Recent Developments in Entrepreneurship Training
IMPLICATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN IRELAND

OECD
BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

European Commission

Foreword

This report provides policy guidance to Ireland on how to improve the design and delivery of entrepreneurship training for people from groups that are under-represented in entrepreneurship. Building on a literature review, recent assessments of inclusive entrepreneurship policy in Ireland and a stakeholder workshop, it identifies concrete actions that can be taken to strengthen the match between entrepreneur and training offers, improve access to training and boost the quality of training offered.

Inclusive entrepreneurship policies seek to give everyone an opportunity to create a successful and sustainable business, regardless of their gender, age, place of birth, work status or other personal characteristics. Levelling the playing field in entrepreneurship can create jobs, fight social and financial exclusion and help respond to economic challenges. One of the most important tools used by governments to make entrepreneurship more inclusive is entrepreneurship training since there are important entrepreneurship skills gaps across the population. Entrepreneurship training covers a broad range of issues and challenges (e.g. developing business plans, improving financial literacy) and can take various formats such as seminars, boot camps, start-up weekends, and short courses. Approaches to training are evolving rapidly as lessons are learned about the effectiveness of different formats, lengths and delivery methods, and as new opportunities emerge from online delivery platforms.

This report provides an overview of the range of tailored entrepreneurship training initiatives offered across OECD countries and provides a brief assessment of the training offers in Ireland, focussing on inclusive entrepreneurship initiatives. It also identifies priority actions to strengthen the suite of entrepreneurship training offers for groups that are under-represented in entrepreneurship to respond to the 2021 Report of the SME Taskforce: National SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, which calls for more actions to "maximise the potential of demographic groups that have untapped entrepreneurial potential". The report draws heavily on discussions at an online seminar that was organised by the OECD with support from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on 28 April 2022. The seminar included presentations of recent OECD work on inclusive entrepreneurship policy and three international case studies: Entrepreneurship Ambassadors (Australia), enterability (Germany) and Yes I Start Up (Italy). Participants representing a range of Irish organisations involved in supporting inclusive entrepreneurship also discussed lessons learned from the international cases and how they could be adopted in Ireland. This seminar and note also contribute to the OECD-EU work on inclusive entrepreneurship policy: https://www.oecd.org/cfe/smes/inclusive-entrepreneurship/.

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Executive summary

Skills gaps remain an important barrier to sustainable entrepreneurship activities and these size of the skills gap varies across the population. For example, 56% of men in OECD countries self-reported having the skills and knowledge needed to start a business between 2016 and 2020, while only 43% of women did. This reflects actual and perceived skills gaps, as well as differences in self-confidence.

Governments commonly use inclusive entrepreneurship training programmes to address these skills and attitude gaps. Training can be delivered through multiple formats such as courses, workshops, bootcamps, coaching and mentoring, among others. In addition to boosting entrepreneurship skills, there is some evidence showing that entrepreneurship schemes can increase employability and that short formats can boost motivations for business creation, especially among vulnerable groups that typically have lower levels of self-confidence. The format of training programmes is evolving rapidly with online delivery becoming more common, especially since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has improved the reach of many schemes but has also created challenges for training providers because this format requires a high level of self-motivation among participants to self-manage their learning. Another important trend is the shift from passive learning to experiential learning.

There are a range of government supports available in Ireland to help prospective entrepreneurs to start their own business, including a range of entrepreneurship training schemes. The Local Enterprise Offices are a vital source of such supports for many first-time entrepreneurs, including training programmes such as the Start Your Own Business training course, mentoring and financial assistance. These public schemes are complemented by a wide range of offers from non-government organisations. While many are high quality, the availability of high quality tailored training is variable across the country. To strengthen entrepreneurship training, especially in the context of inclusive entrepreneurship, it is recommended that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment develop a referral system to help entrepreneurs identify relevant training options. In addition, training offers could be expanded across regions through online channels when appropriate and by using a network model. Finally, the quality of entrepreneurship coaching and mentoring could be raised by offering a set of training modules for coaches and mentors through the Local Enterprise Offices. This could also lead to a certification system that ensures that coaches and mentors have a standard base of knowledge and familiarity with common support tools.

1 The entrepreneurship skills gap in Ireland

Entrepreneurs use a range of skills in starting up and operating their businesses. This includes both workplace skills that are needed to produce their goods or deliver their services, as well as the skills needed to operate a business. These skills have been codified into three categories by the European Union's (EU) Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp): (i) generating ideas and identifying opportunities (e.g. creativity, vision); (ii) managing and leveraging resources (e.g. fundraising, financial literacy); and (iii) converting opportunities into action (e.g. taking initiative, planning) (Bacigalupo et al., 2016[1]). While entrepreneurs do not necessarily need all of these skills to successfully run their businesses, possessing them is likely to increase the chances that it will be sustainable and grow. A lack of entrepreneurship skills is often considered one of the most significant barriers to successful business creation and development (OECD/The European Commission, 2013[2]).

Nearly 45% of Irish people self-reported that they have skills and knowledge needed to start a business between 2016 and 2020, which was below the OECD average of 50%. Moreover, a number of entrepreneurship skills gaps can be observed across the Irish population over this period (Figure 1.1.). There was a clear gender gap with women nearly 20% less likely to report having entrepreneurship skills over this period. Further, youth (18-30 years old) were nearly 15% less likely than the total adult population to report having entrepreneurship skills. These skills gaps across population groups are one of the factors that influences differences in entrepreneurship rates across the population.

Figure 1.1. About 4 in 10 Irish women report having the skills needed to start a business

"Do you have the knowledge and skills to start a business?" Percentage of population who responded "yes", 2016-20
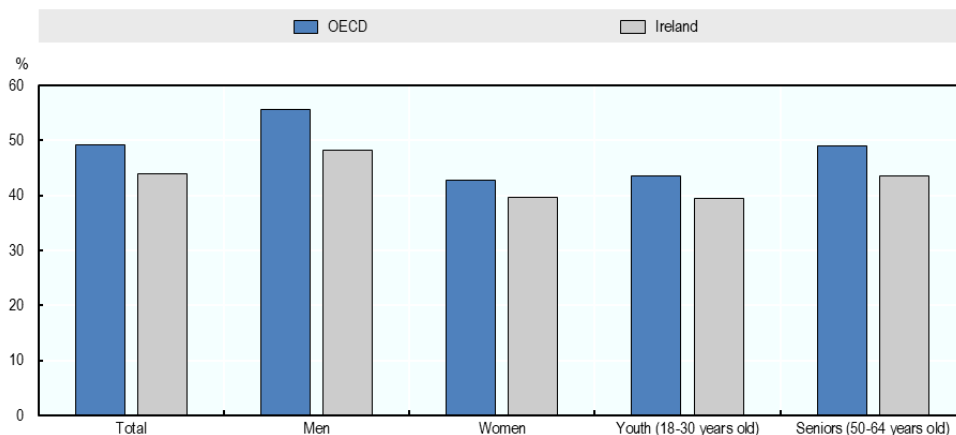
Source: (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 2021[3])

2 International trends in entrepreneurship training

The role of training in supporting inclusive entrepreneurship

Governments commonly use inclusive entrepreneurship training programmes to address skills gaps. Within the European Union (EU), nearly every Member State offers a range of tailored entrepreneurship training schemes for youth, women and the unemployed (OECD/European Commission, 2021[4]). However, tailored schemes for other population groups such as immigrants, seniors and people with disabilities are less frequently offered.

