

Review of Business
Mentoring Services in
Ireland

July 2014

Forfás



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1. Background and objectives

This paper is a summary of the Review of Business Mentoring Services in Ireland, which was initiated through the Action Plan for Jobs 2013 (action 174: *review the mentoring services available to start-up and small businesses and identify any necessary action to be taken*). The review was led by Forfás and overseen by a project Steering Group consisting of representatives of Enterprise Ireland, Forfás, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Forfás commissioned FMR Research to undertake research and consultancy services on its behalf.

Internationally, there is no single definition of the term 'mentoring'. This means that it is open to each mentoring programme to apply the term as they choose. It also makes a review such as this challenging to scope.

The merits of business mentoring as a means of helping enterprises develop are generally accepted, as evidenced by experience in Ireland and internationally.¹ In parallel, differences exist in approach to business mentoring internationally. The challenge is about how the State can best contribute to the organisation and provision of business mentoring services in the country, with the aim of strengthening the performance of SMEs in a cost effective manner. A recent Oireachtas report *Exploring a New Approach to Providing Mentoring Services for the SME sector in Ireland*² raises questions about the current approach to mentoring.

The purpose of this review is to explore how Ireland's overall approach to business mentoring can be developed and the effectiveness of the main publicly funded providers of mentoring services. Specifically, the objectives of the review are to:

- Map the currently available range of business mentoring and wider business advisory services, delivered by both the public and private sectors, for start-ups and small business (less than 50 employees) in Ireland (including for example, crisis management, financial advisory services etc.). The mapping exercise establishes the array of both private and publicly funded providers.
- Undertake a detailed review of the main mentoring provision supported by public funding (Enterprise Ireland, County Enterprise Boards³ (CEBs) and Skillnets) to start up and small businesses (less than 50 employees).
- Set out a range of options on how best practice mentoring services supported by the State could be managed and delivered.

Success in this area can be demonstrated by the increased resilience and growth of Irish businesses, jobs protected, new jobs created and increases in sales turnover of businesses including international sales.

¹ FMR Research (2012) Evaluation of Enterprise Ireland's Mentor Network

² Exploring a New Approach to Providing Mentoring Services for the SME sector in Ireland, , February 2013, prepared by Deputy Áine Collins Joint Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

³ Since April 2014, the County Enterprise Boards (CEBs) have been dissolved and the staff integrated into Local Authorities who will carry out the functions on behalf of Enterprise Ireland, subsequent to this Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) have been established. The evaluation of the mentor programme and findings refers throughout this report to the CEBs. Future action and recommendations relate to the newly formed LEOs

2. Methodology

The project method involved the following research strands:

- Identification and data gathering via secondary research of 175 organisations involved with business mentoring and advisory services in Ireland. Data obtained included outlines of mentoring focus and approach, funding model, mentor base and client base/market penetration and regional spread/focus.
- Dialogue with mentoring researchers and professional interest groups, seeking insight into the prevailing trends in the sector and anticipated future developments.
- Secondary research into mentoring practice and the evaluation of mentoring practice in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.
- In-depth review of mentoring practice within CEBs including data of mentoring activity from every CEB, feedback and perspectives from over 400 clients and over 200 mentors.
- Assessment and incorporation of the findings of recent in-depth evaluations of mentoring services provided by Enterprise Ireland and Skillnets.
- Two workshops with senior stakeholders (providers, industry representatives and policymakers) in business mentoring to explore research findings, discuss the implications and consider options (Appendix I).

This research was undertaken in 2013.

3. Insights from international practice

Many developed economies have formal mentoring programmes as part of their business support recipes. It is widely practiced. There are many different designs of mentoring programmes in evidence, indicating that there is no one best way to configure and manage mentoring support and that programmes are context-specific.

Accepting the definitional challenge, in practice business mentoring programmes around the world seek to set and maintain service standards and service consistency by establishing criteria for the recruitment of new mentors. There is also consideration of training for mentors and in some cases the accreditation of mentors, written service standards and practice guidelines, pro-formas for programme administration and mechanisms to derive feedback from individual clients and mentors.⁴

In other countries, there is a greater preponderance of business mentoring programmes which depend on unpaid mentors than exists in Ireland. Programmes around the world vary in style (for example duration, number of meetings, whether stand-alone or part of a broader business support offer) but the predominant delivery style remains one-to-one, face-to-face. While still a valid and essential component of the mix, the traditional business mentoring model is being extended and broadened into different models.⁵ These include peer to peer,

⁴ The Get Mentoring programme in the UK sought to recruit unpaid mentors from the business community and encourage each to undertake a short mentoring skills training session (delivered face to face and online) which was examined. Many mentoring programmes seek to develop service consistency

⁵ FMR Research (2012) Evaluation of Enterprise Ireland Mentoring Programme (pg. 44)

web-enabled/un-brokered, 'reverse mentoring',⁶ speed mentoring/bootcamp, and group-based approaches. In web-based approaches, business clients have a more direct say in their choice of mentor, being guided by web-based diagnostics to help them determine the fundamental challenge their business faces.

