

CSR Ready

green, fair & competitive businesses



CSR in the Irish Business Community



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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In this blog we look at some of the support structures available to Irish SMEs. The term Corporate Social Responsibility is often seen as something only done by large corporates, however it has huge benefits for SMEs and micro enterprises too. Acting in a way that shows a level of care for staff, community and customers is a good start to a strong CSR ethos. For most small and medium-sized enterprises, especially micro enterprises, CSR is likely to remain informal and intuitive, whereas larger enterprises may have dedicated CSR resources and formal CSR programme. Carefully implemented CSR initiatives such as those delivered through the CSR Ready project can deliver tangible benefits to SMEs, helping them to:

- Win new business and increase customer retention;
- Develop and enhance relationships with suppliers and networks;
- Attract, retain and maintain a happy workforce and become an employer of choice;
- Save money on energy and operating costs and manage risk;
- Improve your business reputation;
- Attract investment and funding opportunities.

CSR is important for the sustainability, competitiveness and innovation of all businesses operating in Ireland and for Irish society as a whole. As this research is conducted based on an ERASMUS+ Project CSR Ready the [European Commission](#) defines Corporate Social Responsibility as "*the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society*". In today's society whether in Europe or Ireland, there is a growing awareness of the demand for responsible business behaviour. CSR has become the mechanism to achieve this from covering issues relating to sustainability, ethics and respect for business and human rights to diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace, it has never been more important for businesses to recognise the impacts that they have on both their environment and the society in which they operate.

Across the Irish Sector the definition of Corporate Social Responsibility is Consistent
'Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is about businesses being responsible and sustainable, and having a positive impact on employees, customers, the local community, shareholders and other stakeholders' ([ThinkBusiness.ie](#))

It is also understood CSR in Ireland *'goes beyond compliance with legislative requirements. It is a voluntary concept, which is led by business. It is a process that maximises the creation of shared value through collaboration with all stakeholders and ensures that the interests of enterprises and the interests of the wider society are mutually supportive.* ([BITC.ie](#))

Business in the Community Ireland

Business in the Community Ireland is a movement for sustainable change in business. In a dynamic and changing environment, sustainable businesses are successful businesses.

They aim to inspire and enable businesses to bring about a sustainable, low carbon economy and a more inclusive society where everyone thrives.

We act as trusted advisers in sustainability and corporate social responsibility. We provide access to best practice and support businesses with practical management and monitoring systems. By facilitating forums for reflection and action, we ensure that businesses anticipate and are ready to meet the current, pressing challenges of climate

change, the pipeline of talent as well as the issues of social inclusion, diversity and accountability.

When Business in the Community Ireland was established, sustainability and CSR were based only on corporate giving and engagement with charities and causes. Today, they have worked with hundreds of companies, sustainability and CSR cover all areas of the business from employee engagement and supply chain to procurement, climate change, and human rights.

They Work in Three Simple Ways

[The Network for Responsible Business](#) Their network has grown year on year since inception. They offer three membership streams which can help companies at any stage of their sustainability and CSR journey.

[The Business Working Responsibly Mark](#) Ireland's only certified standard for sustainability and CSR. Audited by the NSAI and based on ISO 26000, the Mark is the premier business standard in Ireland.

[Business Action Programmes](#) Education and unemployment are key societal issues in Ireland. Companies can have a significant impact on these issues but benefit too through employee engagement opportunities. Their employment programmes can add value to any sustainability and CSR plan of activities.



Led by [CEO Tomás Sercovich](#), Business in the Community Ireland has one of the strongest [board of directors](#) in the country and our Patron is President Michael.D.Higgins.

View [a copy of Business in the Community Ireland Strategic Plan 2019-2021](#).

From providing bespoke advice to some of the most progressive multinational and indigenous companies to helping smaller enterprises navigate and understand CSR, they are the trusted advisers on responsible business practices in Ireland.

Explore how they can support you by visiting their [Membership Section](#) or contact their Membership Executive [Lorraine O'Toole](#) or call 01- 874 7232.

