



NBEI-EDT North Working Paper

Edinburgh Study Trip: Learning and shared implications for NBEI participants going forward

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**DELIVERING SOCIAL CHANGE
THROUGH THE SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUND**

1 NBEI Study trip to Edinburgh March 2017

1.1 What was the Social Enterprise Exchange Marketplace?

The Social Enterprise Exchange Marketplace was held on the 21st March 2017 in the Corn Exchange, New Market Road, Edinburgh. This one day event featured a central marketplace of over 80 exhibitors and represented an opportunity to share knowledge, develop business networks as well as critically challenge traditional thinking around social enterprise practice. The event also hosted a series of interactive forums to consider how better to tackle a range of topical issues ranging from health and social care, ethical finance, inclusive growth and changing the perception of how social enterprises do business in the public, private and third sectors. In terms of attendance, there was a diverse mix of delegates from across Europe that were able to exploit various trading and learning opportunities, establish new business connections as well as raise awareness of Scotland's growing social enterprise sector.

**THE
SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE
EXCHANGE**
Marketplace



1.2 Why was it so relevant to the work of the NBEI programme?

Part of the remit of the North Belfast Ethical Investment Programme is to build capacity and actively support the development of asset-based social enterprises located across the most deprived areas in the SIF North Belfast zone. Since its inception, NBEI has provided investment and technical assistance for over 20 social enterprise projects operating within this locality who are working across a range of different sectors. Despite continual support throughout 2016 and 2017, the NBEI project team felt it was necessary to offer all NBEI participants an additional opportunity view how other social enterprises operate in a different institutional and socio-economic context.



For some time, Scotland has been widely cited and praised as a progressive and successful model of social enterprise practice. It therefore seemed appropriate for NBEI to use the Exchange Marketplace and parallel programme of interactive forums (both pictured above)

as a way to offer learning and potentially stimulate social enterprise ideas for its current cohort of participants. It would also provide an opportunity for group representatives to meet on an informal basis and potentially develop useful contacts and connections with other local social enterprises currently working across the social economy in the SIF North Belfast zone and beyond. The study trip was guided by the following five objectives:

- To provide NBEI participants (especially level 2 business development managers) with learning on how to sustain but also how to scale up their current social enterprise activities;
- To offer NBEI participants with networking opportunities that may lead to the identification of potential learning and trading partners outside of Northern Ireland;
- To allow NBEI business development managers the time to meet in person and share their knowledge and practical working experiences of the local social economy in North Belfast;
- To develop an insight into the latest social enterprise thinking and practice in the rest of the UK as well as Europe;
- To promote the practice of NBEI to date as well as advertise the work of the Social Investment Fund to a wider audience beyond Northern Ireland.

Admittedly broad in scope, these objectives will be revisited at the end of this report to summarise the key lessons learnt and highlight any useful knowledge or practice that can be transferred back to Northern Ireland's social enterprise sector.

1.3 Who participated in the NBEI learning trip?

The NBEI project team circulated invitations to the named representatives of all groups who currently receive funding and technical assistance from the North Belfast Ethical Investment Programme. NBEI also extended an invitation to members of North Belfast Social Enterprise Steering Group which included the local chairs of each designated Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership as well as stakeholders from Belfast City Council and DTNI. Finally NBEI also reached out to members of NBEI's current project board which included representation from Northern Ireland's Executive Office, the Strategic Investment Board and LEDCOM.

Name	Organisation	Role
Ann Trueman	Fabcomms	Business Development Manager
Jim Crothers	The HUBB Resource Centre	Business Development Manager
Sally Smyth	GRACE Women's Development Ltd	Project Coordinator
Damien McCallin	Ligoneil Improvement Association	Business Development Manager
Gráinne Mathews	Ardoyne Youth Enterprises	Communications Officer
Kevin McGarry	ABC Trust Ltd	Business Development Manager
Manus McGuire	CCRF	Chief Executive
Andrew Grounds	Ethical Development Trust North	Project Researcher
Richard Heasley	Ethical Development Trust North	Programme Development Manager
Ciara Rea	Ashton Community Trust	Head of Corporate Services
Irene Sherry	Bridge of Hope	Head of Victims & Mental Health Services
Audrey Murray	LEDCOM	Business Development Manager
Stephen Courtney	Northern Ireland Executive Office	Project Officer
Kenny Knox	Strategic Investment Board	Project Manager
Leah Thompson	Belfast City Council	Economic Development Officer

The final list of NBEI delegates who attended the Exchange Marketplace along with their current organisation and role is presented in the table above. It was pleasing to see that the majority of NBEI business development manager's accepted the invitation to attend and made the most of some of the learning and networking opportunities on offer. This will be critical in the coming months ahead as many of them have been set specific performance targets by NBEI in terms of generating sales and diversifying the revenue stream of the social enterprise they work for or represent. There was also further Northern Ireland representation at the Exchange marketplace via a 25 strong delegation from Social Enterprise NI. This provided NBEI delegates with useful networking opportunities with other individuals working in other social enterprises in different parts of Belfast and beyond.



