



# BACK FOR BUSINESS

FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURIAL  
ACTIVITY AMONG RETURNED  
IRISH EMIGRANTS



**Irish Abroad Unit**



An Roinn Gnóthai Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs

This innovative initiative is funded  
by the Diaspora Affairs fund of  
the Irish Abroad Unit.

# BACK FOR BUSINESS

*'Back for Business helps participants unlock the opportunities for returning diaspora and ensures they are fully equipped to bring their international know-how and networks to the Irish market.'*

Paul Herrick,  
Arco Irish



## ABOUT BACK FOR BUSINESS

Back for Business is an initiative to foster and support entrepreneurial activity among returned emigrants or those returning to live in Ireland. The development programme is aimed at assisting them to start and develop a business. It addresses the challenges that all early stage entrepreneurs face, with a particular focus on the additional barriers and challenges faced by those who have been out of the country for some time.

Back for Business is based on a model of peer support, entrepreneurs supporting entrepreneurs. This approach is well proven as being effective in bringing about increased motivation and confidence among entrepreneurs and having a positive impact on the development of their new business.

The initiative is run over six months part-time, from January to June. It provides the opportunity for up to 50 committed early-stage entrepreneurs from across the country to take part.

Back for Business has been developed and is delivered by Fitzsimons Consulting. Thanks to the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the voluntary contribution of time by the Lead Entrepreneurs, there is no charge to those who are selected to participate.

*'Starting a business in Ireland after years abroad can be disorienting. Ireland has changed; you've changed. Back for Business helped bring things into focus - for me, for our business and our customers.'*

Ralph Benson, Moneycube



## WHO IS IT FOR?

Back for Business is for returned emigrants who have lived abroad for at least a year and have returned to Ireland within the last three years, or those currently living abroad who are planning to return to live in Ireland in the near future.

Their experience of living and working abroad will often bring significant advantages for starting a business, such as having a strong network of international contacts, fluency in foreign languages and greater cultural understanding of foreign markets.

Suitable applicants will be (i) those who have recently started a new business in Ireland, either on their own or with another business partner; (ii) are at an advanced stage of setting up a business and expect to generate sales in the next 12 months; or (iii) are becoming/have become entrepreneurs through the acquisition of an existing business. If the business is newly established, it will not have generated sales before 2024. If acquired, it will not have been acquired before this date.

In respect of the business whether new or acquired, the returned emigrant will be a major shareholder and key decision maker in the venture. Furthermore, they will have the ambition and expectation of becoming an employer of others within three years. There is no restriction on the sector in which the new business is focussed.

## HOW TO APPLY

Those interested in participating in the next Back for Business cycle should register their interest on [www.backforbusiness.com](http://www.backforbusiness.com) in the first instance and they will be sent a link to the application form by email as soon as the call for applications opens later in the year.

If there is any difficulty registering online, please phone us on (+353) 18450770 or email us on [info@backforbusiness.com](mailto:info@backforbusiness.com)

*'It was great to get different perspectives on cash management, sales and marketing tips, and presentation skills.'*

Dave McCormack,  
Fluent



## SELECTION PROCESS

There are usually many more applications from those wishing to participate on a cycle of Back for Business than there are places available. Accordingly, the selection process is competitive. The Lead Entrepreneurs are central to the selection of successful candidates. They seek those who are prepared to fully engage with the initiative over its six months duration; demonstrate a determination to advance their fledgling businesses; are prepared to work hard in pursuit of their entrepreneurial goals; and expect to become employers.

There will be up to 50 places available on the next cycle.

The application process is straightforward, however. No interview or pitch is involved. The Lead Entrepreneurs will meet after the closing date to assess the applications received and candidates will be notified shortly afterwards.

## WHAT'S INVOLVED?

The Back for Business initiative is a tailored entrepreneurial development programme. It is based on peer support - entrepreneurs supporting entrepreneurs.