Entrepreneurship training within the context of inclusive entrepreneurship policy has multiple objectives. Overall, it seeks to increase opportunities for people from groups that are under-represented in entrepreneurship to pursue business creation and provide them with the tools to succeed in developing a sustainable business (OECD/The European Commission, 2013[2]). Other potential benefits include increasing awareness about information and support offers related to business creation (Chrisman, McMullan and Hall, 2005[5]), boosting employability, developing peer networks, and improving entrepreneurial motivations and intentions through trainers, coaches and mentors who act as role models (Peterman and Kennedy, 2003[6]; Van Auken, Fry and Stephens, 2006[7]). Even when training participants – notably the unemployed and youth – are not successful in entrepreneurship, they can move more easily into paid employment with new skills and experience (OECD/The European Commission, 2013[2]; OECD/EC, 2020[8]). Some training programmes offer accreditation, which are useful to signal to outside stakeholders and investors that the entrepreneur has skills and credibility.

Entrepreneurship training can be delivered through various formats, each with advantages and disadvantages. The selection of format used for entrepreneurship training is often based on three primary factors: (i) scale and scope of training objectives (e.g. developing a business model, preparing financial plans); (ii) targeted population (i.e. training formats are not equally effective for all entrepreneurs); and (iii) availability of resources. Entrepreneurship training has traditionally been delivered through "one-to-many" formats where an expert trainer guides (potential) entrepreneurs through structured content in a classroom setting. However, training schemes are increasing being delivered through online, "one-to-one" (e.g. coaching, mentoring) and peer-learning formats (Table 2.1). These formats vary substantially in terms of intensity and length, ranging from one or two hours to courses that are delivered over several months. Regardless of the format, entrepreneurship training seeks to help participants develop practical skills to help them successfully start and sustain a business activity.

The classroom format for entrepreneurship training generally has a positive impact on participants. For example, there is a growing evidence base showing that entrepreneurship training can increase awareness and entrepreneurial efficacy among youth (Ho et al., 2018[9]), as well as increasing start-up intentions and problem solving abilities (Kim et al., 2020[10]).

Similar findings for other population groups are supported by a variety of studies (OECD/European Commission, 2021[4]; OECD/The European Commission, 2013[2]). Moreover, there is some evidence showing that start-up intentions can be boosted by participating in training (Cowling, 2009[11]). Relative to other formats, traditional group training approaches can be more cost-effective because there is a low marginal cost for training providers when they deliver training to a large number of participants. Despite these positive results, the nature of the "one-to-many" approach typically has less scope to tailor training contents and methods to the needs of participants, leading some participants to find these formats less attractive relative to more individualised supports. Moreover, some studies suggest that classroom training is less effective than more intensive supports such as entrepreneurship coaching and business consultancy as (OECD/The European Commission, 2013[2]).

Evidence suggests shorter formats of entrepreneurship training, such as workshops, masterclasses and bootcamps, also have positive impact on entrepreneurship skills, entrepreneurial attitudes and networks. These types of training often focus on building entrepreneurial intentions, addressing a specific skill barrier, building networks or as a gateway to more intensive support. Workshops and masterclasses tend to focus on a specific issue (e.g. preparing a business plan) and/or a narrow target group (e.g. senior women entrepreneurs). Evaluation evidence from the OzGirlsEntrepreneurship programme (Australia) shows that workshops can have a positive impact on building entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions but are less effective at building entrepreneurial skills (Shahin et al., 2021[12]). Bootcamps have also been found to have a positive impact on entrepreneurial skills, as seen from the WiRE Program (Australia) where 82% of women entrepreneurs in the programme reported an increase in entrepreneurship skills and 85% reported their networks growing (Wiesner, 2018[13]). Participants tend to report stronger outcomes after participating in bootcamps as they are more intensive and selective in identifying participants. They also tend to target entrepreneurs with a high likelihood of starting a successful business and place a greater emphasis on building networks and establishing mentorship relationships.

Inclusive entrepreneurship training as part of integrated support packages is an effective approach for addressing multiple barriers in parallel. Integrated support schemes are increasingly common in the EU (OECD, 2020[14]). They can be managed by a single programme or through partnerships (e.g. training providers and microfinance institutes). An emerging method of providing packages of tailored support is through dedicated business incubation programmes (i.e. for a specific population group such as women or immigrants). These programmes typically offer entrepreneurs training, workshops, consultancy, networking opportunities, introductions to investors and often a workspace. Evaluation evidence shows that business incubator programmes can increase business survival rates, increase profitability and job creation, grow networks and improve access to finance (Madaleno et al., 2018[15]; Ayatse, Kwahar and Iyortsuun, 2017[16]). Evidence from Spain suggests that youth stand to benefit more than older entrepreneurs from business incubation due to their lack of experience and small networks (Albort-Morant and Oghazi, 2016[17]). Despite currently not being widely used for training delivery, business incubation programmes appear to hold untapped potential for delivering inclusive entrepreneurship support (OECD/EU, 2019[18]).

