Provision of a Collaborative Enhancement Project:

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO DEVELOPING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS

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Final Evaluation Report

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1. Problem Investigation

Higher education requires institutions to evidence their worth and address the issue of employability within the curriculum. The focus traditionally is largely on young undergraduates who are studying full time and preparing for their first job. However, students enrolled on HE courses within FE higher education are not primarily concerned with the ability to get that first job, but the ability to keep their current job and/or progress to the next job.

Current employability strategies are concerned primarily with generic skill development. Drawing upon an heutagogical philosophy (Snowden and Halsall 2014) of learning, the project team endeavoured to develop a learning resource that enables students to develop social entrepreneurial skills and academic colleagues to develop pedagogic skills appropriate to their context and community. Social enterprise is advocated as a resolution solution to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The World Health Organization emphasises that social enterprise and social entrepreneurs are integral to building a new normal in the Covid world (Halsall et al., 2022b; Halsall et al., 2022c; Oberoi et al, 2021; Snowden et al., 2021). The ingenuity that utilizes entrepreneurial proficiency and spirit to respond to social problems whilst not new, is ahead of the conceptual construct, and is crucial to fulfilling the demands of the changing world. Society today, to ensure equality and parity, demands graduates develop new skills, abilities, and knowledge, that are responsive to challenges of the day — an individual who is able to create social value by generating innovative solutions through a process of social entrepreneurship.

Social enterprise is complex and dynamic; it is a multi-faceted change process through which social entrepreneurs offer economic inclusion and social engagement to different global community and social groups through creative, solution-orientated strategies (Halsall et al., 2021; Oberoi et al., 2018). The global community rests on a fulcrum. To combat societal and global challenges, change is needed and social enterprise provides a resolute solution to these challenges, United Nations Development Programme (2020). For example, the continued socio-economic impact upon global health of the COVID-19 pandemic requires communities to be responsive and to strive towards developing sustainable solutions presented as a result of COVID-19. As emphasised by Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the current Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) stated at a briefing in June 2020 that social enterprise and social entrepreneurs are presented with a distinct challenge – enabling society to build a new “normal”. This reaffirms the place of social enterprise as a mitigation strategy within the covid world (Oberoi, Halsall and Snowden, 2022).

This collaborative enhancement project has enabled the development of a unique social entrepreneurial skill acquisition framework that will aid the development of social enterprise within the higher education curriculum. This is an invaluable resource for educators, policy makers and students, furthermore it will make distinct contribution that will not only enhance the employability skill set of students but also providing them with the capability to act as innovative socio-economic change entrepreneurs.

The project team adopted a collegial approach to develop the project objectives, and to identify the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the proposed outcomes. Utilizing a framework based on Kirkpatrick’s New World model (2010), an iterative process was

commenced that developed four key themes. These comprised: what beneficiaries value; what beneficiaries needed; what challenges they face; and how solutions could be developed to mitigate those challenges both presented and perceived. Key direct beneficiates were viewed to be students whilst indirect beneficiaries included teaching and lecturing staff of HEIs and FEIs; Social entrepreneurs, social enterprises, policy makers and community groups. Consequently, an agreed data collection strategy was developed that would reflect these groups.

The intent of this project was to develop a pedagogic resource portfolio that will be available to those agencies, and individuals who wish to embed social enterprise and entrepreneurship skills, capabilities and knowledge within their curriculum. This was underpinned by developing the following outcomes:

1. Design and evaluation of Social Entrepreneurial skills audit tool for use by HEI course teams to prepare needs led education and skill development. To be made available via online resource.
2. Design and delivery of pedagogical facing social enterprise and Entrepreneurial skills development workshops illustrating how to develop skills and enable learning. Workshops to be recorded and made available online as part of the online resource.
3. Co-construction of a free and publicly available online teaching resource portfolio containing teaching delivery resources, video, case studies and best practice examples and narratives.
4. Provide opportunities for cross and collaborative academic coaching and mentoring with social enterprise pedagogy.
5. Academic paper based on the project to be published within a peer reviewed journal.
6. Establishing an academic community of practice.

2. Methods to Address Problem

A literature review was completed to inform the project infrastructure and design of data collection instruments. Overall, a collaborative action research inquiry approach was adopted to frame the study, reflecting the project team's desire to build knowledge, inform and develop pedagogy, and change practice and the collaborative mode of working between the key partners and participants of the project. An important and key feature of the project was the inclusion wherever feasible of students. For example, this included facilitating Focus Group Interviews, organising and delivering workshops – including the design of brochures; supply, cooking and serving of meals and refreshments; hosting activities; recording and editing presentations. This collaborative participatory approach in all stages of the project proved to be a valuable tool in the learning process, developing skill sets both directly and indirectly as a result of the participation encouraged.

