

The CEAI Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme 2021

Programme Review + Final Summary Report

Funding Support for this Programme was secured by The National Association of Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC) CLG under the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme 2021 administered by Enterprise Ireland.



Disclaimer

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Foreword

As we present this Programme Review + Final Summary Report, it is important to recognise the origins of our Association and the valued relationship with our committed membership base and the support of our funders – Enterprise Ireland - which enabled us to deliver the CEAI Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme in 2021 with such success.

The National Association of Community Enterprise Centres [NACEC] CLG, trading as the Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI), is the national representative organisation of community enterprise centres and enterprise hubs in Ireland.

Initially established as a voluntary organisation in 2008, NACEC was incorporated as a CLG in 2019; underwent a strategic restructuring exercise in 2021 and adopted the trading name of the Community Enterprise Association Ireland (CEAI) to greater reflect our strategic priority of supporting the growth of enterprise - within enterprise centres and enterprise hubs and across their communities - and economic development across the regions. The company is overseen by an Executive Board of Directors drawn from across the regions, each currently holding or having previously held senior roles within the community enterprise sector.

CEAI is positioned as representative of Enterprise Ireland's investment in the community enterprise sector – a key sector within the National Hub Network – numbering in excess of 250 locations and representing an investment of more than €255M by Enterprise Ireland since 1998.

The CEAI Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme 2021 was devised and delivered as a practical Brexit response intervention, in line with the overall objective of Enterprise Ireland's Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme 2021 – namely to offer “funding assistance for existing regional and community based projects that can demonstrate the need for additional support arising from Covid-19, Brexit, and other market changes that will sustain businesses so that they will be viable after the Covid-19 outbreak”.

The 18 participant companies - regionally based micro and SME businesses across Ireland, Northern Ireland and England – who participated in this Programme benefited from capacity building across a range of areas including:

- » industry benchmarking
- » value-add Brexit supports
- » sales and marketing
- » business development

- » routes to market
- » digitalisation for cross border trade and productivity
- » pathways to sources of funding
- » networking linkages
- » innovation enterprise community development
- » in-country advice and
- » in-country soft landing support for cross border trade activity.

The findings which emerged during the delivery of this Programme, and which are captured in this Report clearly indicate that there are unmet needs among regionally based micro and SME businesses in surviving and thriving in the current environment, while continuing to navigate ongoing challenges and emerging opportunities in a cross-border trade marketplace.

Our post-programme impact review identified a wealth of data which is set out in this Report – data which clearly reflects opportunities for future innovation and collaboration as well as highlighting key skills gaps to be prioritised and addressed through specialist training, mentoring and networking for companies in the regions who continue to face regular and often daily challenges arising from the Brexit Agreement.

To conclude, we would particularly like to acknowledge the support of our colleagues and friends among the National Hub Network, The National Enterprise Network England and Enterprise Northern Ireland who facilitated and supported engagement with clients and tenant members across their respective networks for participation in this Programme. Along with our own members and their respective client and tenant base, CEAI, as the national representative association for community enterprise centres and enterprise hubs, looks forward to building strong, collaborative and impactful relationships cross border into the future.

Gary O'Meara
 (CEO Meath Enterprise)
 Chairperson
 Spring 2022
 The Community Enterprise Association
 Ireland

Background & Context

Since 2017, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has put in place funding to support regional enterprise development through Enterprise Ireland's Regional Enterprise Development Fund, the Border Enterprise Development Fund and the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme of 2021. This funds total €126 million across 79 enterprise strengthening projects in every region across Ireland.

The purpose of the Regional Enterprise Transition Scheme (RETS) Programme 2021, in particular, was established to provide funding assistance for existing regional and community-based projects - with particular emphasis on high-impact transition actions - which successfully demonstrated a need for additional support emerging from global economic challenges including the Covid 19 Pandemic, the Brexit Agreement and shifting political landscapes internationally.

As a successful applicant to the Regional Enterprise Development Fund 2019, the National Association of Community Enterprise Centres (NACEC) CLG subsequently secured funding under the RETS Programme 2021 for a number of initiatives including the design, development, management, co-ordination and rollout of a Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme.

A 2019 Survey of the Association's membership indicated Brexit as posing both challenges and opportunities for their tenant base with 60% of members responses clearly naming Brexit as offering tenant-relocation business opportunities for their enterprise centres and enterprise hubs.

