

## DIVERSEurope

### Methodology for the identification of best practices in Ireland

During the engagement with expert working with SME's we asked them, as part of the strategic interview if they were aware of any best practices.

Interviewees were not aware of good practices specifically directed at supporting SME's to implement d&i in remote rural areas, however we did gather information about one good practice that was delivered in Ireland in the early 2000's on a national level, two networks that work with companies, many of whom are SME's and one research report on diversity that included SME's.

### Best Practices

#### Best Practice 1: Providing Direct Support to SME's to Develop Diversity and Inclusion Policies

<b>Organisation:</b>	This was a national initiative. Equality Strategies Ltd was contracted by the Equality Authority (now the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission IHREC) to provide technical support for the national Framework Committee on Equal Opportunities Initiatives at the Enterprise Level provided for under two national agreements. The steering committee included ICTU, IBEC, the Department of Finance, the Local Government Management Services Board and the Equal Opportunities Network.
<b>Objective:</b>	The Committee supported the facilitation and training of a network of management consultants to provide d&i services to SME's, and provided resources for those trained consultants to help SME's to develop employment equality and equal status policies for their enterprises.
<b>Beneficiaries:</b>	Over 150 SME's were provided with resources though a programme we designed that provided for up to five days consultancy to develop equality policies and or deliver equality training.
<b>Context:</b>	What was the initial situation and its specific context? What are the specific difficulties that the practice seeks to address?
<b>Process:</b>	This was a national initiative led by the Equality Authority (now the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission IHREC). It was supported under two national agreements, which involved the social partners at national level. The steering committee included the national social partners, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), the Department of Finance, the Local Government Management Services Board (LGMA) and the Equal Opportunities Network, which was a network of diversity and inclusion leaders in a number of semi-state and private companies..

<b>Impact:</b>	Through this initiative, members gain access to industry led development of training programmes that meet their needs.
<b>Limitations:</b>	Perhaps the main constraint is that the initiative was not continued, as there was a period of austerity, whereby the budget of the Equality Authority was substantially reduced.
<b>Related resources/Links:</b>	It is no longer in operation.

## Best Practice 2: Providing Co-Funding through Business Led Networks

<b>Organisation:</b>	<p>The Midland Border East Skillnet works with its members to identify and drive training and upskilling in the Retail, Sales, Manufacturing, Childcare and Construction sectors, to meet business, people, and performance needs.</p> <p>The Taste 4 Success Skillnet works with its members to identify and drive training and upskilling in the food, seafood and drink sectors, to meet business, people and performance needs. Its members include multinationals, large, medium, small indigenous Irish companies, and a growing number of micro and artisan producers involved in food, seafood and drink (micro brewing) production.</p> <p>Skillnet Ireland operates on the basis of two income sources:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Contributions from businesses participating in Skillnet Ireland programmes, and;</li> <li>2) Allocations from the employer-funded National Training Fund (NTF).</li> </ol>
<b>Objective:</b>	They offer support through the development of training programmes to meet existing and future needs within these sectors to drive Workforce design, People Development and Strategic Innovation and where possible to support those seeking employment to development skills and work placement opportunities within their sector of employment. Their members include include multinationals, large, medium, small Irish companies.
<b>Beneficiaries:</b>	There are 72 Skillnet Business networks, two of who are highlighted her are they are regionally based and work with SME's.
<b>Context:</b>	The ability to leverage private sector investment to this extent is a compelling element of the Skillnet Ireland model and cost sharing with employers is fundamental principle. In 2019, employers contributed over €22 million to the cost of Skillnet Ireland programmes, with every €100 of exchequer investment in the Training Networks Programme attracting a further €117 in private investment.
<b>Process:</b>	This is government supported national programme that engages SME's, as well as large companies, and supports networks of organisations to develop industry led training and up-skilling programmes.

	Skillnet partners with industry to create upskilling programmes which are responsive to business needs and designed to develop future-ready talent.
<b>Impact:</b>	<p>Skillnet is a national business support agency, that aims to help businesses of all sizes identify and develop the talent they need to succeed.</p> <p>The two networks included here participated in research “<i>Cultural diversity challenges and opportunities in the Irish agri-food sector</i>” in 2020, which identified the need for d&amp;i supports in these sectors., including supports for SME’s.</p>
<b>Limitations:</b>	At this moment diversity and inclusion is not identified as an area for the development of up-skilling programmes.
<b>Related resources/Links:</b>	<p><a href="https://www.skillnetireland.ie/">https://www.skillnetireland.ie/</a></p> <p>The link to this research is here <a href="https://www.mbeskillnet.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SNN-Taste-4-Success-Report_Entire-Document-120820-web-version.pdf">https://www.mbeskillnet.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SNN-Taste-4-Success-Report_Entire-Document-120820-web-version.pdf</a></p>

## Conclusion

It was not possible in the timeframe to evaluate any of the practices identified, and as such the views of the experts proved the most important way to gather the information. Experts who participated in the the interviews revealed the need for awareness raising campaigns, and networking opportunities specifically directed at sectoral groups so that people in SME’s can learn about the business benefits of d&i for their organisations and address the challenges for their situation in rural and remote areas.