

Response By:

FERMANAGH TRUST

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Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

*'Developing a Successful Social Economy: NI Government's
Three-Year Strategic Plan 2004-05*

April 2004

The Fermanagh Trust welcomes the production of this strategy by DETI. It represents a significant policy departure and awareness within Government of what is a hugely important and valuable sector within the Northern Ireland economy.

General Feedback

The key points the Trust wishes to feedback in relation to the consultation document are:

- This strategy for the social economy must be firmly linked with DSD's 'Pathways for Change' document and the emerging strategy that results from that particular consultation. Social enterprise has a hugely strategic and fundamental role to play in facilitating organisations within the social economy moving toward greater financial autonomy, diversified income/ revenue streams and a reduction in dependence on grant support.
- There is a danger that '*social economy*' as a term can be taken to mean all things to all people. **This strategy should firmly nail its colours to the '*social enterprise*' mast.** This is where the focus should be within this strategy. DSD is dealing with the wider social economy. This strategy should seek to maximise leverage, rather than covering ground already been thread by other government and sectoral collaborative work and strategising. In order for social enterprise to be taken seriously across all of the sectors within Northern Ireland, it requires an unashamed and focused approach, otherwise there is the danger that the strategy will become to '*wishy-washy*'. Subsequently, the document should be titled '*Developing A Successful Social Enterprise*'.

- There is an underpinning assumption that social enterprises must work exclusively within disadvantaged and depressed communities. If private sector businesses find it difficult, it can be expected that it will be no walk in the park for social enterprises. However, social enterprises should be allowed to develop across the region within affluent wards as well as TSN Wards, so long as the income/ surplus/ profit is used for the regeneration and betterment of those who find themselves located within disadvantaged groupings or communities. Where the social enterprise finds an opening in the market, it should be allowed to penetrate that market on an equal footing with the private sector.
- The learning as identified by Advantage Fundraising Solutions in their report on fundraising in Northern Ireland which explored funding for social enterprise needs to be taken into consideration. Which ever organisation should have responsibility for handling any specific social enterprise fund, should understand the sector explicitly and implicitly. Experience has shown that LSP's were given a significant role through the PEACE II programme to support social economy development in their districts. What we have seen through this, are partnerships who have struggled to come to grips with what the social economy is and how they might support it. Indeed, echoing back to the first point above, an initiative runs the danger of falling back toward more of the same.
- Social enterprise is about thinking outside of the box in terms of approaches, revenue, customers, markets, partners and finance, etc. This strategy should demonstrate the necessary creativity and dynamism that will be required to cultivate and nurture the sector.

- Social enterprises and community businesses need to look beyond local markets to the regional, national and international market place.
- Social enterprise is not a good thing to be investing in, but the right thing.
- The Strategy and the mechanisms established to move it forward need to look beyond the North/ South and East/ West axis. Much can be learned from our European Neighbours in the likes of Sweden and in the United States.

Feedback on Objective 1

- Any awareness raising and determination of the value of the sector must look beyond the confines of Belfast and Derry. Much more attention should be paid to the role and value of rural social enterprise, and social enterprise within our market towns.
- Curriculum development at all levels should incorporate social enterprise awareness, development and learning.
- DSD should be a supporting partner across all of the actions for the period 2004–05.
- Key County-wide social enterprise champions should be identified and worked through by DETI, SEA and SEN. The agencies identified should be social enterprises themselves, and have a clear understanding of the nature, role and importance of the sector, as well as a proven track record and credibility locally. DETI nor SEA/ SEN should not jump to the first conclusion. County-wide or sub-regional hub's should not be selected merely because they part of

an existing sub-regional network. Each hub must and should stand on its merit and past performance.

Feedback on Objective 2

- In developing social enterprise, more attention should be given to social intrapreneurs, and the concept of '*spin-out companies*'. Research tells us that a new social enterprise is more likely to come out of an existing social enterprise and or a community or voluntary organisation.
- More resources need to be dedicated toward the academic and professional development of social entrepreneurs.
- A '*Future Builders*' Fund should be established for Northern Ireland social enterprise development. This could be used as a pilot fund to test new and innovative models of social enterprise development, as well as enhancing the organisational capacity and competitiveness of existing social enterprise organisations.
- More consideration should be given to potential mentoring by private and public sector personnel through Corporate Community Involvement Programmes. An online register of social economy business and organisational needs could be developed which public/ private organisations could trawl and see how they could support through CI/ CSR by way of coaching, secondments, etc.
- Support to social enterprises should be as local as possible and not through "remote control" engagement.
- With regard to the Action 2.4 and the review of the IFI Community Leadership programme and how its scope might be expanded to benefit social economy enterprises, this exercise

should not necessarily work on the assumption of expansion of this programme. In Northern Ireland, a great many capital projects which have been driven by the consultants to the point where they lose all cognisance of local need and reality. Once the allocation of time and support is up, the group is left high and dry to get the community business going, a part of enterprise development which they have never been prepared for. Hence a great many of the businesses find themselves running into difficulty. The projects have become in a great many instances milestones round the necks of our community. The consultants go home, earn their money. There is no commitment to the local area.

Feedback on Objective 3

- An online government procurement portal should be developed where all procurement possibilities are advertised and tenders invited.
- Procurement across government departments and agencies should be standardised, and any legal anomalies across departments and agencies should be addressed.
- Social enterprises should be allowed to tender for all the activities and services currently provided by the private sector. The social enterprise sector has become a sophisticated one. There should be a level playing field across the public, private and social enterprise sectors. If the sector is to be taken seriously, this would appear to be a natural element in establishing the credibility of the sector.