In 2021, with the opportunity to secure funding under the RETS Fund, a collaborative effort was put in place with the National Enterprise Network, England and Enterprise Northern Ireland to share a joint promotional campaign for the purpose of attracting participants onto an intensive (virtual) Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme

This capacity building Programme was delivered over a number of weeks during Q4, 2021 with participation from 18 micro and SME companies from Ireland, Northern Ireland and England. These participant companies benefited from access to training, mentoring, business supports, networking linkages, enterprise space/soft landing access; along with consultancy advice to advance innovation and collaboration opportunities and fast track trade development.

Aims & Objectives

The CEAI Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme 2021 was a practically designed Brexit intervention, targeting micro and SME businesses across Ireland, Northern Ireland and England through similar network and association structures.

In setting out the strategic ambition of the Programme, it was agreed that:

- » the Programme would be designed and delivered as a capacity building programme to improve the resilience of regionally based micro and SME businesses and specifically targeted clients and tenants of community enterprise centres or enterprise hubs clients
 - » the Programme would provide evidence-based research on additionality and value-add opportunities for access to startup supports, enterprise space and other support services across the three networks as well as reinforcing the belief of opportunity for long-term collaboration between the three networks in Ireland, Northern Ireland and England
 - » the Programme would examine the impact of facilitating soft landing, innovation and collaboration opportunities and fast track trade development to regionally based micro and SME businesses in enterprise centres and
- enterprise hubs across Ireland, Northern Ireland and England for whom Brexit has closed doors and opportunities
- » the Programme would focus on key capacity building skills and knowledge including priority areas such as SME industry benchmarking; digital maturity and digital readiness for cross border trade and export; routes to market; partnerships; digitalisation; financial planning; sales and marketing; innovation; network linkages; enterprise community building across the regions and collaboration linkages; sources of cross border funding for in- country trade; supports and mapping for soft landing support in enterprise centres and enterprise hubs between Ireland, Northern Ireland and England
 - » Finally, in the context of all of the above, the Programme would further examine and report on trade development opportunities for the enterprise centre and enterprise hub community across hub networks in Ireland, Northern Ireland and England.

Delivery Framework

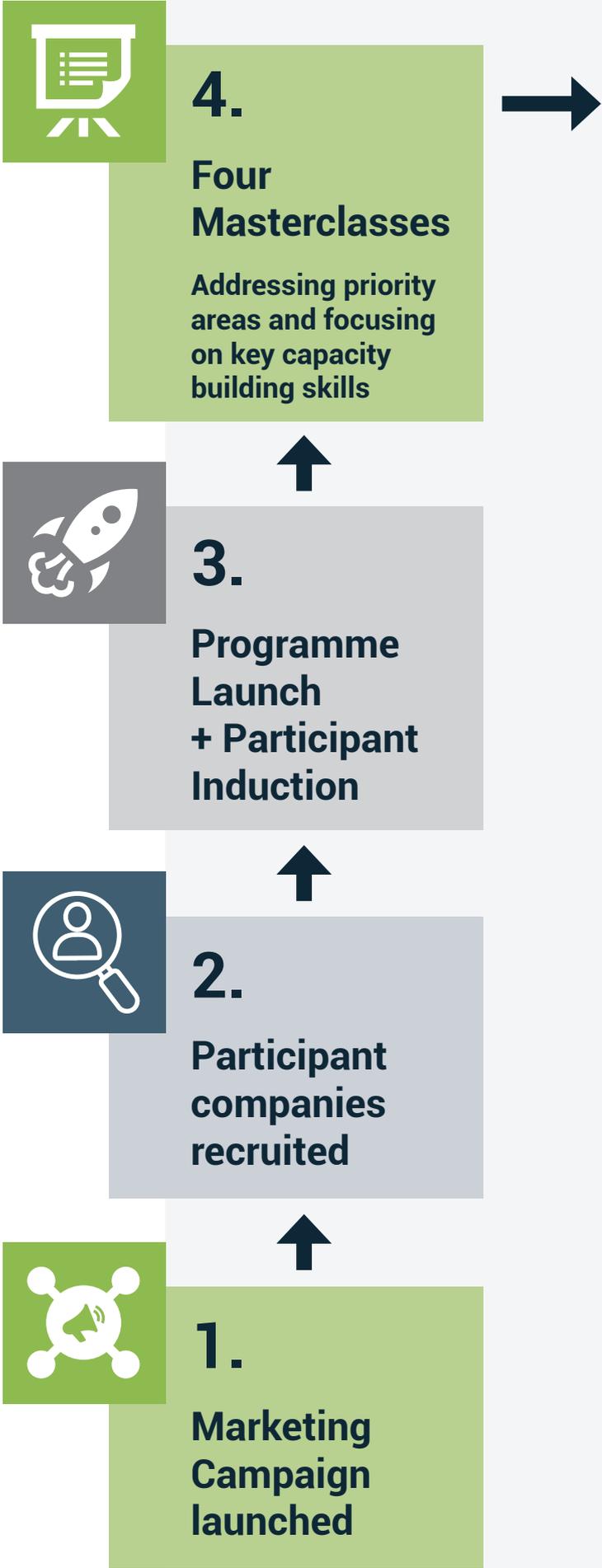
Following a successful tendering process, a consortium of partners was appointed to oversee the design, development, management, co-ordination and rollout of The CEAI Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme 2021.