Table 2.1. Overview of inclusive entrepreneurship training formats

Type	Training format	Short description	Examples
One-to-many	**Classroom training/ Course**	Most common type of entrepreneurship training. The trainer-led format delivers a range of materials on a range of relevant topics in an in-person group setting.	Youth work empowering women entrepreneurship (Bulgaria) – Women entrepreneurs
			Shad Program (Canada) – Youth entrepreneurs
	Workshop	Short-format trainings in either a single session or a series of short sessions, which aim to address specific topics and skills to a narrow target group.	Youth Entrepreneurship Support (YES) (Bulgaria and Romania) – Youth entrepreneurs
			Work for Yourself@50+ (United States) – Senior entrepreneurs
	Masterclass	Single session or small series of workshops taught by a recognised world-class trainer.	Scale Without Border (Canada) – Immigrant entrepreneurs
	Bootcamp	Series of short, intensive training sessions, typically ranging between 3 days and 2 weeks that can combine different modalities of coursework, workshops, peer coaching etc.	Women Entrepreneurship Bootcamp (European Union) – Women entrepreneurs
One-to-one	**Coaching and mentoring**	Facilitated relationships designed to provide tailored support to develop a specific skill or address a business challenge (short-term coaching) as well as long-term personal development (mentoring).	Young Entrepreneurs Succeed! (Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom) – Youth entrepreneurs
			Self-Employment Benefit Support Program (Canada) – The unemployed
	Business consultancy	Fixed-term expert-led training focussed on strategic and transformational support to address a specific issue and strengthen business performance.	enterability (Germany) – Entrepreneurs with disabilities
			Universal Inclusion (United Kingdom) – Entrepreneurs with disabilities
Peer learning	**Peer coaching or mentoring**	Semi-structured learning format where entrepreneurs learn through structured dialogue and problem-solving with their peers, typically led by an experienced entrepreneur.	Going for Growth (Ireland) – Women entrepreneurs
	On-the-job training	Work placement or job shadowing experience in an entrepreneurial setting, ranging from several months up to 1 year.	Year Here Fellowship programme (United Kingdom) – Mid-career change
Online learning	**Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)**	Course-based training available online and free of charge to a large audience - often available for a limited timeframe (i.e. 6-12 weeks). Number of self-study hours required to complete course rarely exceeds 40 hours.	Be entrepreneurial in Cultural Industries in the digital age (France) – Youth entrepreneurs
	Online training courses	Trainer-led course delivered online to a group of pre-registered students over multiple weeks (i.e. between 2 to 17 weeks). Similar to in-person courses, programme fees and additional coursework may be required.	Work-based Entrepreneurship Training for People with Disabilities (WOT) (European Union) – Entrepreneurs with disabilities
	E-learning portals	Self-directed open-access learning materials (e.g. articles, short videos, games, self-tests).	Ascent Digital Learning Platform (United States) – Women entrepreneurs
Training that is integrated with many other supports	**Incubators**	Long-term tailored-support packages (i.e. 3 to 4 years), which aim for participants to achieve a set of milestones and often include pre and post-incubation training, workshops and networking opportunities.	EntrePrism (Canada) – Immigrant entrepreneurs
			Migrant Entrepreneurs Team-Up with Mentors (MEnt) (European Union) – Immigrant entrepreneurs
	Accelerators	Short-term support packages (i.e. 3 to 12 months) designed to speed up the business creation process, focusing on managing influxes of capital and rapid growth. Programmes tend to take an ownership stake in the company.	Female Founders Fellowship (France) – Women entrepreneurs

Source: Adapted from (OECD/European Union, Forthcoming[19])

Recent trends in entrepreneurship training

Moving training online

Entrepreneurship training has been increasingly delivered via online platforms over the past 20 years and this accelerated greatly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes "closed" training programmes (i.e. there is an in-take process much like a traditional training schemes) as well as those that are "open" (i.e. anyone can access the content at any time). The trend has been to offer training modules through "open" online learning portals that include a wide variety of content (e.g. articles, short videos, games, self-tests) for self-directed learning (OECD/EU, 2022[20]). This format allows entrepreneurs to access training content at their own pace, at any time and from any place (Aparicio, Bacao and Oliveira, 2016[21]).

There are many benefits to the increased use of online learning for entrepreneurs and governments. Overall, a growing body of evidence has shown that this type of online format can be as effective as the traditional classroom format (i.e. face-to-face) (Nguyen, 2015[22]) and advances in technology still offer untapped potential for better outcomes. The use of gamification in entrepreneurship training continues to increase based on evidence that it can lead to higher levels of motivation and engagement, as well as improved learning outcomes (Larson, 2019[23]). For governments, a clear benefit of offering training online is that there is a low marginal cost of delivery once fixed costs have been met (OECD/EU, 2022[20]). A second benefit is that online training offers can reach people that did not previously have easy access to training, notably by those outside of urban areas (OECD/European Commission, 2021[4]). The digitalisation of entrepreneurship training has also improved the quality of programme monitoring and evaluation, which helps to ensure these programmes remain accessible to entrepreneurs from different target groups by addressing issues as they arise. For example, some schemes such as Yes I Start Up in Italy report that the programme monitoring has improved since transitioning to an online format (Box 2.1).

While the move online has led to an improved reach for many schemes, it has also introduced new challenges. For example, training providers had to become adept in using new digital platforms, overcome technical difficulties and adjust their training approaches (i.e. standardisation vs. customisation). This can lead to particular challenges for certain target groups, notably senior entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs with disabilities (Box 2.2). Moreover, this format requires a high level of self-motivation to self-manage learning. It is also important to recognise that the needs of target groups differ in terms of their self-efficacy in online environments (Peechapol et al., 2018[24]), cognitive styles and abilities (Rodrigues et al., 2019[25]; Wong et al., 2018[26]), prior knowledge (Rodrigues et al., 2019[25]; Mayer, 2017[27]) and the motivation to learn (Peechapol et al., 2018[24]; Rodrigues et al., 2019[25]). This is especially important in the context of inclusive entrepreneurship as each of these factors varies within each group as well as by gender, age, place of birth, ethnicity and disability.

Box 2.1. Yes I Start Up, Italy

Intervention type: Entrepreneurship training, mentoring and support services for youth entrepreneurs

Description: Yes I Start Up (YISU) is a entrepreneurship training programme of the National Agency for Active Labour Market Policies (*Agenzia nazionale per le politiche attive del lavoro* – Anpal), which was developed by Invitalia (Agency for enterprise development) and the Italian Agency for Microfinance (*Ente Nazionale per il Microcredito* – ENM). The programme aims to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship among NEET youth (18-29 years old) by providing free entrepreneurship training, mentoring and support services.

YISU uses a public-partnership model, delivering training through a network of local training providers[1] (e.g. public training institutions including universities, private consultancy companies, associations, chambers of commerce). The providers are selected through a standardised process and are required to meet certain criteria (e.g. being specialised in training or business advice, demonstrating the ability to offer training to NEETs, having access to appropriate infrastructure to host the course, having qualified teachers, and participating in trainings and informational events for the programme). To ensure effectiveness of the training courses, trainers all teach using the same curriculum and ENM provides each training structure with a detailed programme of the training path, guidance on curriculum delivery, educational materials, and access to a dedicated information system for the management, monitoring, implementation and reporting of the training activities. As of 2021, 500 training bodies were delivering the YISU programme throughout Italy.