The applied learning model involves a series of round table interactive sessions that are facilitated by volunteer Lead Entrepreneurs, who have experience of successfully starting and growing a business. The sessions are focused on the achievement of goals and milestones and the exploration of relevant themes. The Lead Entrepreneurs will work with groups of about eight participants each in a series of round table sessions, supporting them to address the challenges they face in starting, developing and positioning their business for sustainability and growth.

The cycle starts with a Launch Forum in Dublin at which the first round table will also be held. All those selected for participation are expected to attend.

Participants will then meet with their groups and Lead Entrepreneurs in four separate round table sessions between February and May. All sessions will be held at a location convenient to the Lead Entrepreneur. If necessary, one of the round tables will be held remotely for those not yet returned to Ireland. The dates and locations of these three and a half hour sessions will be agreed with the Lead Entrepreneur on the first day.

KPMG will facilitate, on a voluntary basis, a number of workshops for selected participants, as well as for those in the Back for Business community.

A workshop will also be organised which will provide an opportunity for participants to hear from representatives of the development agencies about the various supports available.

**Selected candidates are expected to attend all events.**

*"One of the best decisions I made when I began my entrepreneurial journey was joining the Back for Business programme. Having spent most of my career outside of Ireland, the programme provided not only structure and guidance, but also a collaborative community of ambitious founders."*

Aoife Matthews, Co-founder Sisterly



Areas covered in the course of the programme will include: Establishing Good Foundations; Knowing and Reaching Your Customer; Funding, KPIs and Financial Management, and Roadmap to Progress your Business.

Developing new networks on their return to Ireland is a key challenge for returned and returning emigrants. Accordingly, whenever possible, we will provide networking opportunities to participants.

The cycle finishes with a celebration in June held in Dublin, followed by a Community Forum the following November.

**If you have any queries contact [info@backforbusiness.com](mailto:info@backforbusiness.com) or phone (+353) 18450770.**

## THE BENEFITS

Back for Business participants will:

- Have a strong network of peers and role models from whom to draw inspiration and guidance.
- Have a reduced sense of isolation.
- Experience the benefits of 'good' peer pressure.
- Be motivated and have increased confidence to execute their plans for their business.
- Have a SMART Action Plan for their business, setting out a six-month roadmap to move the new business forward.
- Have practical ideas and solutions to help them overcome key challenges facing them as they settle back into Ireland and start their new business.
- Have a repository of information about supports, which may be available to their business.

# THE LEAD ENTREPRENEURS

The Lead Entrepreneurs who facilitate the round table sessions are the backbone of the Back for Business initiative. They are not, and cannot be, experts in every area of business, but they bring valuable and personal experience of starting and growing a business.

They believe strongly in the principle of entrepreneurs supporting entrepreneurs and are giving their time on a voluntary basis. Their open and full involvement gives the participants an opportunity to get to know and learn from successful role models and to benefit from their wide and varied entrepreneurial experience.



## GILLIAN O'DOWD

Gillian O'Dowd is a Director at Azon, Executive Search partners for leadership succession, business scaling, and new ventures. She has previously been involved in advising on the scaling and subsequent successful sale of two Irish based Recruitment firms to a UK Plc and to a Private Irish Group. Gillian has over 15 years' industry experience gained working within Financial Services institutions and Real Estate Investment firms in Ireland, London and Continental Europe. Earlier in her career, Gillian gained experience working within Ireland's first Venture Capital Investment firm and a pre-eminent M&A advisory firm. Gillian holds a Bachelor of Commerce from UCC and a Masters in Financial Services from the Michael Smurfit Graduate School of Business, UCD. Gillian has served as a Lead Entrepreneur for Going for Growth and as a Peer Supporter for the Irish Cancer Society for many years.