Internationally, business mentoring is capably applied to businesses at the pre-start/start-up phase and to established businesses, with widely varying levels of penetration. Data from countries with established national mentoring programmes suggest that mentoring is mostly focused on start-ups (in terms of sector penetration). For example, in the UK, approximately 11 per cent of SMEs aged 0-3 years have used a mentor in the previous 12 months, compared to 5 per cent of SMEs aged 4-10 years and 4 per cent of SMEs 10 years and older.⁷ It is believed there are three reasons for this trend:

- The first is about awareness of provision and businesses not knowing such services exist.
- The second (and believed to be more challenging) is the degree to which potential business clients are 'ready' for mentoring:
 - Research shows that micro/small businesses display characteristics such as the distrust of external advice (and the motives of the advisers), concerns around the loss of face and personal insecurity, and also scepticism of the value of such help to their business; and
 - There are also questions about business clients ability to 'self-diagnose' and accurately identify the fundamental challenges their businesses face are echoed by mentoring programmes around the world.
- The third is that it is difficult for a single programme to be 'all things to all people', based around one engagement model. Some businesses will favour different modes of engagement and desired benefits, such as a geographical and/or sector focus, which a national programme may not be perceived to offer.

Many mentoring programmes around the world have been independently evaluated, including an extensive review of over a hundred studies and evaluations on mentoring.⁸ The evaluations point to the conclusion there is no single best design for a business mentoring programme and effective mentoring solutions are context specific. However there are some consistent themes that emerge from the independent evaluations - the main four of which appear below.

- First, the economic value of business mentoring is difficult to quantify. The two main challenges are the lack of objective data and, where data exist, the difficulty of asserting the attribution of quantifiable business benefits back to mentoring interventions.

⁶ In reverse mentoring, the mentor has more knowledge in a particular area. However, the mentee has more overall experience (typically as a result of age) than the mentor (who is typically younger), thereby reversing the typical configuration. Examples are when ICT graduates train experienced executives in realising the benefits of social media or mobile technology

⁷ UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (December 2013) Research Paper No. 158 'Demand for Mentoring Among SMEs'

⁸ Garvey, B. and Garrett-Harris, R. (2008) 'The Benefits of Mentoring: A literature review for East Mentor's Forum.' Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University

- Second, the general findings from the evaluations indicate that mentoring for businesses is beneficial and that an integrated approach - mentoring as part of a broader business development programme - is even more beneficial.
- Third, and related to the above, is the recognition that 'good' mentoring is more useful than 'more' mentoring. Enthusiasm to extend the scope of mentoring programmes should be tempered by a reflection on the quality and competence of the mentors and the knowledge that raising the quality of the service is likely to be more valuable to clients.
- Fourth, the primary impacts are that businesses speed up the pace by which they accomplish things and they have increased focus and confidence about their future.

4. Business mentoring in Ireland - overview

In Ireland, as in other countries, there is no universal definition or understanding of the term 'mentoring' across providers. Some services which appear to follow a mentoring approach are not referred to as mentoring, while others labelled as mentoring are more akin to consultancy. For the purposes of this review, the role of the mentor is defined as "to listen, guide and challenge, to consider a range of options and help the client to prioritise opportunities - the role is not that of a consultant, it is the client's responsibility to choose the option and implement the plans".

The business mentoring ecosystem is highly diverse in Ireland with a wide variety of providers when compared to other countries. This raises inherent challenges around consistency and coordination from a policy perspective and the attendant complexity presents issues for companies seeking to access the support most appropriate to them. Notwithstanding these challenges, the approach performs strongly in terms of its overall reach or market penetration of the business sector, particularly for start-up and pre start-up enterprises. The mapping exercise undertaken identified 175 organisations active in Ireland in providing business mentoring. The main publicly funded providers are Enterprise Ireland, Skillnets and the County Enterprise Boards.⁹ There are also mentoring services provided within 15 Incubation Centres and as part of the 10 Enterprise Ireland New Frontiers programmes. It also includes more focused (regional and sector) initiatives many of which are 'ground up' entrepreneurial solutions rather than 'top down' models, including 45 Local Development Networks such as Leader Groups and the Plato Network. A number of Private Providers/Corporates (9), Banks (4) and Chambers of Commerce (4) have also been identified in the mapping exercise.