The training programme is designed to equip participants with the skills needed to start and manage a business. It is divided into 15 modules and takes 80 hours to complete, including 60 hours of online classes and 20 hours of individual tutoring. Courses are delivered to small groups of up to 12 people. The training guides participants through the steps of defining their business idea and developing a viable business plan. YISU also provides participants support in accessing the SELFIEmployment measure, managed by Invitalia, which finances entrepreneurial projects from EUR 5 000 to EUR 50 000 with zero-interest loans, without the need for collateral and/or other subsidy measures. Entrepreneurs who qualify for the loan benefit from support from an Invitalia tutor for a year and a half to support them with financial and administrative matters.

Adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic: The programme has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic by adapting its delivery. The training sessions have been moved online through a dedicated e-learning platform. Participants did not report a drop in the quality of training following the move to the digital platform. YISU also identified benefits to this method of delivery, including improved access to training (e.g. for those in rural areas) and higher quality monitoring of activities and participants. The programme was also expanded to include women and the long-term unemployed.

Results achieved: Over 2018-20, 1 700 NEET youth completed the YISU course in one of the 350 training sessions offered - 100 of which were online. Around half of YISU graduates went on to create a business and 21.5% were in employment 3 months after the end of the programme. 38.9% (586) of YISU graduates applied for funding through the SELFIEmployment Fund, of whom 35.5% (208) successfully received funding. Among those who received funding, 135 participants created a business with almost all businesses founded still in operation after 3 months (97.2%). More broadly, data from the SELFIEmployment Fund (which targets NEET youth) show that 1 555 enterprises had received EUR 52 million by March 2021. This has led to the creation of 2 746 new jobs.

Note 1: The list is available online at www.diventaimprenditore.eu/soggetto-attuatore/soggetti-attuatori-attivi/.
Source: (Ente Nazionale per il Microcredito, 2022[28])

Box 2.2. enterability, Germany

Intervention type: Entrepreneurship training and support services for people with severe disabilities

Description: enterability operates as a service of the Berlin Integration Office (*Integrationsfachdienst*) as of 2013, having been established in Berlin in 2004 by Social Impact gGmbH. The main goal of enterability is to empower people with severe disabilities to decide whether entrepreneurship and self-employment is the right option for them to participate in working life. The programme provides tailored start-up consulting for people with severe disabilities who wish to start a business or who are already self-employed, as general entrepreneurship training programmes are often not adequately able to assist these entrepreneurs. enterability ensures that its services are accessible to all clients and account for the large variety of disabilities. This includes, for example, the choice of location and physical setting, the use of sign language interpreters, the incorporation of digital tools and the ability to offer home visits. In 2019, 33% of the supported clients had cancer or autoimmune disorders, 18% were affected by mental health impairment, 15% by brain injuries and neurological problems, 14% by vision disability, 12% had a physical disability and 8% were deaf or hard of hearing.

enterability follows an integrated approach that combines classical start-up advice with expertise in disability-related matters. A key element of the programme is discussing and analysing the clients' disabilities and their consequences on working life. Additionally, enterability uses an individualised approach to entrepreneurship training. Highly qualified personnel offer tailored support, adapting delivery methods and content to each individual's situation and needs. The entrepreneurship training covers a range of subjects, including assistance in developing sustainable business models, information and consulting with regard to financing, formal processes and social security, coaching regarding health prevention, advice on public support measures for people with disabilities and hands-on assistance with paperwork. This tailored training is complemented by seminars on general entrepreneurship topics, such as marketing, accounting, legal and fiscal matters. enterability also facilitates peer-to-peer networking and organises different groups and events, allowing participants to exchange experiences, discuss relevant topics and identify potential partners.

Adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic: Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, enterability adapted its entrepreneurship training programme to ensure the continued protection and support of its clients. The delivery of the support services (real time trainings, one-to-one support, group events) has been amended by online formats. While this adaption allowed participants to continue accessing entrepreneurship training and support during the COVID-19 pandemic, it also created new challenges. For example, the online format did not allow for as much customisation of support compared to the in-person format. There were also technical difficulties, gaps in digital skills and disability-related difficulties, which changed the overall entrepreneurship training experience. Moreover, the shift online also highlighted the importance of personal contact for participants. Overall, the online format offers a useful additional delivery method to offline formats, leading enterability to ensure that all participants can access the support that best works for their situation.

Results achieved: From February 2004 to the end of 2021, enterability supported more than 1 700 people with severe disabilities who wanted to start their own business. More than 500 participants entered full-time self-employment in Berlin with an additional 500 participants engaged in self-employment as a part-time activity. In 2015, the scheme received the European Enterprise Promotion Award in the category "Inclusive und Responsible Entrepreneurship" from the European Commission. Due to the success of the programme, the enterability model has been replicated in other regions, including the German federal state of Saxony-Anhalt in the period 2011 to 2014.

Source: (Integrationsfachdienst, 2022[29]; enterability, 2021[30])

Growing use of individualised support

An increasing number of entrepreneurship training schemes deliver their programmes in a one-to-one format. This format includes coaching, mentoring and business consultancy. These types of training are often more effective than training in large groups (i.e. one-to-many format) because the content and methods can be better tailored to the needs of the individual participant. The main success factor for individualised training programmes is the establishment of an effective match between the entrepreneur and the coach or mentor to ensure that the support is aligned to the needs of the participant (Snowden, Oberoi and Halsall, 2021[31]; OECD/European Union, 2014[32]). Within the context of inclusive entrepreneurship, coaches and mentors have an important role in providing support beyond the business, including psychological support (e.g. providing reassurance and motivation, help reflect on strengths and weaknesses), career-related support (e.g. help expand networks, serve as a sounding board for new ideas) and role-model function (e.g. share personal experiences and lessons learned) (St-Jean, 2012[33]). However, a drawback of individualised entrepreneurship training programmes is that they are resource intensive and can be expensive to deliver when professional coaches, mentors and consultants are used.

Coaching and mentoring are commonly offered by governments as part of their entrepreneurship and inclusive entrepreneurship support schemes (OECD/European Commission, 2021[4]). Coaching usually refers to a short-term relationship that focusses on a specific skill or business challenge, while mentoring is typically a longer-term relationship that has a greater emphasis on personal development. These types of support are particularly important for entrepreneurs from under-represented groups because they, on average, have lower levels of self-confidence, motivation and skills (OECD/European Union, 2014[34]). Evaluations tend to show that coaching and mentoring is effective for developing entrepreneurship skills (OECD/European Union, 2014[34]) and increases the sustainability of businesses, notably for youth (Jones, Brinkley and Crowley, 2015[35]) and women entrepreneurs (OECD/EU, 2016[36]). Another individualised type of training is business consultancy, which is the transfer of expert knowledge and advice to improve business performance. Consultancy is often more focussed on strategic and transformational support and is delivered through professional business advisors. Business consultancy for inclusive entrepreneurship is especially effective when it is integrated into support packages that include financial support. Consultancies can provide training as part of an array of services which include peer-learning, networking, regulatory compliance and coaching (Box 2.3).