## JULIE CURRID

Julie Currid is a senior B2B technology leader, scaling SaaS businesses across regulated and industrial sectors. She has founded and led early-stage startups as well as holding senior roles in global SaaS organisations operating at €100m+ ARR, supporting growth across Europe and North America. Julie co-founded GoContractor, a workforce compliance platform serving enterprise customers across construction, energy and utilities. Having scaled the VC and Enterprise Ireland backed start-up into North America it was sold to US based SafetyPlus in 2024. Julie has a BSc Management and Marketing and has been involved in Ireland's entrepreneurial ecosystem for nearly a decade having participated in the Starting Strong 6th cycle programme.



## PAUL DUGGAN

Paul Duggan graduated from University College Dublin with a BE in Mechanical Engineering in 1980 and an MBA in 1986. He was awarded an MSC in Coaching and Behavioural Change from Henley Business School in 2017 and a Certificate in Board Dynamics from the Tavistock Institute in 2018. Now based in Dublin, he has lived and worked in Japan and the USA, and has wide experience of international business. Wishing to have his own business, Paul took the opportunity to lead the acquisition of the Gardiner Group in 2003. In his role as CEO, he developed the group and brought it into new sectors and markets in Ireland and the UK. Over the last 4 years he has been selling the Group businesses, a process which is now approaching completion. Paul continues to serve as an advisor and non-executive director to several private companies – for-profit and not for profit.



## SEAMUS REILLY

After the sale of his second healthcare business Critical Healthcare Limited, Seamus Reilly is mentoring, investing and sharing his experience ranging from organic growth, transformational change and new product development, to acquisition strategies in domestic and export markets. Seamus is an alumni of Enterprise Ireland's prestigious 'Leadership 4 Growth' programme. Seamus loves helping to support new businesses to get off the ground, develop and grow. He has an understanding of the challenges and risks involved in breaking into export markets, as well as having practical solutions that enable ambitious companies to succeed with overseas customers. Seamus believes passionately that creating and building a great team is essential for the success of the business, irrespective of its size.



## SINÉAD DOHERTY

Sinéad is Founder and CEO of Fenero, which employs a team of 110 people across Ireland and India, providing innovative and people-centric tax and financial solutions to contractors, freelancers, solopreneurs and the self-employed. Sinead moved to Ireland 20 years ago and has successfully established and grown a business, whilst also being actively involved in a number of entrepreneurial and business networks in Ireland. Sinead is a qualified accountant and qualified financial advisor; twice awarded Accountant of the Year Award in the 2023 and 2020 Irish Accountancy Awards. She is also a qualified Executive & Leadership Coach and has undertaken practitioner-level training in Team Coaching. Sinead has served two years as Honorary Treasurer on the Board of Dublin Chamber of Commerce and three years on the Chamber's Policy Council.



## THOMAS ENNIS

Thomas Ennis, founder and CEO of the Thomas Ennis group, is an award-winning Irish retailer, recognised for his innovative approach to convenience food. Thomas has over 30 years' experience working in all aspects of Irish food retailing. He headed up Superquinn's foray into the convenience world - Superquinn Select, before opening his first store in 2005, the award-winning flagship Spar on Merrion Row, Dublin. Since then Thomas has opened eleven more stores spread across Convenience, Forecourts and Artisan Delicatessens. He currently employs over 200 and is committed to staff development, with his senior management team recruited internally. Seeking to be continually innovative in the food offerings within his stores, Thomas has welcomed Irish franchises into the stores.

## ABOUT FITZSIMONS CONSULTING

Fitzsimons Consulting ([www.fitzsimons-consulting.ie](http://www.fitzsimons-consulting.ie)) specialises in areas related to entrepreneurship and growth. Paula Fitzsimons, founder and managing director of Fitzsimons Consulting, is a recognised expert on entrepreneurship. She was the national coordinator for GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) for Ireland from 2000 to May 2023, a former President of the consortium of GEM national teams, and a former Director of GERA, the governing body for the Global Entrepreneurship Research Association.