In summary the range of providers can be categorised broadly as follows:

- Agencies of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation;
- **Other state agencies** including Bord Bia, Bord Iscaigh Mhara, Sustainable Energy Ireland, Teagasc, Crafts Council, Western Development Commission;
- **Academic institutions** (primarily through Incubation and Innovation Centres) including IOTs, Universities, Nova, Ryan Academy;

⁹ The 175 organisations include all the County Enterprise Boards, Local Development Companies, Business Innovation Centres etc. as separate entries. This recognises the variances in scale and practice across different organisations in the same category

- **Local Development Networks** including LEADER partnership programmes;¹⁰
- **Private companies**, including e.g. IBM, Ernst & Young, Telefonica, Vodafone, banks and others
- **Business Representative Bodies and Networks**, including MBA Association of Ireland, Irish Exporters Association, Chambers of Commerce;
- **State funded skills development programmes** - primarily Skillnets; and
- **Others, including VCs and NGOs** including for example, Silicon Valley, Senior Enterprise, the Women's Business, Social Entrepreneurs Ireland.

Of the 175 organisations identified, 72 percent are based outside of Dublin and all regions appear to be well served via public and private sector providers. Approximately 11 percent provide services throughout the country (including for example, Enterprise Ireland, the Banks, Vodafone).

The majority of the service offerings are broad business based, with a small number of organisations focused primarily on specific sectors, including for example, digital media/Internet based sectors and activities, food, sustainable energy, construction, social enterprises and crafts. However, many of the broad business based offerings (although not possible to quantify) offer mentor services that are tailored to the specific need of a company operating within a sector (e.g. Enterprise Ireland mentor services).

Mentoring activity ranges from 'light touch', standalone mentoring (for example Vodafone speed mentoring initiative) to much more intensive and structured approaches. These include mentoring which takes place over a defined period of time and with defined objectives (Enterprise Ireland, County Enterprise Boards), where mentoring is provided with the end goal of pitching for angel investment (e.g. StartupBootcamp Dublin) or where mentoring is integrated as a core component of intensive management development programmes (Bord Bia, Management Works Skillnet, CEB Accelerate Programme) (See Appendix II).

Compared to other forms of business support (for example, grant finance, consulting support, training, free or subsidised premises), mentoring is a relatively low investment per client which enables a modest overall budget to spread across a larger number of client businesses.

5. Market penetration

Annually, business mentoring provision in Ireland reaches around 21,000 businesses, which represents around 11 per cent of the total business base. Around 15 per cent of businesses in Ireland appear to have benefitted from mentoring from more than one source, thus availing of different expertise as they face different business challenges/needs.

There is a far stronger penetration/provision of mentoring with businesses at their start-up stage in Ireland than there is with established firms. Around 14,000 business mentoring assignments with businesses in their pre-start/start-up phase take place in Ireland each year. The level of assignments is higher than total start-up activity each year indicating significant activity in the pre-start phase.¹¹ Within both the Enterprise Ireland mentor network and CEBs

¹⁰ Mentoring activity within LEADER partnerships is highly diverse in nature and relates both to mentoring of enterprises and community groups, or can be part of training offered by LEADER partnerships (e.g. event management)

¹¹ There were 11,847 enterprise births (new enterprises created) in Ireland in 2011 (source: CSO Business in Ireland 2011)

mentoring provision, approximately 80 percent of mentoring activity relates to pre start-ups and start-ups.

Around 7,600 business mentoring assignments take place each year with established businesses in Ireland (the vast majority of which are micro or small businesses). This suggests an annual penetration level across all providers of around 4 per cent of the total business base. This is comparable to UK figures where 4-5 per cent of established SMEs over 4 years of age have engaged in mentoring in the previous 12 months.¹²

At the same time, there are often challenges in engaging the established business base. Mirroring the international experience, the evaluations and consultations highlighted that the same issues exist with established businesses in Ireland about awareness of provision and, more importantly, distrust of external advice (and the motives of the advisers), concerns around the loss of face and personal insecurity and scepticism of the value of such help to their business. This presents a 'changing mind sets' challenge in terms of extending the reach of mentoring provision while also making it extremely difficult to quantify the level of unmet demand that will actually materialise if provision is increased.

6. Mentors, costs and approaches in Ireland

Mentors

There are approximately 3,000 people engaged in providing mentoring to businesses in Ireland. Two thirds of business mentoring assignments are carried out by paid mentors and one third by unpaid mentors.

Enterprise Ireland has the single largest panel of mentors in the country (c.380) and the CEBs the largest aggregate 'pool' (1,200) although they each retain their own database/mentor panel.¹³ The majority (around 70 per cent) of paid mentors in Ireland provide mentoring services on behalf of more than one organisation (for example, more than one CEB or for Enterprise Ireland and a CEB).

The research interviews and the secondary data suggested there are three main types of business mentor in Ireland:

1. Paid business mentors with either general management or specialist expertise;
2. Unpaid mentors who are retired business executives with general management expertise (the volunteer generalist); and
3. Unpaid mentors still active in business with either general management or specialist expertise (the volunteer specialist).