Ann Trueman – Fabcomms Business Development Manager attending an interactive forum entitled: “Strong brazen and loud: Creative ways to make your business stand out from the crowd”

Before sharing some of the learning and social enterprise practice from the Marketplace NBEI felt it was important to gather some feedback from the Edinburgh trip as a whole. Despite being a one day only event, most participants felt that the experience was a positive one, especially in terms sharing practice and experiences with Scottish organisations who were involved in similar business areas. Below are the views taken from individuals who are currently employed as business development managers for NBEI supported projects:

“I found the study visit to Edinburgh very beneficial to me as business development manager. I enjoyed the conference, particularly the networking and research opportunity it provided me with. I was able to chat to other similar type organisations to gather best practice advice and make personal contact with those which were most relevant to our business. Cyrenians farm was one example of this, which provide a similar service to what we are developing and are a successful social enterprise with an annual turnover of over £600k per year. They offered me advice, answered my questions and swapped contacts so that we could keep in contact. I am trying to source funding to arrange a study visit to their farm for myself to benefit further from their experience and knowhow. I was again delighted to be able to ask questions and arrange follow up dialogues for the many areas of support our enterprise could benefit from. Many thanks to all at NBEI for arranging such a beneficial trip”.

Damien McCallin - Ligoneil Improvement Association

‘My trip to The Social Enterprise Market Exchange in Edinburgh gave me the ability to network firstly with the NI delegation that attended, but also to meet

many of the interesting businesses that were exhibiting and to get a more in-depth understanding of Scotland's SE sector and how their passion and commitment in creating a fairer and more equal society makes them a vital part of a global effort in social change.'

Ann Truman – Fabcomms

2 Relevant models of social enterprise learning & practice

Representatives from a total 84 exhibitors attended Social Enterprise Exchange Marketplace 2017. These spanned a diverse mix of sectors and the exhibition hall represented a great opportunity for all NBEI delegates to potentially trade services, share learning and establish new business connections or partnerships. It would be difficult to profile all of the different exhibitors that attended the 2017 Exchange Marketplace so this next section of the report offers a brief summary of 5 social enterprise projects/initiatives that share some relevance to groups currently participating in the North Belfast Ethical Investment Programme.

2.1 Cyrenians Farm

Cyrenians Farm is a social enterprise located just west of Edinburgh. As well as a working farm producing local fruit and vegetables they are also a home for a community of local homeless people. The farm grows food and helps this homeless community by providing a range of opportunities to develop skills through their traineeship programme. Such in house accredited training courses and food education services are for also sale to Scottish government agencies as well as the general public and to date include:

- REHIS Cooking Skills
- REHIS Elementary Food Hygiene
- REHIS Elementary Food and Health
- Introduction to Food Hygiene
- Good Food Good Health

In terms of generating further revenue, Cyrenians offers a weekly and fortnightly 'veg box' service which allows local people to order food online where it is then delivered fresh to their door, especially those living away from the rural in the heart of Edinburgh.



2.2 HISEZ Fusion – opportunities for entrepreneurs

HISEZ is a development agency for the Highlands and Islands, supporting social enterprises towards economic growth and increased sustainability and social impact. HISEZ's small team, who has experience from the private, public and third sector delivers a range of business development services to various social enterprises, community groups and local organisations operating across the Highlands and Islands. Current services include:

- Business planning and Market assessments;
- Community consultation;
- Economic and social impact studies;

HISEZ have managed to achieving sustainability by tendering to deliver national contracts aimed at providing business support whilst also working with social enterprises and community organisations who commission their services directly.

2.3 STEP Technology Centre

STEP technology centre is an innovative lab facility located at the heart of Stirling which offers a range of 3D printing and rapid manufacturing services to business across Scotland. The current offering of services on sale to SME's and private sector businesses include:

- 3D Printers & 3D Scanners
- Laser Cutter / Engraver
- CNC Router
- Vinyl Cutter
- Digital Embroidery Machine
- 3D Motion Tracking Laptop

The lab also has a video conference suite which includes Superfast Broadband (fixed and wireless), 60 Mbps Download, 15 Mbps upload and high definition camera with 60" inch screen, seating 12.