CSR Hub & CSR Forum

The CSR Hub is an initiative hosted and managed by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation with contribution from the CSR Stakeholder Forum is Ireland's dedicated online resource for CSR. It is a one-stop-shop for information on all aspects of CSR in Ireland. It includes guidance and resources on taking the first steps towards CSR, [Case Studies](#), [latest news](#), [minutes](#) from the CSR Stakeholder Forum Meetings and more. The CSR Hub also outreach to the business community by creating tools including [SME CRM tools](#) to support businesses on their CSR journey.

CSR Forum Under the CSR Hub the CSR Stakeholder Forum was established in June 2014. The CSR Forum brings together representatives from the business sector, public sector and other key stakeholders and the wider community. The Forum, chaired by industry, meets every quarter, with sub-groups meeting on a more regular basis, to address particular areas of focus. Together with DEI, the CSR Forum has been a driver behind the delivery of several CSR initiatives aimed at raising awareness and supporting SMEs in particular. [The CSR Forum](#)

1. **Supports and shares best practice approaches** to Irish businesses, demonstrating their responsibilities and the work required to create opportunities from CSR actions.
2. **They engage with policymakers** to understand CSR, and the benefits it can offer in developing business sustainability and creating a more robust economy, right across the country.
3. **Delivers tangible actions within their CSR National Plan**, achieved through a new level of collaboration between the business community and Government Departments and Agencies. Each year, they undertake a progress review of the implementation of [Ireland's national plan on CSR](#). They ask them *'what goals businesses have achieved, and how Government policy has encouraged and enabled more responsible business activity'*. **Examples of Actions Identified.**
 - Support and promote Government **policy in areas that enrich responsible business practices** by identifying existing and emerging Government programmes in areas relevant to corporate social responsibility.
 - **Collaborate with relevant Government Departments to examine ways in which CSR policies can be supported** such as CSR Forum, DEI, and relevant Government Dept's and Agencies
 - **Collaborate with DFAT through the CSR Stakeholder Forum to communicate the National Plan on Business and Human Rights.** This will encourage business representative bodies to support their companies in their efforts to develop human rights-focused policies and reporting initiatives as appropriate to their size and nature.
 - **Develop a CSR Volunteer Mentoring Programme that will prove most valuable to SMEs, a CSR Tool for SMEs, and a website dedicated to CSR in Ireland.** To continue the continuing effort to raise awareness of CSR in Ireland to promote best practice CSR, news and events via social media and through the publication of a quarterly e-zine.
4. They are *'heavily focused on business, its objectives and approaches equally apply to public service and indeed other organisations, such as charities and institutions'*.
5. They believe that *'CSR is about going beyond compliance, and investing in, and committing to, our responsibilities to staff, customers, the environment and the community. CSR is a boardroom issue; it's a competitiveness issue and it's crucial in building a more sustainable economy and society. We all have a role to play!'*
6. **Monitor activities to maintain Irish competitiveness in CSR.** The Irish

Commission has committed to intensifying its work on responsible business conduct and the CSR Stakeholder Forum will monitor this activity to ensure the Plan and work programme remain relevant to evolving trends.