Data Collection

The methods for this project drew upon a mixed method approach:

- Focus Group interviews (FGI) were conducted with each of the beneficiary groups. Upholding the ethos of student participation at all levels, students were trained in interview facilitation and worked in partnership with a team member to facilitate the FGI's. The interview template was constructed from the findings of the literature review and in partnership with students and practitioners.
- Questionnaire survey distributed via Google doc to each of the beneficiary groups. The survey comprised a mix of Likert scale type questions and some free text response questions. The survey was drawn from data generated from the literature review and constructed with student and practitioners partners.

Data analysis:

- The "Relative importance index" was used to analyse the data collected from the survey data. Content analysis was used to analyse the free text response questions.
- The data collected from the FGI's was analyzed using template analysis.

Ethics:

- Permission was secured from City College Plymouth Ethics panel.

Sample:

- A purposive sampling approach was taken to secure representation from each of the beneficiary groups at Huddersfield, Bolton and Plymouth.

Evaluation:

- The team agreed to draw upon Kirkpatrick's (2010) four stage model which examines reactions to training, what has been learned, what has changed and been effective will provide a framework for the approach adopted.

3. Evidence Gathered

The literature review informed the construction of interview templates and survey questionnaire. The literature review identified six key themes: the notion of social enterprise – defining the concept; how society works with social enterprise; skills development; teaching and learning; social entrepreneurial practice; governance and sustainability.

Online Survey

The data return of the survey was poor with a 33% return on a sample size of 300; this was despite the use of reminder emails. Data collected was analysed by overall measures of the importance of the different dimensions of social enterprise and

entrepreneurship in the literature review and then calculated using the descriptive statistical method “relative importance index”

Content analysis was used to analyse the free text response questions.

Focus Group Interviews

In total, 14 FGIs lasting 45-60 mins were conducted with the beneficiary groups and facilitated by undergraduate students who had each completed a preparatory training exercise to develop their skills and familiarity with the process. Each FGI was digitally recorded. Data collected was transcribed and analyzed using template analysis.

Findings

Focus Groups

Seven key interrelated themes were generated from the analysis:

Definition of the Term

The findings from the focus group interviews suggest there was some consensus amongst focus group participants as to what social enterprises are, even though participants defined it in varied ways. This contrasts with the available published literature. Social enterprises were seen as mission-driven organizations set up with a primary social or environmental purpose, trade in markets, earn income through the sale of products or services, and thrive through their ability to attract real customers. Within each of the focus groups delivered there were distinct differences expressed regarding the notion of social enterprise, both in purpose and understanding the key tenets of social enterprises. Unsurprisingly, practitioners and policy makers had a clear appreciation of the nature of social enterprise, whereas academics lacked clarity. Many students were unaware of the nature of social enterprise, its potential for impact and confused SE with “enterprise in business.” This also reflected lack of clarity and confusion in an understanding of the differences between the terms social enterprise and social entrepreneurship.

Institutions

The impact of the HEI was deemed to have significant impact on learning, entrepreneurs and policy asserted the view that their role could be enhanced and should be encouraged to take a leading role in SE education. It was strongly expressed by social entrepreneurs that HEIs could specifically provide support in developing and illustrating impact and offer support for developing business cases and grant applications.

Stakeholders

All participants strongly expressed the importance of stakeholder involvement in the development of learning opportunities, curriculum design and implementation. Some expressed the view that this should be formalized within HEI systems to ensure that curricula developed represented the community it serves. There was a strong desire

from all parties that involvement of all stakeholders would reduce the impact and influence of the business orientation of SE learning. Moving away from a silo curriculum would reinforce the importance of cross disciplinary frameworks in teaching and learning.

Teaching and Learning

The views expressed by the participants were very clear. Teaching should be a process where the learner acquires the skills, capability and understanding of the key tenets of social enterprise and the skills of social entrepreneurship. Part of this process should include the value of applying what they have learned in “class” in practice. This reaffirmed the value of “work placement” and “internship” opportunities and classroom activities such as the “Learning Company” model (see appendix two) adopted by City College Plymouth.

Personal Skills and Capability

Whilst key functional skills required for social entrepreneurs were expressed, these largely reflected the findings of the survey conducted. Distinctly, each focus group also emphasised the importance of personal qualities, skills, and capabilities. These included: motivation; altruism; resilience, support and encouragement; the ability to think creatively, proactively, and assertively; have a strong beneficent attitude and values; determined and independent collaborative thinker and possess the ability to be multi-dimensional in approach. The findings related to skills and capability were further refined using TA to develop the following sub themes:

- Mentoring
- Resilience – individual and group
- Solution Focused Approaches and style
- Empathy
- Heutagogy
- Optimism
- Holism
- Creativity
- Beneficent Values Driven

Curriculum

Participants, especially students and practitioners, believed that there were several skills gaps between knowledge acquired in university and what they are expected to possess to be relevant in the sector and to be employable. Some also illustrated the challenges they faced when trying to be entrepreneurial because of a lack of entrepreneurial skills development in their education. Social entrepreneurs noted the difficulty they encounter when trying to navigate the regulatory landscape for social entrepreneurs whilst others highlighted the lack of such a framework.