This partnership consortium was led by the Discovery Partnership (an SME Growth Specialist Consultancy Company) with partners including Winning Moves (an SME Benchmarking & Growth Consultancy) and the Centre for Competitiveness Northern Ireland (an organisation focused on Productivity and Competitiveness).

Fourteen expert consultants, mentors and trainers from Ireland, Northern Ireland and England delivered on the programme, across a wide range of industry and discipline specific aspects. The programme also included presentations from case-study businesses and successful role-model entrepreneurs.

Presentations on supports were also given by Enterprise Ireland; The Local Enterprise Office Network; Invest Northern Ireland; National Enterprise Network; Enterprise Northern Ireland; European Enterprise Network and the Community Enterprise Association Ireland.

The Delivery Framework was set out as follows:





5.

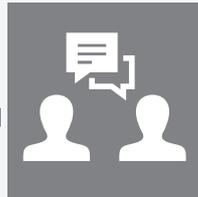
Group Clinics

Sectoral specific B2B and B2C Clinics including internationally traded services; logistics; food; drink; software and technical services and the arts.



7.

SME Industry Benchmarking Training & Coaching



6.

One-to-One Mentoring

Each participant company was supported with mentoring from an expert advisory panel offering broad and industry specific expertise; highly aligned to participant needs; both cross sectoral and discipline specific i.e., food; drink; pharma; logistics; construction; software; energy; digital marketing; financial management; customs; logistics; specific Brexit specialists.



8.

Cross Border Trade Action Plan Development



9.

Shared Learning Event

Participants presented their Cross Border Trade Action Plans; learnings from the programme and their own anticipated needs to support cross border trade and export development into the future.

Participant Company Profiles



Construction



Engineering



Arts & Culture



Pharmaceutical



Transportation



Technology



Services



Other



E-commerce



Environmental
Goods &
Services



Manufacturing



Life Sciences
Services



ITC
Manufacturing
& Services



Media / Audio Visual



Food & Drink



– Franchise,
licensee

Key Insights – Post Completion of the Programme

100%

of participants who attended the Shared Learning Event presented their Action Plans and Learnings.

100% of participants considered the extended reach of The Community Enterprise Association Ireland, Enterprise Northern Ireland and the National Enterprise Network, England as well as the services of Enterprise Europe Network which were introduced during the programme to be important and valuable for extensions of the individual businesses networks and cross border community linkages.

The links and contacts into enterprise centres gained from completion of the programme and an understanding of soft landing provided excellent peace of mind for

100%

of participants planning cross border set up.

Access to expert 1-1 mentoring and discipline/ industry specific expertise and support given on the Cross Border Trade Launch was considered by **100%** of participants to be very relevant to the participant SME companies to navigate Brexit challenges.

Benchmarking:

100% of participants trained in benchmarking

100% of participants indicated they had received support during the programme on Brexit including customs; logistics; vat; costs and are continuing to face logistical challenges; delays and productivity challenges on the ground in relation to day-to-day matters relating to Brexit.

100% of participants experienced similar challenges in micro and SMEs companies in enterprise centres across Ireland, Northern Ireland and England.

100% of participants perceived links cross border, links with The Community Enterprise Association Ireland, Enterprise Northern Ireland and the National Enterprise Network, England to support networks; contacts; collaboration and in-country soft landing were complimentary to existing state supports and filled a necessary gap.

78% of participants expressed serious interest in further cross border networks; contacts; community building and linkages. There was an appetite to deepen linkages and have an extended reach out to networks in their target markets.

78% of participants requested follow up post programme and expressed interest in follow up events/follow up programmes.

70% of participants reported they had increased their sales and sales capabilities further, following completion of the programme to facilitate them having an export presence.

80% of participants expressed interest in exporting and cross border trade.