The least desired of the three types by firms appears to be retired business executives (who tend to offer general management experience) - the concern being that these people may not have up to date knowledge. The most challenging to engage as well as being the most sought after is the volunteer specialist. The research indicates that the most effective routes to recruiting volunteer mentors who are still active in business (and may have up to date specialist expertise) into mentoring programmes tend to be via the personal

¹² UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (December 2013) Research Paper No. 158 'Demand for Mentoring Among SMEs'

¹³ The 'pool' is the aggregate total of the individual CEB mentor panels. Note, some mentors provide mentoring for more than one CEB and are not isolated in the figure

networks/networking of mentor programme coordinators/project managers and via the corporate social responsibility orientation of the employer organisation.

Volunteer mentors, on the one hand, present a strong opportunity to increase the scale of mentoring activity without the direct cost implications of the paid mentor model but, on the other hand, there are inherent challenges in securing their long term commitment and ensuring consistent standards for engagement.

Cost

The value of the business mentoring sector in Ireland is estimated to be in excess of €9m per annum. This includes State funding - €5.3m, European funding - €1.1m, private sector¹⁴ - €0.7m, business (client) contributions - €1.1m, value of unpaid mentors' input¹⁵ - €0.8m. The cost of a mentoring assignment (costs of provision) for which data is identifiable ranges from €26 to €2,759 per business¹⁶ with the median point on the scale at €333.¹⁷

The three main determinants which govern the cost of provision are:

1. the number of mentoring meetings an assignment contains - assignments with fewer meetings cost less to provide than those with more;
2. the degree of voluntary/unpaid input to the provision - either as the provider of the mentoring service or as the organiser/coordinator of the mentoring service; and
3. the scale/experience curve effects - bigger scale mentoring programmes and those benefitting from refinement through experiential learning tend to be more cost efficient than smaller scale programmes and novel approaches.

The mentoring model in Ireland includes approaches which are free of cost to the client or where the client pays a fee equivalent to a portion of the cost of provision. Very little business mentoring is undertaken in Ireland on a basis where the client pays a full commercial rate for the mentoring service. The accepted wisdom is that the vast majority of businesses in the target market for business mentoring (pre-start/start-up businesses and micro/small businesses) lack either the disposition or the means to pay a commercial rate for mentoring. Where clients are expected to pay for their mentoring support, the main driver behind this is to help ensure client commitment to the process rather than seek an entirely client-funded business support model.

Approaches

In Ireland, business mentoring provision includes models which use paid mentors and unpaid mentors, plus approaches which provide 'stand-alone' mentoring and those where business mentoring is more integrated with other business support (for example, incubator space, loans/grant finance, and structured training). Business mentoring in Ireland is dominated by a 'coordinated face-to-face' model. The coordination involves matching the business client with the most appropriate mentor, recognising that in many cases business clients need help in diagnosing the main challenges their businesses face. The distinction between the 'issue presented' by the client and the 'real issue' is the main reason that mentoring programmes

¹⁴ These are primarily from corporate social responsibility spend and sponsorship

¹⁵ This is calculated using the value of input as €50 per hour

¹⁶ 90 per cent of business mentoring assignments in Ireland falls within this band of costs. There are outliers at either end of the band

¹⁷ Enterprise Ireland and the CEBs now pay mentors €175 for a three-hour meeting with a mentoring client

have favoured the use of a coordinator or broker to match the business client with the best mentor.

There is some evidence that the delivery mechanisms around mentoring are expanding from the traditional relationship-based one-to-one model. In line with developments in other countries, recent interpretations and extensions of the mentoring approach are towards shorter interventions (such as speed mentoring, mentor panels), group-based mentoring (included facilitated peer mentoring). There is little use of technology within current mentoring offerings in Ireland, the most prevalent being the use of communication technologies like Skype within mentoring relationships. Web-based platforms for mentoring are beginning to be developed and experimented with but have yet to become more mainstreamed.

The prevailing trend in Ireland seems to be towards sector-based mentoring programmes, where mentoring can be more clearly tailored to the needs of businesses in a particular sector and more readily integrated with other support relevant to such businesses. The prevalence of 'ground-up' initiatives reflects the entrepreneurial nature of mentoring services which often organically materialise through local or industry representatives in response to specific needs in a locality or niche sector. The 'ground up' approach can add considerable value to the mentoring ecosystem in terms of delivering specialities and this cannot be easily replicated by the State through a top-down approach.

