

Report on	Invest NI (INI) Collaborative Growth Programme – Seamus Heaney Cluster
Reporting Officer	Michael Browne
Contact Officer	Mary McGee

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 outline an application being made to Invest NI Collaborative Growth Fund on behalf of the Seamus Heaney Cluster.
2.0	Background
2.1	Invest Northern Ireland has allocated £5.7million funding over the next five years to help stimulate innovation among local businesses. One hundred per cent funding up to £25,000 is available to industry-led networks requiring facilitation support to scope innovative collaborative projects. Members of the Seamus Heaney cluster and Tourism officers have met with Linda Jamison, Collaborative Growth Manager, Skills & Competitiveness and officer Eugene Heaney and they are now putting an application together to Invest NI for support. One member of the cluster, an INI client must take the lead in the application process and Ballyscullion Park has agreed with the support of the group to take the lead in this project application.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>100 per cent funding up to £25,000 is available to industry-led networks requiring facilitation support to scope innovative collaborative projects with the potential to enhance business competitiveness.</p> <p>INI have recognized that successful collaborations can bring significant benefits to each of the participants. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing existing capabilities and knowledge • Acquiring the know how to be innovative • Entry to new export markets • Developing niche value-added products • Expanding services or product offerings • Exploiting cross-sectoral technology and best practice • Developing hi-tech knowledge driven businesses

- Contributing to Northern Ireland's economic performance

Groups intending to apply must consist of at least four Northern Ireland private sector companies, of which one must be an Invest NI customer. Other group members may include local, national or international stakeholders, including those from the academic and public sectors, as appropriate. The Seamus Heaney cluster of businesses is made up of the following business members:

Seamus Heaney HomePlace
 Shepherds Rest
 Killymoon Castle
 Glenavon House Hotel
 Brendan Adams, Tour Guide
 Lough Neagh Eels
 Ballyscullion Park House
 The Old Thatch Inn
 Ardtara Country House
 Tafelta Cottage
 The Terrace Hotel
 Walshs Hotel
 Laurel Villa
 The Royal Hotel
 Jungle NI
 Lough Neagh Partnership
 Clock Tower Apartments
 Clearwater House B&B
 Tourism Head of Service
 Business Engagement Officer
 Tourism Officer
 Seamus Heaney HomePlace

Richard & Roslyn Mulholland, Ballyscullion Park House, an existing INI member business will take the lead in this application on behalf of the cluster. A private business must take the lead, appoint the facilitator, manage the project and complete all payments. These payments are then reimbursed by INI. It is proposed that Mid Ulster Council staff will as part of the cluster support Ballyscullion in this work.

In terms of the scoping study the group have agreed the following objectives and activities:

Objectives:

1. Scope and identify the market(s) (TIL, TNI), customers, segments (i.e. culturally curious) and opportunities (i.e. English language Schools, genealogy/VFR market) for the Heaney proposition and how best the Cluster can target and maximise these through a clear roadmap with recommendations for action including required investment and resources.
2. Evaluate the existing knowledge, capacity and capabilities of individual businesses in the Cluster to continue to work collaboratively to capitalise on the Heaney proposition and to deliver a high quality visitor experience.

3. Scope and identify evidence-based opportunities for new product/service development using digital technology, knowledge transfer, complementary support services and the creation of packages and experiences that are marketable both nationally and internationally. Examine the issue of branding vis a vis the Seamus Heaney HomePlace/ HomeGround brand and its importance for the businesses'
4. Identify skills deficits/gaps and how to address these to ensure businesses are equipped to capitalise on new business opportunities identified and deliver a high quality visitor experience.
5. Identify stakeholders and partners who could benefit from the Cluster as well as sustainable business models.
6. Develop new and existing synergies, networks, models of best practice and partnerships that can help sell the Heaney proposition and enhance business opportunities and competitiveness.

Activities:

1. Liaise with INI to develop a terms of reference and confirm guidelines for the appointment of a competent and experienced facilitator to complete the Scoping Study.
2. Conduct a one-to-one assessment of the capacity of individual businesses to enable them to capitalise on the Heaney proposition, with suggested and costed recommendations for improvement..
3. Through in-depth market research, develop a clear and robust plan whereby the cluster can maximise market opportunities presented through the Heaney proposition, with recommendations and defined resources required set out as actions. These should include researching new product/service development ideas using digital technology, knowledge transfer, branding, complementary support services and the creation of packages and experiences.
4. Scope and map the current skills and deficits gaps of individual businesses and identify the nature and level of support or intervention required (both in skill area and skill level) to address weaknesses.
5. Research best practice 'business models' and scope potential new stakeholders that could add value to and strengthen the Cluster
6. Through in-depth scoping work, identify new partnerships, networks and synergies that can help the cluster to strengthen and succeed. Suggest and cost study visit and guest/learning opportunities for the group with similar businesses or region with a literary/culturally curious segment or theme.

If the group are successful with this application, they will be in a position to appoint a facilitator to work with them in developing a scoping study to fulfil the above objectives and activities.

Phase 2 of the Collaborative Growth programme involves support up to £170,000 to help the group deliver on the activities outlined in the study.

4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	<p><u>Financial & Human Resources Implications</u></p> <p>Human: Support from Mary McGee, Business Engagement Officer and Charmain Bell, Tourism Officer to deliver the project and assist with administration and processing.</p>
4.2	<p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u></p>
4.3	<p><u>Risk Management Implications</u></p>
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	Mid Ulster District Council, support this application in terms of staff support via the Seamus Heaney Cluster Group.
6.0	Documents Attached & References