78% of participants had improved their digital skills and websites as a direct result of the programme.

76%

of participants had developed their sales and marketing skills.

70% of participants were interested in expanding their digitalisation capability in order to improve their cross-border sales and export capacity and capability; this included digitalisation support to localise websites and social media presence for entering new markets including cross border trade.

63% of participants were interested in specific Meet the Buyer events. Even within the limited pilot there were some cluster specific areas emerging – including software services; B2B buyer events; Food/ drink retail buyer events.

60%

of participants were interested in further Brexit supports.

Following the programme;

23% of participants had either created an on the ground cross border presence/ or intended to do so in the near future (i.e., next 6-12 months). This included company set up an/or presence in the cross-border country. The CEAI Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme had taken away the fear of setting up in another territory.

Through the network and contacts;

20% of participants are able to benefit from an Intertrade Ireland Pilot Programme on Supply Chain Assessment Benchmarking and receive further mentoring as a direct result of the contacts on the Cross Border Trade Launchpad; an example of the interconnectivity of linkages and contacts made through the programme

Emerging Issues

Digital Readiness:

- » A key skill gap identified within participant companies was the absence of suitable digital resources and digital expertise across key management functions such as governance and compliance; operations; sales and marketing and financial resourcing
- » Affordability of software solutions, technical solutions and the skilled resources to effectively implement digital solutions is an issue; particularly for digital productivity solutions aimed at improving competitiveness
- » The company responses necessary to deal with the negative trading effects of the Covid 19 Pandemic and the Brexit Agreement have resulted in many companies not looking at digital back-office productivity
- » A lack of understanding and lack of skills to digitise the sales and marketing offering to localise it for export and cross border sales is limiting opportunity
- » In general, Micro and SME businesses have not dedicated or cannot dedicate time, investment or resources to effectively resourcedigitalisation.

**Competitiveness
through
digitalisation**

Skills Gaps:

Participant companies lacked appropriate skillsets; access to expert advice and in-house resources to adequately prepare for export activity. Export readiness skill and resources gaps identified among the participants included:

- » Business planning for export
- » Resources including people capacity
- » Marketing capabilities to localise the offerings for cross border trade
- » Access to funding to drive export-led activities.

**Scaling export
focused
companies
driving growth
across the
regions**

Recommendations



Cross Border Networking Linkages

Build on the existing cross border links of the Community Enterprise Association Ireland, Enterprise Northern Ireland and the National Enterprise Network, England to support networks; contacts; collaboration and in-country soft landings so as to complement and bring value-add to existing state supports. The extended collaborative reach of these networks is a very valuable support for on-the-ground implementation to drive cross border trade.



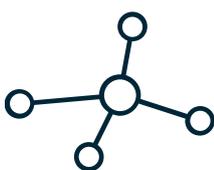
Extension of Supports based on Needs Identified

Extend the CEAI Pilot Cross Border Trade Launchpad Programme 2021 to a broader offering going forward and make it available to a wider audience of enterprise centre and enterprise hub clients across Ireland, Northern Ireland and England.



Networking

Build and deliver a follow-on programme and support to include routes to market; sales and marketing training; financial and funding; SME community building; network linkages; soft landing and in-country cross border supports and supports to access cross border opportunities.



Soft Landing Support

Promote the provision of soft-landing supports through cross border networks to assist companies to easily set up and support cross border trade is relevant for any future interventions.



Promotion & Awareness

Create a cohesive and sustained PR campaign to highlight the benefits of the cross-border linkages; connections; collaborations; community between the Community Enterprise Association Ireland, Enterprise Northern Ireland and the National Enterprise Network, England and the benefits of soft-landing space.



Practical Solutions and Supports

Ensure any future programme continues to provide practical and expert supports for continuing and emerging Brexit challenges being experienced on the ground. This should include access to expert advice in customs; logistics; sourcing; advice on managing an increasing costs on a day-to-day level as well as at the strategic level. Access to experienced mentors and consultants in this area of expertise is a very relevant support for any follow-on programmes.



Sectoral Specific Needs

Address sectoral specific needs in any follow up programmes and in events being organised (such as Meet-the-Buyer events) including software services; sustainable packaging for producers etc.



One-to-One Expertise: specific supports and specialist advice

Ensure future programmes include access to expert one-to-one mentoring and discipline/industry specific expertise across a variety of topics including navigating the Brexit challenges; digitalisation; finance; routes to market; sales and marketing and innovation .