Experimenting with micro-credentials

Micro-credentials is a tool that has emerged in recent years to certify learning outcomes and experiences. They are usually offered for short-term entrepreneurship training programmes regardless of the learning setting (i.e. formal, non-formal, informal) (European Commission, 2022[37]). They are currently most frequently used in formal learning settings such as university programmes and as stand-alone credentials such as the Entrepreneurial Skills Pass (ESP). The ESP is an online micro-credential that provides an international qualification to young entrepreneurs, particularly students between the ages of 15-19 years old who have entrepreneurial experience. It was developed by JA Europe in collaboration with the European Commission and is based on practical entrepreneurship experience, mentoring, self-assessments via an online portal and a final examination to earn the micro-credential (JA Europe, 2022[38]).

Micro-credentials afford participants a more flexible approach to obtaining specific competencies need for business creation and development in addition to transversal skills. Moreover, micro-credentials support lifelong learning by encouraging people to upskill and develop new skills (Nic Giolla Mhichíl et al., 2020[39]). For example, the Propel programme in Saskatchewan (Canada) aims to support solo entrepreneurs with up to four years of business operation in upskilling and offers the possibility of micro-credentials to several course modules (e.g. Financial Management, Sales and Marketing) (Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan, 2022[40]).

Box 2.3. Entrepreneurship Facilitators, Australia

Intervention type: Entrepreneurship training, mentoring, networking and advisory services

Description: The Entrepreneurship Facilitator Programme is an initiative that encourages and supports people in starting and running their own business. It is aimed at those who are considering becoming self-employed, have started a small business in the past two years, or who need to pivot their business to ensure that it remains viable. The objective of the programme is to promote and encourage self-employment and entrepreneurship by linking interested individuals with available services and programmes, including self-employment services, microfinance services and start-up incubators.

The Entrepreneurship Facilitator Programme is delivered by a network of providers (both for-profit and not-for-profit) in 23 selected locations around Australia. Providers appoint one or more entrepreneurship facilitators (facilitators) who are responsible for delivering services under the program in their contracted location(s). As of 2018, services were extended beyond the initial target group (unemployed youth) to include any interested mature age Australians and people at risk of unemployment due to structural adjustment.

Key success factors of the programme include its collaborative nature and the facilitators themselves. It is important for facilitators to have an understanding of how to start and operate a business as well as strong knowledge about the local business environmental (e.g. industry trends, business opportunities). An important part of their function is to establish effect networks for entrepreneurs so that beneficiaries can build connections with relevant stakeholders in the local ecosystem. Facilitators also host networking events and provide referrals to appropriate services in their small business ecosystem where further support is needed. They also deliver additional support services through 1:1 mentoring sessions and workshops. These workshops cover themes such as management skills, financial literacy, time management and marketing, and provide information about where to get further support for starting and running a business.

Adaptations to the COVID-19 pandemic: In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Entrepreneurship Facilitator programme continued to collaborate with local ecosystems and provide updated links to support services and measures introduced following the outbreak of COVID-19. This included providing information and directing participants to the COVID-19 government assistances for businesses, how to differ returns due to COVID-19, market diversification and resilience grants as well as other business supports available from banks and other market actors.

Results achieved: Since 2016, the Entrepreneurship Facilitators programme has assisted over 146 000 people. The programme has hosted over 12 400 individual mentoring sessions, of which 63% of participants were women. Moreover, the programme has delivered more than 2 400 workshops, which have been offered both in-person and online.

Source: (Department of Education, 2022[41]; Business LEAP, 2022[42])

# 3 Entrepreneurship training for inclusive entrepreneurship in Ireland

Conditions for inclusive entrepreneurship are strong relative to other OECD countries

The conditions for inclusive entrepreneurship are relatively strong in Ireland yet there are substantial gaps in start-up rates across the population. Overall, the business environment has many strengths, including by low levels of administrative burden on new start-ups and strong investor protection and a strong policy framework with a range of well-developed schemes for entrepreneurs (OECD/European Commission, 2021[4]). Nonetheless, the overall nascent entrepreneurship rate was equal to the OECD average for the 2016-20 period and there are substantial gaps in nascent entrepreneurship rates across the population. Over this period, Irish men were nearly twice as likely as women to be actively working towards creating business (Figure 3.1). This gender gap is about 27% greater than the gender gap for OECD countries. Irish seniors were 15% less likely to be involved in business creation than the overall average, which was a smaller gap than at the OECD level (30%). Youth were more likely than the population average to be active in business creation in Ireland and at the OECD level over this period.

Eliminating the gaps in early-stage entrepreneurship activity rates (i.e. nascent and new business ownership rates) could result in an additional 115 000 entrepreneurs in Ireland. This would increase the base of early-stage entrepreneurs by about 33%, which is slightly below the OECD average (37%) (Figure 3.2). Nearly 90% of these "missing" entrepreneurs are female and slightly more than one-third are over 50 years old, while very few missing entrepreneurs are under 30 years old. These proportions are about the same as the OECD average.

Figure 3.1. There are gender and age gaps in start-up activities

Share of the population involved in nascent entrepreneurship activities (18-64 years old), population weighted average for the period 2016-20
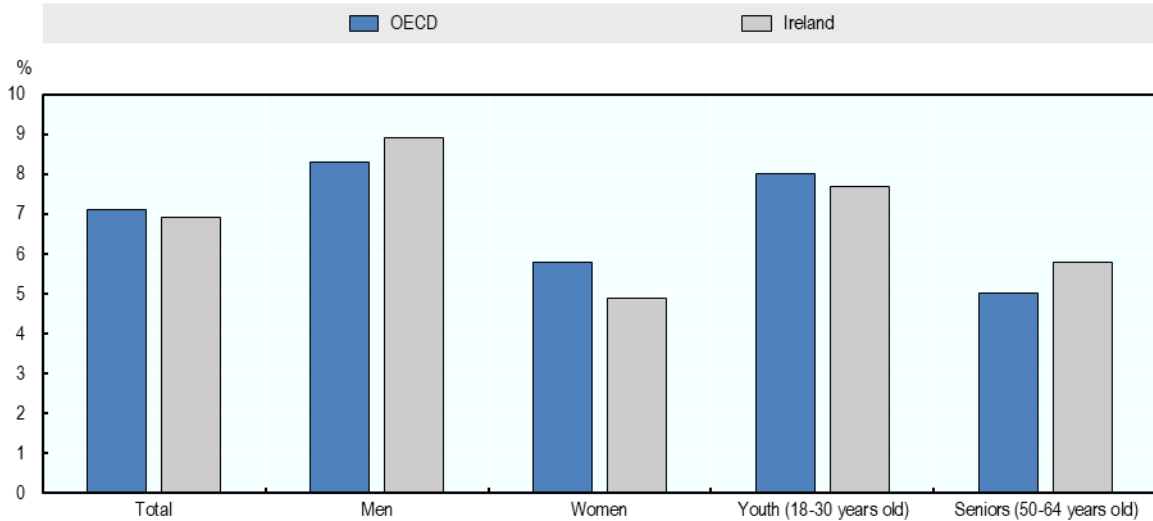
Note: The nascent entrepreneurship rate measures the proportion of the population 18-64 years old that is actively involved in setting up a business they will own or co-own. This business has not paid salaries, wages or any other payments to the owners for more than three months. The new business ownership rate measures the proportion of the population that is currently an owner-manager of a new business that has paid salaries, wages or any other payments to the owners for more than three months, but not more than 42 months. The following OECD countries did not participation in the GEM survey between 2016 and 2020: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Iceland, Lithuania and New Zealand.
Source: (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), 2021[3])