7. Evaluations of main providers of publicly funded mentoring services

The main publicly funded mentoring programmes (Enterprise Ireland's Mentor Network, CEB mentoring and Skillnets Management Works¹⁸) have been recently evaluated and/or reviewed.¹⁹ The programmes each had favourable outcomes and impacts.²⁰

The Evaluation of the Enterprise Ireland Mentor Network (2008-2012) was based on survey evidence of 267 clients (from a total population of 1,000), 168 mentors (from a total population of 330) and 47 Enterprise Ireland Development Advisors in addition to follow up interviews and consultations with Enterprise Ireland. The evaluation found that:

- 82 per cent of respondents felt participation met their business needs;
- 79 per cent felt the mentor was helpful to them in achieving their objectives;
- 67 percent of clients felt better prepared to face challenges because of mentor help;
- 59 percent considered the support of the mentor to be the most suitable type of support for their business ; and
- 47 percent said their business had grown because of mentor help [123 clients]. The determination of quantitative impact is challenging as it is difficult to directly attribute

¹⁸ Within the Management Works Skillnet, the mentoring activity is an integrated part of the management development programmes

¹⁹ These three mentoring programmes receive around €3.4m of public funding annually, which approximates to about two thirds of annual public sector funding for business mentoring in the country

²⁰ Note, the individual programmes operate on widely varying scales and have different modus operandi. Because of this and the fact the evaluation methodologies differ, the quantitative findings are not directly comparable

a business' achievements directly to mentoring and particularly so when such support is integrated with other financial/business development supports.²¹

The main impact was in improving the focus and pace of the business, enabling it to develop more quickly in many cases and, arguably more importantly, provided the owner with increased confidence. Detailed recommendations focus on the need to augment mentors with specialisms, greater flexibility around number of mentor engagements, greater use of technology-enabled mentoring and focus on specific functional areas such as financial management.

CEBs mentoring activities range from discrete mentoring support to integrated approaches including, for example, the CEB Accelerate Programme. In relation to the CEB evaluation, 409 CEB clients in receipt of mentoring support from CEBs responded to the survey out of an estimated client population of 15,000 (over the past 3 years).²² The CEB evaluation found that:

- 86 percent of respondents said that the mentoring support met its business needs;
- 82 per cent of respondents felt better prepared to face challenges because of mentor help;
- 79 percent felt that the support of a mentor was the most appropriate support for their business needs;
- 61 per cent felt their business had grown as a result of the mentor help; and
- 41 per cent cited other benefits including increased confidence, focus and direction and enhanced business/management capabilities.

In general, clients that received integrated supports and/or had 4 or more engagements with mentors were more likely to record increased turnover or jobs than those that met their mentor only once.²³

Overall, mentoring was seen as making a good, positive contribution to clients and their businesses. The key programme development issues to emerge from the data were as follows: no universal approach to training of mentors; inconsistent approach to note taking during meetings and reporting following meetings; lack of consistency in feedback on mentors' performance; the amount of contact/meetings was, on occasions, too little; the apparent lack of signposting clients to other business support; and a lack of data for the evaluation of impact of mentoring support. It was also noted that a high proportion of CEB mentoring provision was focused on start-ups relative to established SMEs.

An interim evaluation of the mentoring element of the Skillnet Management Works programme received 90 responses (out of an estimated 200 population).²⁴ The evaluation found that:

²¹ In the case of the Enterprise Ireland evaluation, only 21 companies were able to attribute quantified benefits to mentoring - the majority expressed benefit in qualitative terms

²² The response level ranges indicate a confidence interval in the results of better than +5% at 95 percent confidence level assuming the sample was based on a random selection

²³ Depending on the specific measure, between a fifth and a quarter of survey respondents linked the mentoring support to increases in turnover, jobs safeguarded and/or created

²⁴ Management Works involves a range of subsidised, tailored management programmes which are supported by professional business mentors

- 91 per cent of participants surveyed were positive about the programme's contribution to their business potential and 86 per cent felt their mentors challenges them about their business.
- 32 per cent reported increased turnover and 32 per cent reported increased profits.
- Overall the evaluation showed the mentoring component in a very positive light, with the exception of some clients wishing more time be allocated to the mentoring within the Management Works programme.

In summary, the evaluations have supported the efficacy of the approaches but have also drawn attention to areas which can be strengthened. The main issues to emerge in the evaluations were around:

- Further raising the bar in terms of mentor capability;
- Service consistency;
- The benefits of integration between mentoring and other forms of business support; and
- The provision of data to support impact evaluation.

It is important to acknowledge that the format and structure of each of the programmes is quite different - a reflection more so of the needs and characteristics of the client base and the objectives of the assignment. For example the CEB assignments involved 54 percent of clients meeting with the mentor between one and three times, Enterprise Ireland's programme involves a more structured process and 92 percent had engaged in meetings with mentors ranging from three to over ten. The Skillnets mentor service is an integral element of its ManagementWorks programme.

8. Conclusions and recommendations

Evidence from evaluations of programmes in Ireland and internationally illustrates that mentoring is clearly beneficial and can be a very effective enterprise support (especially when integrated with other supports). Furthermore, it is a relatively cost effective method of reaching out to and supporting the small business sector. Ireland performs well by international standards in terms of market penetration, especially with regard to mentoring services for start-up and pre start-up businesses.

