

29th April 2004

Our Ref: EL/JC/04

Social Economy Unit
DETI
Netherleigh
Massey Avenue,
Belfast BT4 2JP

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: Developing a Successful Social Economy

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (“The Commission”) has responsibility for implementing the legislation on fair employment, sex discrimination and equal pay, race relations, sexual orientation and disability discrimination. The Commission’s remit also includes overseeing the statutory duties on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. The Commission welcomes this opportunity to comment on Developing a Successful Social Economy as we believe that the contribution made to economic development by the social economy has the potential to regenerate and sustain local communities.

The Commission supported the key strategic objectives outlined in the Strategic Plan. We welcome the intention in Objective one to establish baseline information on the size, scale and value of the sector. This information will raise awareness of the contribution of the sector. This can also be used as a mechanism for the identification of areas where the development of the social economy is weak. The Commission recommends the establishment of robust information on the sector as soon as possible. We also welcome the proposed establishment of social capital indicators.

The Commission accepts that at times the regulatory, legal and policy framework including that associated with equality, may seem

bureaucratic and unnecessary. We would stress however that the promotion of equality of opportunity makes good business sense and needs to be mainstreamed throughout all sectors in Northern Ireland, including the social economy sector. It is important that as the sector develops the promotion of equality of opportunity is a central consideration in relation to employment and does not reproduce or reinforce current employment patterns for women, disabled people and ethnic minorities. Positive action measures may be necessary to ensure that barriers are overcome and if necessary funding should be available to reduce identified barriers such as training, childcare and accessibility.

The Commission welcomes through Objective three, improving the social economy's sector ability to tender for public procurement projects. We wish to stress that, as far as European and international laws allow, public procurement should be used for equality objectives, and must be compliant with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

I hope the above is helpful and if you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Lavery
Direct Line: 028 90500628
Fax: 028 90315993
Text: 028 90500589
Email: elavery@equalityni.org
Director Policy and Research