Figure 3.2. The relative number of missing entrepreneurs in Ireland is about equal to the OECD average

Ratio of "missing" entrepreneurs relative to the total number of early-stage entrepreneurs, average for 2016-20
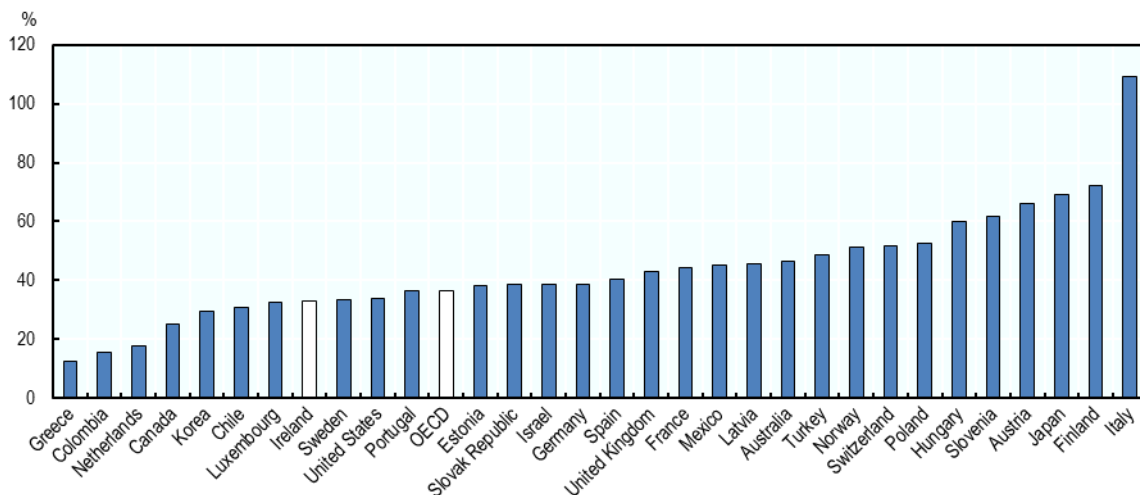
Source: (OECD/European Commission, 2021[4])

There are many entrepreneurship training schemes for people from under-represented groups…

Entrepreneurship training is an important element of Ireland's strong enterprise and entrepreneurship support system. Policy is guided by a number of high-level policies and strategies, including Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 (Ireland, 2016[43]), the OECD Road Map for SME and Entrepreneurship Policy in Ireland (OECD, 2019[44]) and the Report of the SME Taskforce: SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan (Ireland, 2021[45]). These are complemented by group-specific action plans such as the Enterprise Ireland 2020 Action Plan for Women in Business (Enterprise Ireland, 2020[46]) as well as regional enterprise plans such as the Regional Enterprise Plan to 2024: Dublin (Ireland, 2022[47]). In practice, entrepreneurship training for people from under-represented groups are implemented by a core group of actors:

- **Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)** are the principal agency for promoting entrepreneurship in local communities. One of the main offers is training programme Start Your Own Business, which is composed of modules including identifying target market, financial planning, promotion, bookkeeping and more. They also have an online platform (supportingSMEs.gov.ie) that directs entrepreneurs and SMEs to available support programmes. In addition, a number of initiatives are targeted a specific groups such as youth. Examples include the National Student Enterprise Awards and Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur competition.

- **Enterprise Ireland** offers different formats of entrepreneurship training to different client groups. Some general information on business creation is provided in the online portal Information Store for Start-ups, but most support is targeted at high potential start-ups. This includes EnterpriseSTART 2 "Challenging and Validating your Business Idea" that is delivered in partnership with the Business Innovation Centres (BICs) in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Waterford, as well as the Sprint accelerator, which is delivered by the Dublin BIC. It also offers a range of sector-specific programmes such as Foodworks Ireland and Bio Innovate Programme, which are offered in collaboration with sector organisations.

  Enterprise Ireland also a range of dedicated actions to support women entrepreneurs that are guided by the Enterprise Ireland Action Plan for Women in Business (2020). Actions include training and mentoring (and financial support) for high potential start-ups led by women, as well as support for capability development programmes for women entrepreneurs such as Going for Growth, Exxcel Female Entrepreneurship and Innovate Programme.

- **Local Development Companies** (LDCs) are multi-sectoral partnerships that deliver a range of services to support rural development, labour market activation, social inclusion, climate action and social enterprise services. Initiatives are delivered by not-for-profit, volunteer-led organisations with support from the government. LDCs can use funding for entrepreneurship training from the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-23. Examples include Inner City Enterprise, which offers entrepreneurship training and business advice to the unemployed, youth and social entrepreneurs. One of its notable initiatives is the Young Entrepreneur Training Programme, a 3-week programme for 18-30 year olds that cover business creation and personal development.

- **Further Education and Training Authority (SOLAS) / Education and Training Boards** operate a large number of training and upskilling programmes. While these are primarily aimed at employees, some cover entrepreneurship. These offers are generally targeted to the unemployed or those at risk of losing their job, but some training offers are aimed at young people.

- **Intreo Centres** (public employment service) offer courses on entrepreneurship skills and business creation for the unemployed.

- The **Department of Justice** is working to implement the Working to Change Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021-23, which seeks to improve employment options for people who have criminal records. The Strategy highlights entrepreneurship as one of the strategic areas and a points to a number of actions including the continuation and expansion of the Prison Entrepreneurship Programme, the establishment a network of business mentors to support those in the criminal justice system and strengthening engagement with Community Enterprise Hubs and LEOs. Several actors such as POBAL are supporting the implementation of the strategy.