Based on the evidence and consultations, this review makes a number of recommendations. The actions aim to address the key issues identified in the review and to expand and enhance Ireland's business mentor services for start-ups and small firms. The objectives for developing mentoring services in Ireland for the future are to:

1. Raise the bar, in terms of service quality, consistency and professionalism for all mentor service engagements;
2. Increase the scope of mentoring for established companies and in the provision of specialist mentoring provision with a particular focus on micro and small enterprises;
3. Establish appropriate metrics and develop the capability to measure the impact of business mentoring.

The key measures of success of mentoring interventions should be around evidence of:

- Strengthening Ireland's small and micro enterprise capability at the firm level to deliver increased sales and jobs;

- Increased focus on competitiveness and productivity to deliver sustained results;
- Improved sustainability and resilience of Irish businesses; and
- Increased ambition to think globally, to innovate and to internationalise.

Improving efficiency and effectiveness

Currently, mentor panels in the CEBs (now operated by LEOs) and EI operate individually. There are potentially significant benefits and efficiencies to be realised by centralising core internal EI and LEO mentor databases. Once centralised, this should facilitate access by mentors to assist in identifying specific and/or complementary expertise as required. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the business mentor service can be enhanced by taking a more holistic and integrated approach. This is not intended to be prescriptive or to limit the flexibility of providers to deliver mentoring as a stand-alone support option, particularly in the case of pre-start-ups, start-up companies and where the challenges/solutions to the business are not as yet well defined.

Recommendation 1 - Centralising EI and LEO panels

Create a single business mentors database for use internally by the main State supported services, building on the existing databases held by Enterprise Ireland and individual LEOs. This database would be centrally managed and maintained by Enterprise Ireland, with the aim of widening access to mentors as appropriate, reducing duplication and increasing efficiencies. The search function will allow information to be distilled regarding expertise, e.g. functional and/or sectoral, experience, interests, regional reach etc.

(Led by Enterprise Ireland and LEOs)

Recommendation 2 - Holistic approach

- 2(a) Equip mentors with the information needed to communicate the wider enterprise support options that are available to the business mentoring clients as appropriate. This will ensure that Irish businesses are aware of and can benefit from the range of business support available to them.
- 2(b) Encourage more integrated solutions as appropriate, where mentoring is part of a broader support package for businesses.

(Enterprise Ireland, LEOs and Skillnets)

Broadening the scope and access

Ireland measures comparatively well with regard to market penetration of start-ups in particular, however, there is an issue with regard to the balance of provision. The country's mentoring provision for new businesses (some have said 'over provision') masks a comparatively light market penetration of established micro and small firms.

According to the research interviews, it has been suggested that there may be some inconsistencies in terms of the provision of mentor supports to locally traded entities (including across the network of CEBs) and/or that there is the potential to enhance the focus on this cohort. This is particularly pertinent and timely in light of the recent transition of CEBs to Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), their mandate to become the first stop shop for small enterprises and the development of a Centre of Excellence within Enterprise Ireland.

Recommendation 3 - Broadening scope

- 3(a) Equip the LEOs to respond to potential increased demand for business mentoring support from established micro and small businesses, either by way of direct provision using the (new) national panel and/or signposting to other business mentor organisations/providers in the locale.
- 3(b) Identify 2-3 LEOs that would pilot a more proactive approach to actively stimulate demand, raise awareness and address mind-set issues with respect to mentoring. This will help to determine the level of unmet demand and evaluate the potential economic benefits of a more proactive approach in the context of limited resources.

(Led by EI Centre of Excellence with LEOs)

Enhancing consistency and professionalism

The research has identified some issues with consistency and quality of service. There is no consistent approach to the selection of mentors across the main publicly funded organisations, the assessment of their skills and their professional development, which can influence the experience for the client. There is some excellent practice²⁵ (but this is not necessarily universal), which provides a basis to raise the bar in terms of the professionalism of the publicly funded service(s) overall. In addition, there is potential to improve continuing professional development for mentors.

The Centre of Excellence will play a key role in terms of the development of procedures and best practice for the delivery of supports by the LEOs. An immediate action requires the implementation of the recently developed Codes of Practice relating to mentor services.

Recommendation 4 - Consistency

Implement the recently developed CEB Codes of Practice and Terms and Conditions for business mentoring across public funded mentor programmes in order to ensure minimum standards in consistency regarding relationship management, intervention style, client confidentiality, note-taking/reporting, feedback on service performance.

(Led by EI Centre of Excellence with LEOs)

Recommendation 5 - Raising professionalism

In the first instance, develop a consistent approach to training and development for mentors, with the aim of further professionalising mentoring practice.

