employment, Job Initiative and more recently the national Social Economy programme have given rise to community and area based responses to social exclusion. Local and community development evolved as a solution to the problem of long-term unemployment and the direct employment schemes emerged as the main form of statutory support in this regard. This approach has continued to pervade statutory responses to social and economic exclusion since the 1990s and persists in more recent national policies and programmes of local, urban and rural development.

This comparisons between different experiences of social enterprise in two remarkably similar countries has revealed some interesting institutional features that seem to account for some of the differences. Isomorphisms exist towards the market and within the sector, but for different reasons. Social capital appears as a part of functional strategy in both countries, but again institutional factors in Ireland exert greater pressure for community social capital. And a different UK institutional context for civil involvement places does not emphasise direct linkages with the social enterprise.

A rhetoric of sustainability is apparent in both countries but Irish data on high subsidy levels that may be difficult to eliminate. And the UK dominant resource typology indicates the need to continue funding regimes for certain types. Although it may be that market context for UK public services allows more possibilities for social enterprise to develop mixed economies.

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