A variety of key concepts and skills were identified ensure the appropriate skills and knowledge set of the social entrepreneur. These included: budgeting, target setting, and financial management; leadership and organisational skills; networking and communication skills; social awareness and conscience; research and evaluation

techniques; use of language and report writing; marketing promotion and the use of media and ICT; philosophical basis of social enterprise; supporting others; coaching; problem analysis and resolution; the nature and dynamics of social and political challenges. The Focus Group Interviews also placed emphasis on cross disciplinary teaching, with curriculum delivered by appropriate specialists and those with practical experience such as economists, counsellors, business and leadership specialists, social scientist educators and importantly practitioners. Participants also acknowledge the importance and value of social entrepreneurship as a key skill set for all graduates and strongly expressed the desire for these skills and capabilities to be part of all graduate education.

Work Placement/Internship

The emphasis participants placed on the opportunity to engage with a practical experience was striking. Participants illustrated the value of university organised work placements. Practitioners expressed the view that this would enable student to apply and develop the skills necessary to engage fully in the work place, describing the graduate who had participated in work placements as “hitting the floor running” and fully appreciative of the “demands and complexities of the role.” Whilst some academics expressed the view that integrating a “work experience” opportunity was not always feasible within a curriculum, due to resource demands and lack of opportunity, students and practitioners felt that this was a valuable learning tool. The “Learning Company model” adopted at City College Plymouth was viewed by some participants (those familiar, including practitioners and students from the Southwest) as an exceptional learning opportunity for students provided within a learning environment without some of the complexities associated with internship and work experience opportunities. Furthermore, practitioners also expressed a desire that SE education should be based on a Foundation degree or Apprentice degree model.

Survey

The data collected demonstrated key tenets of a potential social enterprise skills and capability framework that should frame social entrepreneurial learning experiences. Using the RII to rate the relative significance of these tenets, the most significant included (in rank order):

1. Communication and networking skills
2. Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation models and theory
3. Mentoring and coaching
4. Marketing and promotional skills
5. Product and idea development
6. Awareness of socio-economic issues
7. Awareness of social and public policy
8. Methods demonstrating impact and evaluation
9. Financial management
10. Culture, ethics, and values
11. Impact of globalisation
12. Social capital and responsibility
13. Sustainability and SDGS

Free text question responses invited practitioner participants to list the five most desirable skills for a graduate working within SE. The following were identified by at least 50% of participants:

- Communication and Networking Skills
- Mentoring and leadership
- Resilience and the ability to manage stress
- Ability to problem solve
- Empathy
- Financial awareness and planning
- Policy awareness and political astuteness
- Evaluative skills
- Self-determination and motivation
- Optimistic outlook
- Multi-dimensional awareness
- Creativity
- Desire for social change

Students were also invited to identify their most desired skills and qualities for employment within social enterprise. The response rate to this question was poor – only 30% (41) of the sample responded. These included in more than 50% of the participants:

- The ability to do a job effectively
- Understand what the job entails
- Leadership skills
- SE skills
- Report writing

Responses exploring Entrepreneurial Learning Approaches were mixed. For example, when asked the following questions:

- Does the entrepreneurship education provided by universities improve and develop business knowledge & skills?
- Are higher education staff aware of the value of entrepreneurship education?
- Does the entrepreneurship education offered within the HE sector provide opportunities to explore business ideas?
- Are you satisfied with the quality of the employment skills graduates gain during their studies?
- Do you consider the time and money spent in obtaining the Qualifications good value?
- Do HE studies provide a good opportunity to understand business processes & to start a business in future?

The results were inclusive. However, when asked to respond to the notion of self-efficacy and self-competency, 80% of respondents ranked these as very important.

4. Summary

Analysing the data from the survey and focus group interviews enabled the team to determine the key tenets of what constitutes social entrepreneurial learning, enabling the development of a framework that could enable the facilitation of a social entrepreneurial curriculum. This is presented in Appendix One.

5. Project Outcomes

This QAA funded project had six key outcomes:

1. Design and evaluation of Social Entrepreneurial skills audit tool for use by HEI course teams to prepare needs led education and skill development. To be made available via online resource.

   Collating the findings reported within this project the team devised a tool which was evaluated on small scale by students and by policy and practitioner experts in the field of social enterprise. The final version can be viewed in appendix one.

2. Design and delivery of pedagogical facing social enterprise and entrepreneurial skills development workshops illustrating how to develop skills and enable learning. Workshops to be recorded and made available online as part of the online resource.