Informed by international best practice, the DJEI Working Group (see recommendation 8) should consider the pros and cons of aspects such as: introducing a tiered approach appropriate to depth of engagement; accreditation and recognition of prior learning; continued professional development, including approaches to mentor networking, sharing of best practice, collaboration and peer to peer learning between mentors. The Working Group should have regard to servicing the differing needs of clients and the various models of mentoring provision (from light touch to more structured/integrated).

²⁵ For example, the CEBs have recently completed the development of a Code of Conduct (based on Enterprise Ireland's best practice), and PLATO has developed standard training and a NFAQ accredited qualification (FETAC level 6) that its mentors must complete

Based on the deliberations of the working group, an agreed best practice approach should be incorporated into the codes of practice/Terms and Conditions within 12 months (see section on effective implementation below).

(DJEI Working Group)

Monitoring and evaluation

There are no standard approaches to monitoring and evaluating the impact of mentoring internationally. The diversity of provision in Ireland also highlights a lack of consistency in terms of monitoring and evaluation of publicly funded mentoring services. Improvement on this front could better identify gaps in quality and consistency and augment the evidence base available in order to further enhance services.

Good practice is evident among some providers with a particular focus on improving analysis of quantitative benefits (such as increased employment, sales/export growth) and can provide a starting point in this regard.

Recommendation 6 - Monitoring and evaluation

Develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation approach that identifies the metrics needed, collation of relevant data pre- and post-intervention (both quantitative and qualitative).

(DJEI Working Group)

Innovative approaches

There may be potential to use leading edge technologies to supplement the existing state mentoring services with more informal and volunteer based models of delivery. An interactive database could be developed to provide direct access by pre-start-ups, start-ups and established firms to volunteer mentors allowing for a 'self-service' model.²⁶ A range of engagement methods would be promoted, including, for example, online delivery, 'office hours', reverse mentoring, group-based approaches and peer-to-peer learning. Mentors willing to offer their services in this way would provide a profile setting out their area of expertise (sectoral and/or functional), regional location, availability and basis for engagement.

It is envisaged that the concept would be market tested in the first instance, with the intention of progressing to a national approach within a short timeframe thereafter. A number of factors need to be considered including ownership (public and/or private), risk management (and a suitable legal disclaimer applied if/as required), different models of provision, engaging volunteer mentors, raising awareness, financial and human resources, existing panels/databases, managing firms' expectations, etc. Private sector support should be sought in the development, promotion and operation of the database.

On the supply side, there is a particular need for more volunteer specialist mentors. There is an opportunity, especially alongside new and emerging models of mentoring service delivery,

²⁶ Brokerage will continue to be central to state-funded mentoring arrangements so that the suitability, targets and feedback mechanism of mentoring projects will be set out and tracked

to harness the considerable business expertise available in Ireland and the international footprint of Ireland's diaspora, including within the multinational sector and overseas, taking in to account the inherent challenges in securing the commitment of this cohort.

Recommendation 7 - Innovative approaches

7(a) Establish an inter-active searchable, self-service portal that would be accessible to all firms considering mentoring support and that would provide information on the range and experience of mentors. The concept may be market-tested in a region in the first instance.

Encourage mentors to register and indicate their availability, including e.g. experienced entrepreneurs and executives in large companies.

7(b) Seek to expand the mentor population to include a higher proportion of volunteer mentors in areas of under-represented specialist expertise (sectoral, market, technical, internationalisation etc.) including tapping into sources such as Ireland's diaspora, building on the existing work by the enterprise agencies and taking into account inherent challenges in maintaining professionalism, commitment and consistency.

7(c) Seek to increase the contribution from individuals currently employed in the multinational base of companies, ensuring that they are supported by their employers to engage in a consistent/sustainable way (e.g. by way of Corporate Social Responsibility commitments).

(Led by DJEI Working Group with Industry representatives)

Effective implementation

The mentoring landscape is diverse and there is a large number of public and private sector providers of business mentor services (and wider business services) with national, regional and/or sectoral focus. This approach serves well in terms of breadth of coverage and specialisms. At the same time, it presents challenges from a policy perspective in terms of focusing and delivering on the actions needed to enhance services and avoid duplication.

Therefore, a pragmatic approach to implementation is required. It is suggested that initially the focus of action should be on the larger scale State-supported enterprise programmes to embed best practice and professionalism on a consistent basis (namely, Enterprise Ireland, LEOs and Skillnets) and to deliver on the objectives set out above.

It is recommended that a Working Group will be established for a period of 12-18 months. The Working Group should be led by DJEI (or its nominated Chair) and made up of representatives from Enterprise Ireland, LEOs, Skillnets, Forfás and other mentoring stakeholders as appropriate. Experts would be invited to participate in working project groups, specifically to further develop mechanisms for raising professionalism, expanding the mentoring pool, for identifying/piloting innovative approaches and for developing and embedding a monitoring framework.