Benchmarking

Include benchmarking as a touch point on micro and SME productivity as recommended in the OECD report 2019 and the SME taskforce on SME Growth and Entrepreneurship January 2020.



Export Readiness

Build capacity and capability in export readiness skills such as

- » Business Planning for Export
- » Organisational development
- » Building People Capacity
- » Building Export Capability Routes to Market
- » Marketing capabilities to localise the offerings for export
- » Access to funding for export and
- » In-country selling models and resources into any future programme.



Digital Readiness

Include supports to increase digitalisation capability in order to improve micro and SME cross border sales and export capacity and capability such as

- » Digitalisation support to localise websites
- » Social media presence for entering new markets including cross border trade as well as
- » CRM systems for sales lead management. A focus on improving export digitalisation capacity is a critical element of building export capability.

Participant Feedback



"Mentor was very strategic - we gained increased knowledge about setting up an office in Northern Ireland; how to go about it and what to do about employing someone from Northern Ireland. Brexit support was specifically very helpful in dealing with current challenges and workarounds for customs and cashflow management. We're also working on applying for a grant to employ a salesperson in Northern Ireland as well."

Roisin Price,
CalX instrumentation services, Kells, County Meath, Ireland

"The programme was excellent and what I've learned is actually a lot. I have learned a lot of market intelligence; market research into other markets and digital skills from the programme that have been put immediately into action. My sales have grown as a result of the information and leads I got; so much so; I am now hiring another person starting 1st June. So lastly; it's been excellent and another programme like this would be very helpful in the future."

Tessa Smit,
Hendrick European, Mitchelstown, Republic of Ireland



HONEY CORN

BOTANIC ORGANIC NATURAL

"I am absolutely delighted to have been selected to be on this pilot programme I think it's been absolutely fantastic.... just been so useful and in terms of what I've learned from this."

Ayesha Ibrahim,
Honey Corn UK

"The programme has been a great opportunity; The programme has really jump started my practice again after COVID and Brexit. COVID basically cremated my company overnight; this programme been a great insight to where my business can go."

Lise McGreevy,
artist; photographer Northern Ireland



"The benchmarking was great - you know how

to set yourself against competition; where you stand; how you're improving; whether you're improving or disapproving; insights and understanding in general about cross border trade and having that confidence then to trade across the borders as well."

Fergal O'Connor,
Buy Media, Republic of Ireland

"Further help in international business development would be hugely important for us; you know your customers in your own market you don't know anybody in the other markets so it's making those initial baby steps into those markets has been really helpful

-as part of the next steps from this programme it would be good to get more assistance in this. The strategic sales partnerships section was excellent - I thought was really good -it's part of our market strategy in the UK; in the North to form these strategic partnerships with other businesses."

Fergal O'Connor,
Buy Media,
Republic of Ireland



"From the very start of the process; the presenters have been excellent all the way through the process has been very informative. We've set up a company in Ireland down in Cork; so, I think overall it's been a fantastic initiative and a learning initiative for us in Pace and we're going to be talking to people within this workshop over the next couple of months there is no doubt about that. So, we're very keen to keep aligned and engaged talking to people on the group here; so, thank you very much for all your help and support and again as I say fantastic initiative very much enjoyed it."

Kevin Kelly,
Pace Digital; UK



"I found the calibre of speakers very high and there's been a lot of educational

content across the course so that's been much appreciated. We're really in the centre of Northern Ireland we have learned a lot about funding and network and support; - we have learned and implemented and improved our ecommerce website and social media."

Trevor Boyd,
Betty's Ice Cream,
Northern Ireland

Appendices

Appendix I:

List of Participants

Company Name	Contact Person
Bay Tree VA Ltd	Jane Cattermole
Honey Corn UK	Ayesha Ibrahim
Buy Media	Fergal O Connor
Calx	Róisín Price
Cape Clear Island Distillery	Cape Clear Island Distillery
CivilTec	Raymond Carroll
DEM Pharmaceutical Limited	Paul Deering
Maisha Coffee	Lucy Ewins
McGrath Quantity Surveyors	John Casey
Niamh Kennedy	Niamh Kennedy
Premier Energy Storage	Peter O Riordan
The Bearded Man Ltd	Conor Cogan
TQ Transport	Tessa Smit
UMAC Systems Ltd	David Downes
Bettys Ice Cream	Trevor Boyd
CoBabble	Wayne Denner
Lise McGreevy Photographic	Lise McGreevy
Pace Digital Sales	Kevin Kelly



 www.communityenterprise.ie

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 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ceaireland>