Fitzsimons Consulting has been central to the design and development of award winning initiatives which focused on specific demographic groups to maximise their entrepreneurial potential: Going for Growth, supported by Enterprise Ireland and KPMG ([www.goingforgrowth.com](http://www.goingforgrowth.com)) and ACORNS, supported by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine ([www.acorns.ie](http://www.acorns.ie)), among others. Fitzsimons Consulting developed and delivers Back for Business in response to an open call by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Paula Fitzsimons was appointed by the Tánaiste, Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, to the SME Growth Taskforce in 2020. Paula also served on the advisory panel for WEgate, an EU initiative.



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# PREVIOUS PARTICIPANTS

Following the successful completion of eight cycles of Back for Business, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is once again supporting the initiative in its drive to promote entrepreneurial activity among the community of returned and returning Irish emigrants.

Thirty-one participants completed Back for Business 8. They had spent an average of ten years out of Ireland. Networking and re-establishing contacts was the barrier most frequently cited by applicants, when asked to identify what for them constituted the main barriers that posed a challenge to them returning from abroad to develop a business in Ireland. This barrier is very unique to this group of entrepreneurs.

In recognition of this situation, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is supporting the development of a Back for Business Community for previous participants to continue their developmental growth and facilitate them networking with each other.

The progress made by participants over the course of the programme gives a flavour of their experience and of their progress. Results have been collated from the twenty-nine Back for Business 8 participants, who completed an end of cycle survey, and who have returned to Ireland.

- All who completed Back for Business 8 were very positive in their end of cycle feedback. Virtually all felt nearer to achieving their ambitions and would recommend the programme to others.
- At the start of the cycle, 59% were pre-revenue. Over the course of the programme a further ten began to trade. At the end of the cycle over three quarters were trading (76%) with others planning to generate sales in the coming months.
- By the end of the cycle, the combined turnover of the group had increased from €1,425,000 to €2,594,000 and there were 51 more employees.
- One of the advantages of time spent out of Ireland is contacts developed internationally. At the start of Back for Business seven of the participants already had some export sales. There were a further five first time exporters over the course of the cycle. The strong export orientation is evident with the majority expecting to have customers in export markets in three years time.



Aoife Finnegan, Curio PR, Darragh Collopy, Duir Design and Jennifer Provan, Kitchenetta

*'The Back for Business programme enabled me to evolve with my peers and re-engage my network at home, as well as opening new doors and opportunities.'*

Laura McDermott, Colectivo



*'It's a great programme that brings together returning entrepreneurs with strong aspirations to grow their businesses in Ireland. The format enables sharing of experiences and challenges to help business growth.'*

Tom O'Brien, Sprintmodo



# SPONSORS

The Back for Business initiative is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Its objective is to encourage a greater level of entrepreneurial development among emigrants who have recently returned or are returning to live in Ireland in the near future. Following a competitive tendering process, the Back for Business initiative, as developed by Fitzsimons Consulting, was selected as most suitable to achieve the stated objectives. It is designed to positively and effectively tap into the entrepreneurial talent of returned and returning emigrants and to equip these early stage entrepreneurs with the knowledge, confidence and networks to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses.



*"I am acutely aware of the barriers that are faced by those returning to Ireland and this is why the Programme for Government contains a specific commitment to provide support to assist Irish people living abroad who want to return."*

*Back for Business is a concrete example of the practical support that is provided through the Government's Emigrant Support Programme, to equip early-stage entrepreneurs with the knowledge, confidence, and networks to successfully start and develop sustainable businesses."*

**NEALE RICHMOND, TD**  
**MINISTER OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DIASPORA**



*'The best part of Back for Business was being able to pick the brains of my peers and my Lead Entrepreneur.'*

Niall Joyce,  
Prograss Design

*'Participating on Back for Business increased my network enormously and taught me invaluable lessons about running a business. The main thing I've learned is to focus on working on the business rather than in the business'.*

Ciara Petty, Ciara Petty Design





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