It is anticipated that the recommendations above could be implemented within a 12 month timeframe. All business mentoring providers will be encouraged to adopt the processes, guidelines and databases developed around publicly funded business mentoring over time.

Recommendation 8 - Implementation and focus

Convene a working group in 2014 to drive coordinated execution, led by DJEI (or its nominated Chair) and made of up representatives from enterprise, providers, agencies and other stakeholders as appropriate.

Experts and other stakeholders should be invited to participate in focused working project groups as appropriate, to deliver on a number of the recommendations set out in this review [re raising professionalism, expanding the pool, innovative approaches and monitoring framework]. Membership of the Project Group(s) should include mentoring programme providers, practitioners and expertise relevant to the particular initiative.

(DJEI)

Appendix I

Consultations

Name	Organisation/Company
Linda Lucas	Lucas Promotions
Fintan Lyons	Kaizen Energy Ltd
Eileen O'Neill	Enterprise Ireland
Jackie FitzGerald	Enterprise Ireland
Greg Swift	Dublin City LEO
Michael Johnson	Dun Laoghaire Rathdown LEO
Vincent Reynolds	Cavan LEO
Eamon Ryan	Limerick LEO
Áine Collins	TD
Kieran Moynihan	Entrepreneur in Residence CIT
Alan Nuzum	Skillnets
Lorcan Ó'hÓbáin	ManagementWorks SkillNet
JJ O'Connell	Plato
John McSweeney	Small Business Advice Programme
Louise Allen	Crafts Council of Ireland
Karen Hennessey	Crafts Council of Ireland
Eoin Costello	Hothouse, New Frontiers, Dublin Institute of Technology
Anthony O'Brien	Irish Banking Federation
Paula Fitzsimons	Going for Growth
Paul O'Brien	Department of Education & Skills
Clare Dunne	Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation
Eugene Forde	Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation
Claire Crowley	Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation

Appendix II - Summary of Mapping Exercise - categorised by type of initiative (stand-alone./ integrated) and scale

Integrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arklow Business Enterprise Centre • Bord Iascaigh Mhara • Build Your Audience Scheme (Arts Audience) • Cork Institute of Technology - PINC • Dublin Chamber - David Manley Awards • Dundalk Institute of Technology - Honeycomb (Creative Works) • Dundalk Institute of Technology - Vital Project • Entrepreneur's Organization • Foróige Youth Entrepreneurship Programme NFTE • Greenshoots Emerging Entrepreneurs Programme • Guinness Enterprise Centre • Institute for Minority Entrepreneurship • Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire - Media Cube Incubator • Institute of Technology, Carlow - Inspire Project • Institute of Technology, Tralee - Discovery ITT • Invent Centre, DCU • Ireland's High Performance Computing Centre • Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) - LEAP programme & National Franchise Centre • NDRC Launchpad • Nexus Innovation Centre • NORIBIC I-Factory Programme (cross-border) • Nova University College Dublin • NUIG Business Innovation Centre, NUI Galway • Silicon Valley Global Partners • smartstart.ie • Social Entrepreneurs Ireland • TalentPool Ltd • Telefonica Ireland/Wayra • Trinity College Dublin, TTEC • Udaras na Gaeltacht • Western Development Commission 	743	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bord Bia • Construction IT Alliance • Cork Business & Innovation Centre • DCU Ryan Academy for Entrepreneurship - Propeller Venture Accelerator • Dublin Business & Innovation Centre • Elephant Business Incubation Centre • Enterprise Ireland - Mentor Network • Enterprise Ireland - New Frontiers Programme • Irish Exporters Association • South East Business & Innovation Centre • South West Regional Authority • Teagasc • The Digital Hub • The Women's Business • West Business & Innovation Centre 	2372	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDC - BTWEAS • LDC - LEADER • ManagementWorks Skillnets • Allied Irish Bank 	8022	
Mixed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • InterTradeIreland Small Business Programme 	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beacon Coaching Consultancy • Network Ireland 	175		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEBs 	5354
Stand-alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank of Ireland • Beacon Initiative • Bray Lions Club – Cara Mentoring Programme • Conor Kenny and Associates • Crafts Council Ireland • Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs • Ernst & Young • Family Business Ireland • Female Entrepreneurs Mentoring Programme • Google Ireland – New Media Mentoring Scheme • IBM • MBA Association of Ireland 	253	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ernst and Young • Going for Growth • Mentors.ie • Plato • SCCUL Mentors • Senior Enterprise • Small Business Advice Programme • Sustainable Energy Ireland 	1423			
Stand-alone light touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Carlow Chamber - Mentoring Clinic • Donegal Business Boot Camp • Sligo Chamber of Commerce and Industry - Mentoring Bootcamp • Start-up Weekend Dublin • Startupbootcamp 	117			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vodafone • CAVA 	3250	
Scale : No of annual engagements by provider	<50		50-499		500-5,000	5,000+	



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