CSR HUB Key Milestones

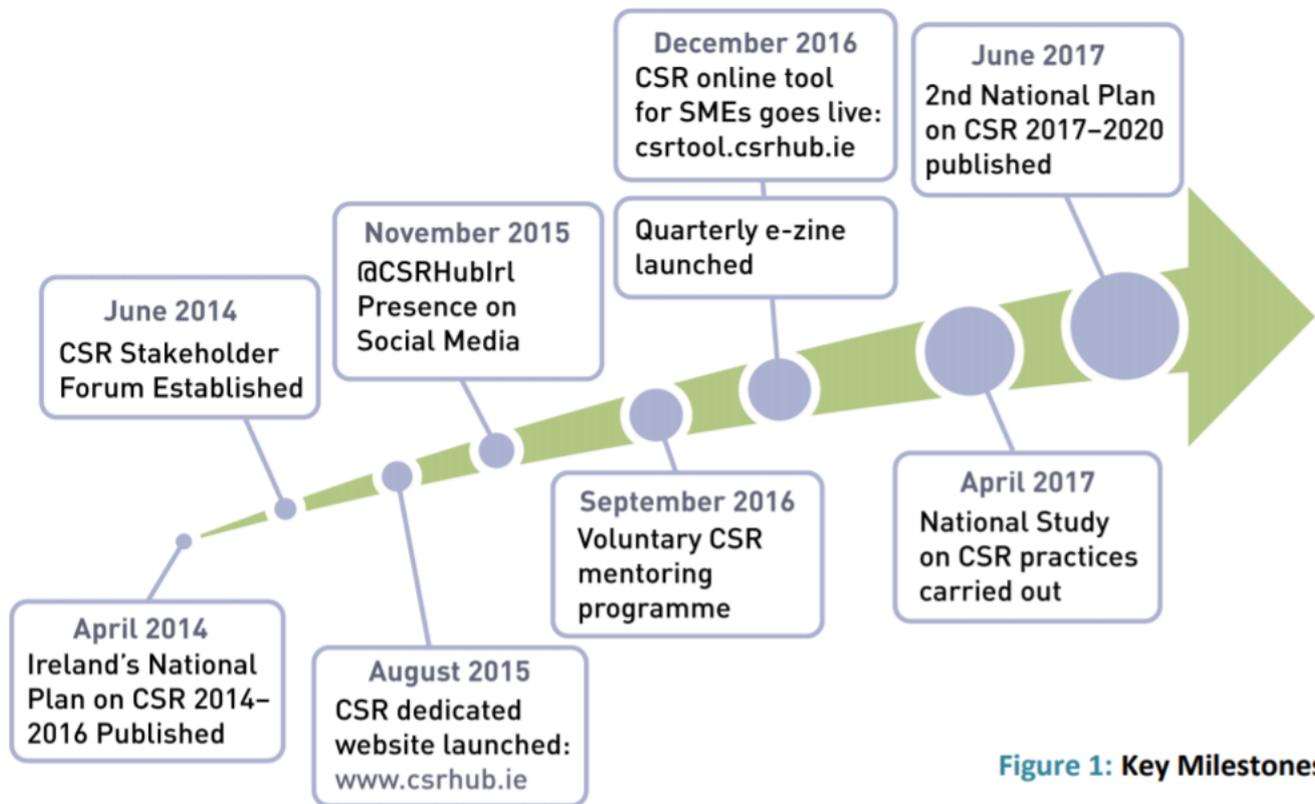


Figure 1: Key Milestones.

World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

Business in the Community Ireland is the national partner network for the WBCSD and are engaged in bringing the message and deliverables of the newly launched "Vision 2050: Time to Transform" to its member companies and other key stakeholders in Ireland. The shared vision of the WBCSD is compelling: "*A world in which more than nine billion people can live well, within planetary boundaries, by 2050.*" This vision is supported by a framework for action for the decade ahead, "*designed to help companies drive change in their sustainability planning and business strategies.*"

The Vision 2050 focuses on systemic transformation, defined in the report as "*reinvention, recreation, and the emergence of completely new ways of thinking and acting based on fundamentally new premises and new sources of value.*" The systemic change also means that the change is going to be interconnected, interdependent and multi-layered, involving all stakeholders. The vision is structured around nine pathways to transformation:

1. Energy
2. Transportation and mobility
3. Living spaces
4. Products and materials
5. Financial products and services
6. Connectivity

7. Health and wellbeing
8. Water and sanitation
9. Food

For each major pathway, the report defines the key transitions that will be required, such as *'circularity, regenerative, net-zero, shared value creation, universal access, transparency'*, and specific areas of business focus for the 2020-2030 decade ahead. Additionally, the framework realises that a significant business mindset shift will be required, based on the principles of *'reinventing capitalism, long-term resilience, and regenerative thinking'*.

Additional information on CSR for SMEs can be found through the CSR Ready Project Resources and other supporting national bodies as indicated above providing expert advice and examples of best practice case studies and advice and support for businesses who are interested in learning more about Corporate Social Responsibility.

It is always a good place to start with getting the right advice, start with low hanging fruit and starting small. It is key your staff are behind you. Don't forget they may have some pretty innovative ideas already how you can best implement CSR in your company. Working as a team and keeping the momentum going is always the challenge, but with the right support externally and internally and the right mindset and knowledge there is no reason why you can't reap the benefits as a best practice Irish example and leader in CSR.



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