

Report on	1) TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 2) Parkanaur College Update 3) Mid Ulster MEGA - NI Apprenticeship Week 2021 (NIAW21) 4) Rebel On Demand – Pilot Proposal		
Date of Meeting	7 July 2021		
Reporting Officer	Head of Economic Development		
Is this report restricted for confidential business?			Yes
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon			No
			X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide Members with an update on key activities as detailed below.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 The Rural Micro Business Development Scheme funded through DAERA's Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme (TRPSI) will run again in 2021/22 subject to approval of a business case and budget within the Department. July 21 has been targeted as a potential opening date for this year's scheme.</p> <p>Approval to participate in the 2021 Scheme was granted by Council in May 2021.</p>
2.2	<p>Parkanaur College Update A deputation from Parkanaur College gave a presentation to the Development Committee in February 2021 requesting assistance from Council. The Council agreed that officers would liaise with representatives from Parkanaur College to provide information on potential funding streams and programmes to support their plans for the future.</p>
2.3	<p>Mid Ulster MEGA - NI Apprenticeship Week 2021 (NIAW21) The Department for the Economy facilitated the second annual Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Week from 26th to 30th April 2021. The week offered an opportunity through a dedicated programme of virtual events and online promotional activity to demonstrate how apprenticeships work for individuals, businesses, communities and the wider economy.</p>

2.4	<p>Rebel On Demand – Pilot Proposal</p> <p>The Business Start Joint Management Team (JMT), which comprises officers representing the 11 Councils, has been approached by the ‘Rebel Business School’ (formally the ‘Popup Business School’) https://therebelschool.com/ondemand/ with a proposal to be involved in a free NI pilot scheme for 6 months (to December 2021). This takes a different approach to start up from the traditional support structures to stimulate entrepreneurial activity. The pilot ‘Rebel On Demand’ is a 24/7 business support platform, made up of specially created video, written and audio content aiming to target a range of clients from anyone thinking about how to start a business, to those who aren't even aware it's an option they should be considering or and those who do not tend to come forward to seek structured support. It proposes an alternative approach to engaging with potential clients, promoting mini-experiments, preparing and allowing pre-starts to test their ideas and make decisions about next steps. The benefits are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An alternative approach and perspective to business start • No eligibility criteria – open to all. • Referral route to ‘Go For It’ and other relevant local supports. <p>Most business support is only available between 9am and 5pm. While this captures many start-ups, 9am-5pm doesn't work for everyone, e.g. carers, lone-parents, under 25s, the employed seeking to develop another enterprise or anyone who works best in the evening / early morning.</p> <p>The video provides a brief introduction on what Rebel On Demand offers: https://vimeo.com/547872185.</p>
3.0	<p>Main Report</p>
3.1	<p>TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22</p> <p>This Scheme is targeted at the rural micro business sector and will provide capital grant aid of up to £4,999 funded at 50% of eligible costs.</p> <p>Meetings between DAERA and all participating Councils have been ongoing in preparation for this year's Scheme as reported to Council in May and June 2021.</p> <p>In terms of Scheme opening dates and applicant eligibility criteria members are asked to note the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAERA has indicated a preference to open this year's Scheme as soon as practicably possible in order to allow sufficient time for funded projects to complete and claim their funding before 31st March 2022. Mid Ulster received very large intakes of applications in the previous two years meaning that, the assessment process alone took three months to complete. As such, the Scheme will open for applications across all Council areas from 1st July and close 31st July 2021 with a view to getting letters of offer issued by the end of October 2021. • DAERA has also indicated that this year's Scheme will only be open to micro business who did not receive funding in any of the two previous years

of this Scheme – 2019 and 2020. As such, this determination will need to be built into the Scheme Guidance Notes. There will be an option of running a second call, which would be open to all micro businesses, if initial funding allocations are not full committed from the assessment of new applicants to the Scheme.

The Head of Economic Development wrote to Mr Gerard Treacy, Rural Affairs Division, DAERA on 9 June 2021 to relay her concerns regarding both the opening timescales and eligibility criteria. Highlighted were: (i) to open a call for applications during the month of July 2021 when many businesses are closed for 2 weeks would not be appropriate, especially as businesses need to request supplier quotes to submit with their applications, and (ii) limiting the Scheme to only new applicant businesses that haven't previously received funding from TRPSI, is likely to hold back the growth plans of many companies that desire to develop new business opportunities.

The following response was received from Gerard Treacy on 15 June 2021 which in summary advises that the TRPSI Scheme will continue, as planned, and open in July.

"For the 2021 Rural Business Development Grant Scheme, we are focusing on businesses who have not benefitted to date from the Pilot or the 2020 Scheme. We had a good debate about this focus at our recent Sub Group meeting at which I explained the Departments rational for this way forward. As you will be aware funding for the Scheme comes from the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme budget therefore it is incumbent on us to work with partners to seek out and support those most in need and indeed those with possibly the least capacity to avail of funding opportunities. With a £1m budget for this year's scheme, recently approved by our Minister we are hoping that is sufficient to support those that have not availed of grant aid to date. At some stage next year it will be important to undertake a detailed evaluation of the 3 funded Schemes so that DAERA can consider successes and failures and indeed the future needs for the Scheme / rural businesses.