The schemes implemented by these actors are complemented by a large range of initiatives that are led by non-government actors. Many of these initiatives are focussed on providing entrepreneurship training for population groups that are under-represented in entrepreneurship such as women, immigrants, youth, people with disabilities, ex-offenders and travellers (Table 3.1). Some of these initiatives are also supported by private sector or by social enterprises, which are supported under Ireland's National Social Enterprise policy 2019-22. Social enterprises commonly offer training and mentoring in the areas of business planning, mentoring, leadership, governance, capacity building, financial planning and digital innovation.

Table 3.1. Selection of tailored entrepreneurship training initiatives for under-represented groups

Target group	Tailored entrepreneurship offer
Women	• Going for Growth is an internationally acclaimed peer-to-peer mentoring programme designed to encourage more women entrepreneurs to be ambitious and supports them to achieve their growth aspirations.
	• Starting Strong is aimed at ambitious early-stage female entrepreneurs whose pre-revenue development, degree of innovation and growth potential are all above average.
	• ACORNS is a training programme based on round-tables for early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural communities.
Immigrants	• Several organisations and networks such as the New Communities Partnership, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland and Dignity Partnership offer workshops and advice to immigrants on self-employment.
Youth	• Entrepreneurship modules and programmes are offered in all higher education institutions, which are often accompanied by a range of other start-up supports (e.g. incubators).
	• Similar actions are growing for students in formal education such as Foróige National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship, which is delivered to 12-18 year olds.
	• Education and Training Boards also deliver some entrepreneurship training as stand-alone programmes or embedded into other programmes.
Seniors	• None identified.
People with disabilities	• Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities, which is hosted by TU Dublin. This initiative was piloted in 2021 and provided training to 20 entrepreneurs with disabilities out of 38 applicants. Following the course 6 successfully started a business.
	• The online course Open Doors Webinar Series for people with disabilities who wish to purse entrepreneurship was organised by Towards Work. As of May 2022, all modules were available online.
Ex-offenders	• The Start Your Own Business programme was launched in 2017 in collaboration with the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board and the Irish Prison Service.
Travellers	• A number of community development projects offer entrepreneurship training for travelers such as Meath Travellers' Workshops.

…but the quality and availability is uneven across the country

Overall, workshop participants and key stakeholders assessed entrepreneurship training initiatives as strong relative to other inclusive entrepreneurship measures. Across the six pillars of the OECD-EU Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool, Building entrepreneurship skills and capacities across

the population was among those pillars assessed as being the strongest. Nonetheless, the "skills" pillar was collectively scored 5 out of 10, signalling that stakeholders believe that there is substantial scope for strengthening entrepreneurship training. Facilitating access to finance was assessed as average, while Strengthening the design and delivery of inclusive entrepreneurship support and Building a supportive regulatory environment for inclusive entrepreneurship were considered as needing more improvements.

Among the good practice statements that comprise the "skills" pillar, stakeholders scored the availability of coaching and mentoring and the use of appropriate delivery channels highly. Both of these good practice statement had an average score of 6 out of 10 (Figure 3.3). Other good practice statements point to areas for improvement as well as gaps. These include a need to better identify the needs of different entrepreneurs so that they can be matched to appropriate training, increase use of individualised support and tailored support, and strengthen links to financial support.

Discussion in the seminar around the results of the Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool highlighted a number of strengths and weaknesses. The majority of participants agreed that many of the tailored entrepreneurship training initiatives are successful at reaching their target group and improve access to entrepreneurship. This was particularly true for women entrepreneurs and to a lesser extent youth entrepreneurs and those seeking to start a business out of unemployment. However, participants noted that there are few tailored offers available for some groups, including seniors, immigrants, people with disabilities, travellers and ex-offenders. A small number of small-scale interventions offer entrepreneurship training but these are delivered by non-government organisations rather than government. While some of these offers are of high quality, many rely on volunteers who lack the resources and networks of professional trainers. These offers also tend to be concentrated in urban areas so many offers will only be available in a specific location.

Figure 3.3. Irish stakeholders score the availability of coaching and delivery channels highly

Assigned scores to good practice statements in the "skills" pillar of the OECD-EU Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool, April 2022
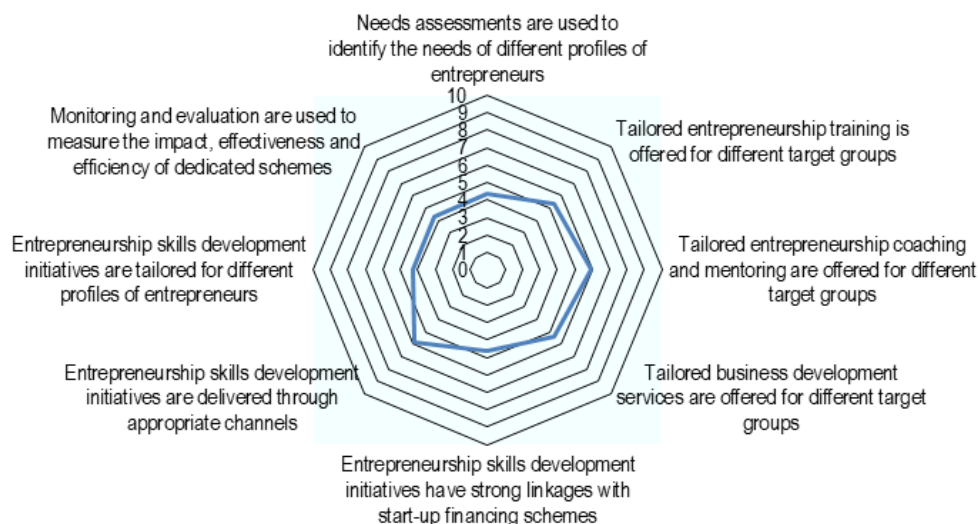
Note: This figure reports the average scores assigned to the good practice statements in the skills section of the OECD-EU Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool. The assessment tool was used by 10 stakeholders in advance of the workshop on 28 April 2022.

4 Moving forward

The seminar participants used breakout groups to identify and discuss priority actions that could be taken to strengthen entrepreneurship training for people from under-represented groups.

Implement a referral system to help entrepreneurs identify relevant entrepreneurship and management training offers

What?