   Skills development workshops were delivered at the University of Huddersfield and City College Plymouth. They were well attended by a mix of students, practitioners, and academics. The aim of the workshops was to promote awareness of social enterprise pedagogy and to enable the utilisation of innovative pedagogical methods to develop skills and knowledge. These workshops co-created and co-delivered with students received very complimentary feedback. Evaluations noted in particular:

   - "*What a great use of students to promote learning"*
   - *"The learning company model is something that I will take away and develop"*
   - *"Social enterprise – I get it now"*
   - *"Lots of ideas – thank you"*
   - *"I sense that this (social enterprise) is something that we should all be developing in our programmes"*

   Unfortunately, the video recording of the three workshops was not particularly successful and following editing the team agreed not to use them as standalone videos but to utilise appropriate excerpts as part of teaching resources.

3. Co-construction of a free and publicly available online teaching resource portfolio containing teaching delivery resources, video, case studies and best practice examples and narratives.

A variety of resources have been developed that can be used for the teaching and delivery of social enterprise and can be accessed via the following link. This is a dynamic link and will be developed further as resources increasingly become available.

4. Provide opportunities for cross and collaborative academic coaching and mentoring with social enterprise pedagogy.

   A network has been developed between the partners that enables a needs-led and free mentoring and coaching support to both practitioners and academics who wish to develop social entrepreneurial skills. For example, the project team are supporting events specifically at the University of Bolton, City College Plymouth and University of East London and supporting the development of standards with Social Enterprise Mark.

5. Academic paper based on the project to be published within a peer reviewed journal.

   This was published in October 2022: Halsall, J. P., Snowden M, Clegg, P., Mswaka, W., Alderson, M., Hyams-Ssekasi, D., Oberoi, R., and Winful E. C. (2022) Social Enterprise as A Model for Change: Mapping a Global Cross Disciplinary Framework, *Entrepreneurship Education,* Vol. 5 pp. 425–446. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41959-022-00084-w

6. Establishing an academic community of practice

   A small emerging community of practice has been developed within the collaborative partnership and this will develop further in the coming months.

Looking to the Future

Drawing upon Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation, the support from the QAA has been an invaluable resource, enabling the project team to reflect upon collaborative working practices and initiate a model of change that has enabled:

Short-term Benefits:

- The project has contributed to the personal and professional development of all team members.
- The development of a Social Enterprise Audit tool that can be used to inform curriculum design at both micro and macro levels (see appendix one).
- Awareness of Social Enterprise and Social Entrepreneurship as a skills and capability set that can be utilise as a mitigation strategy for socio-economic challenge and to promote social justice.
- Increased numbers of students pursuing Social Enterprise as a means of employment post-graduation.

- Recognition of the value of a set of SE standards to enhance practice and the importance and value of accreditation of those courses/programmes that support social entrepreneurial capability and skills.
- Access to a set of resources that promote social enterprise and entrepreneurial teaching and learning.
- The development of an emerging community of academics, practitioners, and policy makers to support and develop social enterprise and entrepreneurship with the sector.

Medium-term Outcomes:

Within the next 18 months, we anticipate:

- A 360-degree evaluation of The Social Enterprise Audit tool at two levels: institutionally and at a programme level. Institutional: One institution has expressed desire to implement the tool across all provision at FHEQ levels 2-6. A business case has been developed, and it is intended to implement this in September 2023 and impact holistically evaluated and reported by early summer 2024. Programme: A further institution will be using the tool as part of a FHEQ level 7 programme and holistically evaluated and reported in Spring 2024. This will provide data to enable the value of the tool to be illustrated and provide an opportunity for further development.
- The development of a quality mark that provides an indicator of the quality of the social enterprise learning and teaching experience.
- Develop further and maintain access to resources that promote social enterprise and entrepreneurial teaching and learning.
- Develop a conceptual social enterprise governance framework that will promote SE practice and establish clarity for educators and policy makers.
- Quantify the impact of the SE curriculum within graduate employability and socio-economic impact.
- Increase the community of practice within the national context.

Long-term Impact:

In the longer term, it is the intended outcome of this project to promote sustainable change. The data collated in the mid-term will illustrate the benefits of SE education as an essential part of the curriculum; a curriculum that will promote graduate employability, enable graduates to develop social enterprises and as such promote social change and equity.

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Appendices

Appendix One: An Audit tool for Higher Education

Appendix Two: The Learning Company Model: Developing Competencies in Community and Public Services

Appendix Three: Published Article
Halsall, J. P., Snowden M, Clegg, P., Mswaka, W., Alderson, M., Hyams-Ssekasi, D., Oberoi, R., and Winful E. C. (2022a) Social Enterprise as A Model for Change: Mapping a Global Cross Disciplinary Framework, Entrepreneurship Education, Vol. 5 pp. 425–446.
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