



Call for funding and training for ethnic businesses

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Jim Aughney

MAINSTREAM funding from the Government is needed early next year to provide training for ethnic minorities, according to the Small Firms Association.

Patricia Callan, Director of the SFA and chairperson of the Emerge Development Partnership has called on the Government to commit funding from the beginning of 2008 to provide training supports to ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

"Non-nationals now make up over 10pc of our population and our workforce at 420,000 and 200,000 people respectively and clearly represent an untapped pool of entrepreneurial talent in Ireland," commented Callan.

Most of the ethnic minority populations are in the 24 to 44 year age bracket, which is the age at which most people set up in business.

With only 28pc of Irish nationals now falling within this age bracket, non-nationals will become increasingly important in contributing to our pool of potential entrepreneurs, the SFA said.

"It is clear that in moving from their native countries to Ireland, they have already demonstrated their entrepreneurial qualities, a readiness to step out of a familiar environment and into a new culture and system.

Over the past three years, a pilot

programme called "Emerge" has been funded by the EU EQUAL Community Initiative through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and has proven to be extremely successful in promoting ethnic minority entrepreneurship in Ireland.

The programme has directly assisted 207 participants who have attended training at pre-enterprise, start-up and growth levels.

Training was delivered in Blanchardstown, Cork, Galway and Tallaght with a master-class for growth delivered in Athlone. Already 68 (33pc) of the participants have set-up new businesses.

Ms Callan said that "the need for "Emerge" is clear. There is currently no specifically designed mainstream programme that targets the particular problems encountered by ethnic minority entrepreneurs, i.e. that takes into account the problems presented by cultural differences, racism, language problems and social exclusion.

"Over the past three years, Emerge has addressed these issues and has successfully strived to overcome their specific barriers by working with financial and government institutions.

"What is now required is a commitment by Government, in line with the recommendation in the 'Small Business Forum Report' to commit to providing funding from the beginning of 2008 to potential ethnic minority entrepreneurs in all parts of the country."