The application opening date of 1 – 30 July was considered and agreed by the Sub Group so that support could be provided to rural businesses as early as possible following their full opening up subsequent to the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns. It was also believed by the Sub Group that the July holidays would not have a detrimental effect on the number of applications received as there is still over a 4-week opportunity for businesses to apply. Like all other aspect of the Scheme the opening dates can be reviewed as part of the evaluation. An earlier opening period of mid-June was considered but due to Council approval for some areas not being in place until the end of June, this could not be accommodated.

In a Scheme like this with many delivery partners it will not always be possible to satisfy the wishes of everyone but I believe the Sub Group understand that and are pleased to avail of this sustained opportunity to support rural businesses".

Parkanaur College Update

3.2 A virtual meeting took place on 7th May 2021 between Council officers and

	<p>Parkanaur representatives to provide information on potential funding streams and programmes to support their plans for the future.</p> <p>Minutes of the meeting on 7th May 2021 is attached on Appendix 1 for Members information.</p>
3.3	<p>Mid Ulster MEGA - NI Apprenticeship Week 2021 (NIAW21)</p> <p>The Department for the Economy facilitated the second annual Northern Ireland Apprenticeship Week from 26th to 30th April 2021. The theme of NIAW2021 was “<i>Strengthen and Grow Your Team with an Apprentice</i>”. One of the main priorities of the industry-led MEGA Network is to increase the number of apprenticeships within the manufacturing and engineering sector in Mid Ulster. This year Council agreed to financially supported MEGA with up to £950 to implement a five day social media campaign to promote the benefits of apprenticeships and the existing opportunities within local industry. MEGA also plan to develop a creative animation to promote the MEGA Degree Apprenticeship in Manufacturing Engineering with specialism in Industrial Digitalisation, Robotics and Automation, in partnership with Ulster University. This will be the first ever Manufacturing & Engineering Degree Apprenticeship and supports DfE’s OECD Skills Strategy NI Report 2020.</p> <p>An Evaluation Report on MEGA’s promotional activity to support NIAW21 is attached on Appendix 2.</p>
3.4	<p>Rebel On Demand – Pilot Proposal</p> <p>Following the Transfer of Functions in 2015, Councils became responsible for promoting and supporting entrepreneurship. With the current Business Start Programme due to end in March 2023, Councils are now considering the structure of future business start-up activity to inform the future delivery and mechanisms to drive entrepreneurship.</p> <p>This proposal has the potential to raise the profile of entrepreneurship and, in so doing, to increase enquiries and act as a feeder to the ‘GoForIt’ Programme for those clients who then require more structured support provision and help with a Business Plan. Council’s role would be to assist in promoting the initiative.</p> <p>The Rebel On Demand proposal offers Councils access to a 6-month free pilot (commencing July 2021). During this period data and analytics on the level of engagement and participation across each Council area would be collected to enable Councils to evaluate its performance, at which stage each Council could decide upon whether they wish to continue (and resource) the initiative, post-January 2022.</p>
	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial:

	<p>TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 Grant aid to be provided by DAERA subject to approval of business case. An administration budget of 10% of the funding allocation will be available to Council.</p> <p>Rebel On Demand – Pilot Proposal No cost to Council - Free six month pilot (July – December 2021)</p>
	<p>Human: TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 Officers time</p>
	<p>Risk Management: TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 Council policies and procedures will be adhered to in the roll out of this plan</p>
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	<p>Equality & Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 Equality and Good Relations screening will be carried out prior of commencement of the Scheme.</p>
	<p>Rural Needs Implications:</p> <p>TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 Screening will be carried out prior of commencement of the Scheme.</p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	<p>It is recommended that Members;</p> <p>TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021/22 Note the timescale and new eligibility requirements for DAERA's TRPSI Rural Business Development Scheme 2021.</p>
5.2	<p>Parkanaur College Update Note enclosed Minutes of meeting held with Parkanaur College representatives on 7th May 2021 on Appendix 1.</p>
5.3	<p>Mid Ulster MEGA - NI Apprenticeship Week 2021 (NIAW21) Note Evaluation Report on MEGA's promotional activity to support NIAW21 on Appendix 2.</p>

5.4	<p>Rebel On Demand – Pilot Proposal</p> <p>Note Council’s participation on the Rebel On Demand’s 6-month free regional pilot programme, with a view to assessing the data to be provided on the level of engagement achieved during July-December 2021.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Minutes of meeting with Parkanaur College on 7.5.21</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Evaluation Report – Mid Ulster MEGA PR re NIAW 2021</p>