Workshop participants agreed that although there are many entrepreneurship training offers across Ireland, a weakness in the support system is that many entrepreneurs have difficulty identifying relevant training offers to strengthen their entrepreneurship and management skills. This calls for a two-step approach to build a referral system to connect entrepreneurs to relevant entrepreneurship and business management training offers by government agencies and non-government actors. The first step to strengthen signposting would be to complete a comprehensive mapping of relevant training offers at the national and local levels. This mapping should include basic information on different offers, including the name of the scheme, programme manager, location, brief overview of scheme (i.e. 2-3 sentences), entry requirements and costs for participants (if applicable). This mapping would need to be updated biennially to ensure that the information is up-to-date.

Once the mapping is complete, there is a need to effectively disseminate the information to entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs. A starting point could be to develop an online platform that acts as a knowledge hub, as called for in some of the regional enterprise plans. This would require developing an online tool that is hosted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). It could be open to the public, or intended for use by LEOs and their network of mentors. This would need to be complemented with an awareness raising campaign to ensure that LEOs are informed about entrepreneurship training offers. The DETE could organise awareness raising workshops with the LEOs to ensure that they have updated information on entrepreneurship training offers for different target groups.

While a comprehensive mapping exercise would likely lead to greater awareness among entrepreneurs, a more proactive approach could be more effective. The "facilitators" model in Australia (Box 2.3) has demonstrated strong results and can be adapted by the LEOs. The LEOs already have a large network of entrepreneurship mentors and their role could be expanded to that of a "facilitator" to build on their knowledge and regular contact with entrepreneurs in their area. Ongoing workshops could be used to inform the mentors/facilitators about the training offers in the local area, as well as online training offers from national agencies and organisations. The mentors/facilitators would need to have early interactions with entrepreneurs to help them identify their training needs. This would require an assessment tool or framework, which could be an online tool that asks about their motivations, ambitions and experience. The results of the tool would help identify training needs and match them to offers based on the mapping.

Why?

There is a large number of tailored entrepreneurship training offers available for different population groups through various government agencies and non-government organisations but it can be a difficult system for entrepreneurs to navigate. This is particularly true for new entrepreneurs, especially those with lower skill levels. There is no clear entry point into the system for new entrepreneurs who are not familiar with the various actors providing entrepreneurship training. Many people might go to Enterprise Ireland but the majority of their training offers are for businesses that are already established. The LEOs are a more appropriate entry point but many workshop participants perceived that there is a low level of awareness about the types of supports offered by LEOs. In addition, the offers vary from one city to another. Another risk identified by participants was that many initiatives are stand-alone activities that are not well-connected to policy objectives.

Increase the availability of tailored entrepreneurship training across all regions

What?

Access to entrepreneurship training can be improved in two primary ways: use of online delivery platforms and dissemination through existing networks of training providers. In recent years, a clear trend in the delivery of entrepreneurship training has been the increased use of online delivery. This provides greater flexibility for participating in training and creates new opportunities for entrepreneurs to access training that might not be offered in their city. Experiences across OECD countries show that online entrepreneurship training can be effective under the right conditions such as the Yes I Start Up initiative (Box 2.1) but other experiences such as enterability (Box 2.2) show that the online format did not allow for the same level of individualised support compared to trainings delivered in-person as well as highlighting the importance of personal contact for participants. The DETE could support training providers that are moving their training schemes online with some brief guidelines, good practice lessons and checklists. An important element of these support materials is to offer some assistance to training providers in the decision about whether online training is appropriate for the training objectives and targeted participants.

Going online is not the only solution for increasing the availability of entrepreneurship training, particularly for groups with lower levels of digital skills and self-motivation. The Yes I Start Up initiative (Box 2.1) offers of model of how entrepreneurship training schemes can be disseminated through networks of training providers. In this approach, a standard curriculum is developed and then delivered through a network of local training providers who have met certain criteria set forth by the programme. The training developer would then need to train the network of training providers so that they understand the expected learning outcomes and learning pathways for participants. It also requires the establishment of a monitoring system to ensure that the entrepreneurs are achieving the expected learning outcomes through the network of training providers. The DETE could proactively identify some of the leading entrepreneurship training programmes offered through public and non-government providers (i.e. those receiving public financial support) and assess the potential for scaling up training offers through a network where there is the greatest demand. The LEOs can have a central role by helping to identify potential training providers to be in the network along with the Irish Local Development Network and POBAL. The LEOs can also support the roll-out of training offers by facilitating training the trainers and monitoring implementation to ensure the quality and consistency of the training courses.

Why?

While general entrepreneurial training such as the LEO Start Your Own Business programme is offered in every County in Ireland, access to entrepreneurship training that is tailored for the needs of different target population groups is currently uneven. Thus a major determinant on the accessibility

of tailored entrepreneurship training that is typically offered by non-government organisations is the location where individuals live. Some people from groups that are under-represented may be able to access suitable and high quality training online, but many will have difficulties with this format.

Go further in "professionalising" coaching and mentoring

What?

Coaching and mentoring schemes for entrepreneurship and inclusive entrepreneurship could be strengthened by providing ongoing training opportunities for coaches and mentors. Public agencies have made efforts to recruit experienced staff and provide trainings to advisors, consultants and mentors to provide the bespoke support needed in their area. This includes the provision of training such as the EI Best Practice Masterclasses and tools such as Best Practice Guide for the Mentor Network. These capacity building activities could be further strengthened by offering additional training modules to entrepreneurship coaches and mentors to cover new methods of supporting entrepreneurs and emerging forms of entrepreneurship. These modules could, for example, cover new developments in entrepreneurship support in core areas such as new coaching and mentoring tools and techniques; new financial instruments and markets (e.g. crowdfunding, fintech); and emerging markets for entrepreneurs (e.g. operating an online businesses, green entrepreneurship). These would aim to provide coaches and mentors with guidance to work with entrepreneurs based on leading international practices. This could include, for example, toolkits and checklists that can be used in a flexible way to meet the needs of the entrepreneurs that are being supported. An additional special module on diversity in entrepreneurship and working with entrepreneurs from under-represented groups (e.g. women, immigrants, people with disabilities, ex-offenders) is recommended. This module could highlight the specific challenges faced by people from different population groups, as well as appropriate and effective approaches to working with them. All of the short modules on different topics (i.e. 1-hour each) could be organised into a programme comprised of 4 or 5 modules. The DETE could be responsible for developing the modules, with support from the LDCs and POBAL. The training modules could be delivered by the LEOs to ensure that they are available in all regions. The DETE could consider offering a certification for coaches and mentors that complete the programme, which would also require an assessment process such as a short exam at the end of each module.

Why?

Coaching and mentoring schemes for entrepreneurship and inclusive entrepreneurship tend to rely on volunteers which risks leading to uneven results. The quality of entrepreneurship coaching and mentoring offers could be strengthened through further training the mentors/coaches in a formalised process. Professional mentors and coaches can typically go further to help improve the quality and consistency of entrepreneurship training offers.

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