Not only does STEP have an onsite lab, but it also has a portable mobile facility, which is available to go out to any location to demonstrate their new products, technologies and software to SMEs based across Scotland.

2.4 Social Investment Scotland and ASDA

Social Investment Scotland and ASDA have been working in partnership since 2014 to grow the social enterprise sector in Scotland. Using the proceeds of the 5p carrier bag charge ASDA and SIS are investing in local communities across Scotland, creating jobs and working to increase the availability of social enterprise products on supermarket shelves.

In 2016 the partnership ran the first ever social enterprise development academy to help Scottish product-based social enterprises develop the skills they need to access the large retail market. The intensive academy provided expert advice and insight into supermarket trading disciplines, with the aim of increasing the availability of social enterprise products for ethically minded consumers.

The social enterprises are receiving ongoing mentoring and access to finance through social investment loans to help scale them up. Twelve social enterprises from across Scotland took part. As a result two have already secured their first super market listing with products now on shelves in more than 350 Asda stores nationwide.



2.5 Media co-op

Media co-op was founded by a team of award-winning media professionals who specialise in creating digital media and films for the third sector and broadcast television. They work to produce media strategies, short films (and long ones too), participatory projects with service-users, and online campaigns powered by social media. Media co-op work only with organisations that share their vision i.e. charities, NGOs, social enterprises, co-operatives, trade unions and the public sector – people who share our values of co-operation, ethical working, focus on service, and environmental sustainability. Media co-op is currently a preferred Supplier for NHS Scotland, on the basis of outstanding quality and value for

money. They are a multi-skilled, multi-generational, multi-lingual team with many decades experience tucked which is also being passed on to many of the young people who are receiving training through their in-house trainee programme. They also sell this training product to other organisations and institutions who are involved in the creative digital media sector. Whether advising on using the media to best effect, making an awareness-raising animation, designing a social media campaign, training your staff to make films in-house, supporting your service-users to make their own film, or creating a website, Media co-op offers a range of services that help constitute a sustainable social enterprise.

3 Take away learning for NBEI supported groups

In conclusion NBEI will offer some learning that has relevance to participating groups as well as the wider social enterprise sector in the SIF North Belfast zone and beyond.

3.1 Developing learning and trading networks

The Exchange Marketplace provided NBEI participants with the opportunity to meet potential trading and learning partners that work outside Northern Ireland. For example, Damien McCallin, the business development manager from Ligoneil Improvement Association spoke at length with representatives from Cyrenians Farm who similar to him are also involved in developing and operating horticulture based social enterprises. At present, some of LIA's social enterprise work is still at the conceptual stage, so the opportunity to just talk and learn from others who have made further progress with their businesses was invaluable. So much so that Damien is currently looking to secure additional funding to travel back to Edinburgh and visit the Cyrenians farm in the near future.

3.2 Sustaining and scaling up social enterprise activity

The Exchange Marketplace provided NBEI participants, especially individuals in business development manager posts with learning on how to *sustain* but also how to *scale up* their current social enterprise activities. One of most striking differences between the Northern Ireland and Scotland social enterprise sector was ***the willingness of some Scottish social enterprises to compete and tender for private or government contract work***. In the Northern Irish sector there is a still a strong reliance on grant aid and programme funding from either government or non government sources such as the Big Lottery. NBEI are not advising groups to shy away from these funding opportunities (especially if they have had success in the past) but rather work towards diversifying their revenue streams by exploring new opportunities that might possibly emerge from the Strategic Investment Board's 'Buy Social' public procurement framework.

For example, NBEI has supported the development of Task Team - a Level 3 social enterprise that will aim to provide maintenance and facilities management services as well as employment and trade-based training opportunities for local people living in North Belfast. This new social enterprise will target the 'Buy Social' framework as a way to secure contacts by helping larger and privately ran maintenance companies fulfil their social commitments. Critically this will also support the long term sustainability of Task Team as the completion of such work will allow the social enterprise to develop a track record, build a reputable brand and help tender for more work in the future - potentially in its own right or either again in partnership with the same or another private sector organisation.

3.3 Spin off social enterprises that share services, resources and skills

As the previous section 2 highlighted, the Exchange Marketplace demonstrated some useful examples of social enterprise practice from Scotland and beyond. Some of the exhibited

housing projects represented useful learning and have since helped to conceptually develop NBEI's own Level 3 Housing Redevelopment social enterprise called Upright Housing. One feature that was common across all of the exhibited housing projects was the integration of an in house maintenance team or facilities management provision. This proved extremely useful as it allowed the housing redevelopment company to tap into resources, equipment, staff, skills and relevant expertise when needed. It thus helped to keep operational costs down and provided a much more robust, profitable and sustainable business model. Finally in terms of creating social value, this integrated model was also able to provide much more 'on the job' training but critically a range of paid apprenticeship opportunities due to the broader scope of work that was being carried out.

NBEI envision that in the long term Task Team will able to perform a similar role for its own Level 3 Housing Redevelopment social enterprise called Upright Housing. The take away learning here is that the activities of **'spin off' social enterprises** (housing redevelopment and building maintenance) **that complement not contradict each other can ensure success and sustainability in the long term**. It will be important over the coming months for NBEI to remain in contact with Scottish organisations such as the Link Group as a way to remain aware of the challenges that exist when starting up a housing redevelopment social enterprise but also how to effectively integrate an in house maintenance company. Finally and in line with stimulating such 'spin off' activity, does the start up of a Level 3 Housing Redevelopment company as well as maintenance offering also represent a further need for NBEI to develop another Level 3 social enterprise that offers property acquisition, letting and management services?

3.4 NBEI groups, networking and potential supply chain linkages

The Exchange Marketplace provided NBEI business development managers an opportunity to meet in person and share their knowledge and practical working experiences of the local social economy in North Belfast. On later reflection it also showed the NBEI project team the **potential linkages between some of the different groups that are currently receiving NBEI investment or support**, especially in terms of some the services and products they currently offer. Moving forward the NBEI team feel there is a unique opportunity to formalise these linkages in some way by potentially developing a social business network or a local services directory so that NBEI supported groups can develop the possibility of trading with each other across Belfast. The NBEI programme is now currently supporting over 20 different social economy projects across the SIF North Belfast zone so there **is real potential for these groups to 'buy social' and develop local supply chains which are not only economically profitable but also demonstrate higher levels of social value**.

NBEI feels there is an opportunity to launch this network or directory via an event such as a business breakfast. All NBEI groups would be encouraged to participate and market their own products and services whilst invitations could also be extended to private companies who are potentially looking to comply with Northern Ireland's 'Buy Social' procurement framework by partnering or doing business with a local social enterprise. In the long term this could help NBEI supported social enterprises reduce their grant dependency and diversify their income stream by tendering for work and contracts alongside private sector companies.

3.5 NBEI practice, legacy and what happens next for the sector?

During the Exchange Marketplace, the NBEI project team spoke at length with organisations who also work to support the development of community projects, local service providers and social enterprises. **Similarly to NBEI, organisations like HISEZ have favoured an asset based approach and work hard to provide their clients with not only investment but also the technical support and mentoring required to grow projects and achieve**

sustainability by utilising a building in the long term. Scottish organisations were quick to applaud this approach and were also impressed at the outcomes that have been achieved so far by the NBEI programme. However, organisations including HISEZ were also quick to question what would happen when the programme closes in March 2018?

After this date there will potentially be no vehicles based in the SIF North Belfast zone and to NBEI's knowledge none across Northern Ireland that are able to offer a package of investment combined technical support services. Such uncertainty has been compounded by the recent closure of Social Enterprise Hub's and despite some Hub's retaining a basic skeleton service, there seems to be very little conversation about what will happen in the short or long term. This may have consequences not just for Northern Ireland's social enterprise sector but may also threaten the progress or outcomes of some projects that have benefited from recent NBEI support. The ongoing work of Social Enterprise NI is important especially in terms of political lobbying and providing a platform for allowing different social enterprises to network and market their products and services. However as an organisation they only provide limited resources and no real operational investment for groups who are looking to diversify or expand their current operations.

Admittedly the Scottish institutional context is vastly different and by speaking to various representatives of the Scotland's social enterprise sector there is seemingly more political commitment to invest in the development of not just a profitable but a much fairer economy. The recent Social Enterprise Strategy 2016-26 looks to realise this aim and ensures that funding is protected in the short to long term and that the sector will receive sustained investment over the next 10 years. Capacity building organisations in the mould of NBEI like HISEZ thus have an opportunity to tender for government contracts which allows them to go out and provide seed investment and operational support to social enterprises working on the ground. Given the current political and consequently budgetary uncertainties at Stormont in Northern Ireland it is difficult to envisage a similar level of commitment here in Northern Ireland, especially in the short term. Despite such uncertainties the Exchange Marketplace did demonstrate how finance could be raised quickly to help support and scale up the social enterprise sector by diverting the profits from the 5p bag tax. This displayed a creative response to a dip of resource allocation and investment in social enterprise activity that was experienced previously in 2013. It was also a response that has since had economic but also socially useful implications for the product-based social entrepreneurs who have benefited from participation in the social enterprise retail academy that was developed in partnership with ASDA.